

REMARKS

Good afternoon. I would like to thank Chairman Clyburn and the Subcommittee members for inviting me to be here today to share Colorado's experience fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the last two years, we have relied on the latest data and science to help guide our response to the virus. And at every turn, we have taken a balanced approach, prioritizing the health and safety of Coloradans, working to lessen the psychological and social impact of the pandemic while minimizing impact on our economy.

This has led Colorado to one of the shortest shutdowns, and one of the lowest death rates in the country.

When the lifesaving vaccine first became available, we launched an aggressive effort to get every Coloradan protected.

We vaccinated 70% of Coloradans 70 and older by mid February, reached President Biden's goal of vaccinating 70% of adults by July 4, and we have brought that same intensity to vaccinating 5-11 year olds and administering third doses.

The lifesaving vaccine is our best tool against the virus, especially against severe illness, hospitalization and death. But early detection also prevents disease spread and saves lives, which is why we've worked to make testing free, quick and easy in Colorado with more than 100 community testing sites.

Last year, we made rapid tests available through a home delivery program and I'm happy to see the federal government implementing a similar program nationwide.

We also used testing to protect state employees working with some of the most vulnerable under our care, including workers at our corrections facilities, veterans nursing homes, and youth detention facilities.

And we worked with schools to make free testing available on site, ensuring students and school staff could be safe in the classroom.

Earlier this week, Colorado also launched a new mask delivery program, providing free, medical grade masks at public libraries, fire stations, recreation centers, VFWs, YMCAs, and high traffic community centers around the state, building on our success in distributing millions of medical grade masks to teachers and students at schools.

These programs are examples of how we've worked to tackle this virus from every angle. I'm proud of our state, and the way we've stepped up to lead during this global crisis, but the simple truth is states cannot continue to spearhead these efforts indefinitely.

COVID-19 will be with us for years to come, and while early data may indicate that we are entering the endemic stages of this virus, we must be prepared for the inevitable lulls and waves that will continue impacting our hospitals, as well as any future events like COVID-19.

Protecting hospital capacity has always been our north star. Whether you suffer a heart attack, are injured in an accident, or sick with COVID-19, we have worked to ensure there is a bed available for you. But we can no longer allow how we live, how we work, and how our children go to school to be determined by whether or not our hospitals can keep and hire staff or maintain adequate supplies of personal protective equipment.

We need a national standard of hospital and health care system readiness.

We know that there are disruptions in the workforce, especially in healthcare, and we are losing critical nurses, doctors and staff every day. That's why urgent action from hospitals to improve working conditions and raise wages is needed now.

In Colorado we are working on a plan, with legislators and healthcare providers, to invest in our healthcare workforce and ensure we have capacity to respond to the pandemic, while also caring for any other Coloradan in need of a hospital bed. But we can't stand alone, this has to be nationwide.

And it's not only about the need for available hospital beds, we must also find a way to integrate our pandemic response back into the healthcare system where it belongs.

Colorado stood up testing sites, vaccine clinics, and distributed therapeutics, all of which made sense during the public health emergency. But moving forward, our medical system - doctors, pharmacies, urgent cares, and more - should be providing this care as they do for all other conditions

Coloradans trust their primary care doctors and often turn to them first, but because FEMA is not reimbursing the costs associated with equipping primary care and pediatric physicians to provide vaccines, many doctors are still not offering this critical protection to their patients, further putting the onus on the states and their hospitals.

Similarly, far too many schools in Colorado and across the country don't have a designated school nurse, someone who can help administer tests, take temperatures, and catch cases in their infancy. Because of this we see too many outbreaks in our classrooms and too many children needlessly getting sick. Colorado has worked to get schools the supplies they need,

including masking and on site testing, but both are opt-in programs. We need our schools to have on site care to ensure that our kids can get the education they deserve in the classroom.

We know what we need to do, and it's going to take all of us coming together to get it done. I want to thank Chairman Clyburn and the Subcommittee once again for inviting me here today, and I hope this perspective can help spur nationwide action to help our country move forward. Thank you.