

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Health Ranking Member Anna Eshoo

Health Subcommittee Hearing on “Preparing for and Responding to Future Public Health Security Threats.”

May 11, 2023

This hearing is an important first step to reauthorizing the *Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act* also known as PAHPA.

It’s a priority for me that the PAHPA reauthorization is a product of bipartisan negotiation and compromise and I’m proud to work with Rep. Richard Hudson, a terrific partner, to pass this law before the September 30th deadline. Rep. Hudson and I issued a bipartisan request for information on February 27th to seek input on PAHPA and we’ve received over 250 responses from a full range of medical and public health stakeholders. This is a very important first step and start on this and I’m grateful to all the stakeholders for responding.

My thanks to our witnesses for the valuable perspectives you will share with us today and for your important work on the front lines protecting, preparing, and responding to public health emergencies.

In 2001 our country endured the attacks of September 11th and the anthrax attacks shortly thereafter. That may be deeply buried in the past, but it’s vivid to me. At that time, Congress realized our country was not prepared to coordinate responses to mass casualty events or chemical attacks.

I authored legislation with then-Representative Richard Burr, who was a member of this committee, that established the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) to be responsible for coordinating federal responses and the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) to be responsible for developing desperately needed medical countermeasures for chemical, biologic, radiological and nuclear threats.

That important bipartisan legislation was signed into law in 2006, and was most recently reauthorized in 2019, an effort I led with another great partner who I miss to this day, former Congresswoman Susan Brooks, who really served with distinction on this committee.

Since its creation, BARDA has been hugely successful and I’m enormously proud of that. Its efforts led to 69 FDA licensures, approvals, and clearances of medical countermeasures. Without BARDA’s important work, we would not have been blessed with a safe and effective Covid vaccine as quickly as we were. BARDA now needs additional investments and authorities so that it can continue to develop technologies and platforms that can rapidly produce vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics, and other tools to protect our nation from potential threats.

This PAHPA reauthorization must meet the challenges we witnessed during the Covid pandemic and anticipate the challenges of the future. I will never ever forget the following: turning on my TV set and seeing our nation's healthcare workers wrapping themselves in black plastic garbage bags. And it was because they lacked proper Personal Protective Equipment. I, like many Members of Congress, spent 2020 trying to secure ventilators and other essential supplies for the hospitals in my district, I know you did it in yours. We must make sure our stockpiles are real and that they are adequate to prevent the chaos we experienced.

Covid also exposed the fragility of our supply chains, especially for pharmaceutical and medical products. These are critical goods that we cannot live without. Our medical supply chain is broken in three devastating ways: shortages especially during high demand in an emergency, subpar manufacturing, and an overreliance on foreign production.

Today's hearing is especially meaningful because it's on the same day as the official end of the Public Health Emergency for Covid. I look forward to everything that takes place in this all-important hearing.