

**Opening Statement for Republican Leader Bilirakis
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
Legislative Hearing on “Pandemic Profiteers: Legislation to Stop
Corporate Price Gouging”
February 2nd, 2022**

As Prepared for Delivery

Good morning, everyone. And welcome to the first Consumer Protection and Commerce Subcommittee hearing of 2022. First, I would be remiss if I didn't express some disappointment that we're not joining in the theme our friends in the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee discussing a path forward on Autonomous Vehicles, which provides a true opportunity to transform our economy and save thousands of lives. That said, I certainly don't want to dismiss the importance of our discussion here today about how our constituents are paying higher and higher prices.

I certainly respect the work of the Federal Trade Commission we task them with executing, and as our comprehensive privacy and data security draft bill demonstrates, I also believe in working closely with the State Attorneys General to help enforce a preemptive law.

But we must have an honest discussion about the real challenges our country and constituents are facing, rather than a bait and switch about where to push blame. I know my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are aware of inflation problems and the crunch on our supply chain, and the President was questioned as much in his most recent press conference.

However, somehow, we're supposed to be convinced that there is widespread price gouging occurring. Even the Majority's memo for today's hearing disputes its own thesis by footnoting an article from The Washington Post called *Inflation Causing Financial Strain for Nearly Half of U.S. Households*.

That article doesn't reference price gouging once... Instead, it attributes increased prices to surging inflation, booming consumer demand and crippled supply chains. The article even goes on to say "the picture is further complicated by a widespread labor shortage and the revolving door of the pandemic..." The legislation brought forth by the Chair today, which would give broad new authorities to the FTC to go after price gouging during the public health emergency, does not define what excessive pricing is and does not adequately account for any of the causes for increased prices.

The legislation is missing a full account for the supply and consumer demand of certain goods, the bottlenecking of our ports and distribution centers, current labor shortages, or even the organized crime ripping goods right off rail freight like we're seeing in cities like Los Angeles. This Committee should seek to avoid unintended consequences on businesses when protecting consumers, and thus I can't support the legislation in front of us. And we shouldn't let it divert from President Biden accounting for big government spending programs and overregulation that are crushing our economy and keeping it from recovering.

The fact is I'm not sure the American public buys into the narrative either, as they know our local mom-and-pop stores are doing their best with what products they can get their hands on. Add to that a recent article from the New York Post reporting the results of a study that found 69% of respondents disapprove of how President Biden is responding to the inflation crisis, with only 29% approving. This committee has a duty to protect consumers and promote commerce.

We have supported providing FTC with tools they need to be successful, like when we gave them first-time civil penalty authority to go after COVID-19 scams. But giving consumers a false protection here without properly identifying actual harms will give the FTC chair more unchecked powers at a time when her actions should be receiving more sunshine.

I'm hopeful this committee can get back to the business of how to grow our economy with innovation springing from clear regulatory frameworks, like for AVs and artificial intelligence, and protect consumers with clearly defined authorities for the FTC, like in our privacy and data security draft. I know we can do it. With that, thank you madam Chair, and thank you to our witnesses. I look forward to your testimony.

I yield back.