

[Opening Statement was delivered by Chair Guthrie's designee, Vice Chair Bucshon]

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
for the Honorable Brett Guthrie**

**“Are CDC's Priorities Restoring Public Trust and Improving the
Health of the American People?”**

July 23, 2024

- Today we are here to assess the effectiveness over the past several years of key centers within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. With an agency that receives nearly \$20 billion in annual funding and plays a critical role in assisting our states and localities with preparedness and response efforts, it is essential for Congress to evaluate the job the CDC is doing to achieve its mission.
- The agency's mission states that it's designed to, “Work 24/7 to protect America from health, safety and security threats, both foreign and in the United States...To accomplish our mission, CDC conducts critical science and provides health information that protects our nation against expensive and dangerous health threats and responds when they arise.”

- To know and fully understand the CDC's mission is to realize the history of the agency. Originally established in 1946, the CDC was in effect an extension of the Department of Defense and created to help track malaria internationally.
- Today the agency operates 23 different centers, institutes, and offices that all have different focuses. Most recently, the agency has conducted research on climate change, social determinants of health and health equity, and harm reduction and guidance on safe storage of firearms.
- We will hear from the directors of six of these centers today about their role in executing the CDC's mission and their vision for the future.
- Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit our shores, Americans have experienced historic rises in drug overdoses fueled by a tragic rise in illicit fentanyl being trafficked across our Southern Border. Overdose prevention remains one of the CDC's core responsibilities, but the data only show rising year-over-year

overdose rates, indicating the overdose prevention efforts require further scrutiny. This includes whether federal overdose prevention and response efforts can be streamlined across agencies to help better direct resources to communities most in need.

- The nation now potentially faces a threat with the H5 Avian Influenza, which is impacting poultry and dairy farms, and has infected 10 farmworkers across the United States. While the Avian Influenza does not currently present imminent harm to humans, my hope is the CDC learned their lessons from COVID-19 and will be adequately prepared to respond if needed.
- Another issue exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic is the questionable use of temporary data authorities granted to the CDC throughout the Public Health Emergency. The mandated data transfer from local health care providers was used by the CDC to impose one-size-fits-all masking and vaccine mandates, school closures, and pandemic lockdowns.
- In one instance, to illustrate just how far the agency would go to force these public health restraints on Americans, the agency

purchased cell phone data to track vaccination rates and adherence to state and local shutdowns.

- At the same time, the CDC has received over \$1 billion in directed funding for a “Data Modernization Initiative” that has yet to bear fruit. There are many outstanding questions as to where this funding has gone, how much has been utilized, and for what purposes.
- The agency continues to seek additional data authorities, despite operating over 100 surveillance programs and widespread skepticism around the authorities they already have. We need strong answers justifying why these backdoor policing authorities are needed.
- I cannot in good conscience support this until the CDC takes responsibility for using American’s data punitively against them, which undoubtedly drove further distrust amongst the American people.

- While I do give the agency credit for taking the step towards a much needed reform and reorganization, I do believe increased reflection is needed – particularly for an agency that remains unauthorized.
- The American people deserve a CDC that is accountable to its core mission – preparedness and response to infectious diseases. Otherwise, we risk repeating past failures and placing millions of American lives at stake as a result.