



COMMITTEE ON

SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Ranking Member Lucas Opening Statement on Vaccine Uptake

“The Science of COVID-19 Vaccines and Encouraging Vaccine Uptake”

February 19th, 2021

Good morning Chairwoman Johnson. Thank you for holding this important and timely hearing. And thank you to our expert witnesses for your participation today. I hope we can learn valuable information that we can share with our constituents as we continue to battle the COVID-19 pandemic.

Almost one year ago to date, the Science Committee held our first hearing on the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then we’ve seen day-to-day life change dramatically. Millions of people have suffered from this pandemic, and COVID-19 has claimed the lives of nearly 489,000 Americans.

In recent weeks, the United States reached a positive milestone, as more Americans have now received at least one dose of the vaccine than have tested positive for the virus since the pandemic began just over a year ago. According to CDC data, the United States has administered approximately 55 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines since the first shot was given on December 14, 2020, and approximately 12 percent of the total U.S. population has received at least one dose.

But as the original COVID-19 virus and new variants continue to spread across the globe, it is imperative that the U.S. take a more aggressive and ambitious approach to ramping up vaccine manufacturing and distribution. We need to get as many shots in arms as quickly as possible.

It is also crucial that rural and underserved communities are not left behind during the vaccine rollout. For example, many rural residents lack broadband internet connection and are unable to secure appointments, which are largely scheduled online. Residents in more isolated parts of the country also experience difficulties finding somewhere to get the vaccine if they do not live near pharmacies or community health centers. Distributing vaccines that require ultra-cold storage also presents challenges for these communities as doses will expire if they are not properly stored.

The American research enterprise, including government, academia, and industry, has the expertise, resources, and talent to continue to fight this pandemic. From vaccine development at record speed to PPE manufacturing, America's scientific community has stepped up to the plate, as scientists and researchers immediately pivoted at the start of the pandemic to focus on combatting COVID-19. With the integration of technologies such as artificial intelligence and high-performance computing, researchers can identify promising vaccine candidates quicker. Advanced manufacturing techniques also offer promising methods to bolster supplies and rapidly modify vaccines to address new strains of disease.

These factors allowed the U.S. to approve two safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines just one year after the pandemic began. Scientists were able to develop these vaccines in record time thanks to almost two decades of basic research on related viruses.

These investments in basic research have truly been lifesaving. We must continue to make critical investments in American research for the health and safety of our nation.

As vaccine distribution ramps up and we continue to work to stop the spread of COVID-19, it is imperative that key decisions are grounded and backed by strong science and data. We simply cannot afford to ignore science during this critical time.

This morning, I sent a letter to the Chairwoman respectfully requesting a hearing regarding the science on safely reopening or maintaining our nation's K-12 schools for in-person learning. Research has established that the approved COVID-19 vaccines are safe, and the evidence shows it's also safe to open our nation's schools with the appropriate precautions in place.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about the current state of vaccine uptake, hesitancy, and access across the country. I am also looking forward to hearing about Oklahoma's plan and learning more about the efforts taking place across the state to ensure that underserved and rural communities are not forgotten. Thank you, Deputy Commissioner Reed, for your participation here today.

I want to thank the witnesses for taking the time to be here to share your expertise and insights with us during this pivotal time to help keep Americans healthy. I know we are all looking forward to the day all Americans can safely return to work, our children are back in school, and we can see our loved ones once again.

I yield back my time.