

Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations Virtual Hearing
“Pathway to a Vaccine: Efforts to Develop a Safe, Effective and Accessible
COVID-19 Vaccine”
July 21, 2020

Chair DeGette, I want to thank you for holding today’s hearing on an incredibly important and timely topic. I also want to welcome today’s witnesses. We know you and your colleagues are hard at work to develop medical countermeasures, including the vaccines that we are here to discuss today. You are literally working to save the world, so we greatly appreciate you making time to participate in today’s hearing.

Energy and Commerce Committee Republicans continue to closely examine current issues related to COVID-19 and how to best prepare for an uptick in cases at the same time as flu season hits us. Last month, we released a report with recommendations on the first pillar of our work, focused on COVID-19 testing and surveillance. Earlier this month, Committee Republicans released the second pillar, focusing on vaccines and therapeutics. The report includes a series of important recommendations that officials should consider to better position the country to produce and distribute vaccines and therapeutics.

As discussed in our report there are extensive efforts led by the federal government, in partnership with the private sector, to develop medical countermeasures for COVID-19, including Operation Warp Speed. Operation Warp Speed facilitates, at an unprecedented pace, the development, manufacturing, and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. One of the many goals of Operation Warp

Speed is to have as much as 300 million doses of a safe and effective vaccine for COVID-19 available to Americans by January 2021.

The speed with which we have been able to identify vaccine candidates and move into clinical trials is unprecedented. To put it simply—this could not be done without the private sector and they have been an integral part of this herculean effort. The collaboration we have seen over the past few months between the federal government and the private sector is extraordinary and I commend these efforts.

At the Committee’s June 23 hearing, Dr. Fauci stated, “we are taking financial risks, not risks to safety, not risk to the integrity of the science, but financial risks to be able to be ahead of the game” to make safe and effective vaccines available to the American public. In addition to hearing today an update on the status of your efforts to develop vaccine candidates, we also want to hear how this unprecedented speed does not mean sacrificing safety or efficacy.

Along those lines, we also need to know how your companies are helping to build vaccine confidence in this country. This is a critically important topic that spans beyond COVID-19. It is made more urgent by the fact that once a COVID-19 vaccine is proven safe and effective, and is authorized or approved by the FDA, we want Americans to feel confident in getting a vaccine. This is also vital when thinking about the fast-approaching fall and the intersection of COVID-19 and the influenza season.

We need to ensure not only that a vaccine is available, but also that it is accessible. Rural communities frequently find themselves on the outside looking in. When it comes to COVID-19, no one should be left behind. As you all continue your work to provide a safe and effective vaccine, I ask that you also take into

consideration the need for a robust manufacturing and distribution process capable of providing this vaccine in a timely manner to all Americans from every walk of life.

We also want to hear about efforts underway to ensure there are a sufficient amount of ancillary supplies, such as glass vials, in order to package and distribute vaccines to Americans. This is another issue we need to be taking action on now to ensure availability of an authorized or approved vaccine to Americans as quickly as possible.

I thank of all of our witnesses for appearing today and I look forward to hearing your testimony.