

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Gus Bilirakis**  
**CPAC Subcommittee Hearing on**  
**“Safeguarding American Consumers: Fighting Fraud and Scams**  
**During the Pandemic”**  
**February 4, 2021**

*As Prepared for Delivery*

Thank you Madame Chair. Good morning and welcome to our first Consumer Protection and Commerce Subcommittee hearing of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress.

I would like to congratulate Chair Schakowsky for another term leading this great Subcommittee where we promote innovation, champion emerging technologies, and protect consumers, and I am greatly looking forward to working with you.

I would also like to recognize the newest Republican Members of the Subcommittee, Dr. Dunn from Florida, Mr. Pence from Indiana, Ms. Lesko from Arizona, and Mr. Armstrong from North Dakota –

You all bring unique and invaluable expertise and I am eager to see the great work you all will accomplish.

Lastly, I would like to thank my friend, E&C Republican Leader Rodgers, for giving me the opportunity to lead Republicans on this Subcommittee and congratulate her on leading this great committee for our side of the aisle.

I know she is going to do great things as our leader to help the American people.

Today we will explore steps we can take to advance our fight against fraud and scams – which is so important during this pandemic. Millions are forced to isolate and remain in their homes and bad actors continue to exploit consumers’ fear and confusion – some promising fake reservations for coronavirus vaccines, stimulus checks, loans for small businesses struggling to stay afloat, and even Super Bowl tickets.

Just earlier this year in my district in Pasco and Pinellas Counties in Florida, the health departments discovered use of a fake Eventbrite website being used to charge money for registrations for the COVID vaccine.

This fake website was a complete scam, for as we know vaccine registration is completely free.

We must continue to protect consumers from falling victim to scams, as it not only cripples individuals financially but can also cause serious mental health issues and lead to suicide.

We made great progress on this Subcommittee last year.

We enacted H.R. 6435, the Combating Pandemic Scams Act, led by Rep. Carter, along with Reps. Hudson, Kuster, and Blunt-Rochester.

With the efforts of our friends at the Federal Trade Commission, this law will focus tools and resources on vulnerable communities to better educate and protect them from scams.

Unfortunately, scammers are continuing to find new ways to exploit vulnerable Americans during COVID-19.

With people remaining locked in their homes, many head online for social interaction.

The bad guys know this, and the FTC has already found that people are increasingly falling victim to scams through social media platforms.

In just the first six months of 2020, scams originating from social media tripled resulting in \$117 million in losses.

With more consumers tuning in to these platforms, scammers create fake profiles offering connection, friendship, or economic relief only to steal information and hard-earned dollars. These scams will often come by way of friend requests and direct messages or advertisements.

As the FTC continues to publish helpful information on best practices, I urge Big Tech platforms to do better – you should help your users remain vigilant against scams and fraud.

Bad actors will resort to any means to steal money and information - they will create fake profiles, calls from new phone numbers, and even try to mask their identity as a friend or family member.

The best preventative measure is education, and entities across the country working in unison to share educational materials. If consumers know what to look for, they will be better equipped to avoid scams.

I commend the FTC for their tireless work fighting on behalf of consumers.

However, they cannot do it alone.

There must be greater collaboration and cooperation with state and local law enforcement, merchants and platforms, and communities to better educate consumers on best practices to avoid falling for scams and to increase efforts to hold bad actors accountable.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here today and I look forward to learning how to better strengthen protections for Americans from scams and frauds.

I yield back.