

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “No Time to Lose: Solutions to Increase COVID-19 Vaccinations in the States”

February 2, 2021

Today, we convene the Energy and Commerce Committee’s first hearing of the 117th Congress to examine the urgent need to increase COVID-19 vaccinations across the country. This Committee’s top priorities this year are to combat this pandemic, provide relief to struggling families, and rebuild our economy. In the coming months, we will push an aggressive agenda that will ensure the Biden Administration has all the tools and resources it needs to crush this terrible virus.

This goal is more pressing than ever. Thousands of Americans continue to die each day from COVID-19, while new, more contagious strains are emerging in the United States. We are now in a race to keep vaccines ahead of new virus variants—and the stakes could not be higher.

The pandemic’s toll on the nation is tragic. To date, nearly 440,000 Americans have lost their lives from COVID-19—surpassing the total number of U.S. soldiers killed during World War II. More than 10 million Americans are unemployed, while one in three households struggles to make ends meet. It’s no wonder Americans’ assessment of their mental health is worse than at any point in the past two decades. Experts warned of a dark winter, and unfortunately, they were right.

Amid these dark days, we’re now seeing the rollout of some of the most powerful tools we have to contain the virus: safe and effective vaccines. Unfortunately, the initial rollout has been marked by confusion and delays. It’s no secret that the demand for vaccine is outpacing supply—leading to cancelled appointments, endless lines, and mounting concerns.

Limited transparency into the nation’s vaccine supply, as well as conflicting accounts about a reserve held by the federal government, have all contributed to uncertainty and frustration.

Thankfully, the Biden Administration is already taking action to address these issues, including purchasing additional doses that will increase our vaccine supply by 50 percent by the end of summer. I hope to learn today what more Congress and the federal government can do to provide more certainty and help accelerate vaccinations across the country, while ensuring equitable access for those most vulnerable to COVID-19.

Despite the issues we’ve encountered with the vaccine rollout and the painful road still ahead, I’m optimistic that we are finally on a path to beating the virus.

As I mentioned, there are currently two extraordinarily effective and safe COVID-19 vaccines authorized by the Food and Drug Administration—and more could soon be on the way.

States have stretched their limited resources to implement an unprecedented vaccination program, reaching 26 million Americans and counting.

And we now have a new Administration that will be guided by science and a comprehensive national strategy to beat the pandemic—something I have long called for.

So there is hope on the horizon, but we have much work to do to get there. That starts with tackling the biggest challenges standing in the way of containing the pandemic: Getting vaccines into as many arms as possible, as quickly as possible.

This nationwide vaccination campaign is truly historic, and it will require substantial support from Congress to succeed.

To that end, Democrats in Congress are moving swiftly to pass the American Rescue Plan—a bold, comprehensive proposal from the Biden Administration that would fund vaccination efforts and provide Americans much-needed relief. Critically, the plan would invest \$20 billion in a national vaccination program to help ensure greater accessibility and availability of vaccines across the country.

It includes critical financial support to state and local governments, which have been pleading for any support from the federal government to assist in their efforts to combat this virus.

I hope my Republican colleagues will join me, without delay, in supporting this bill for the American people. There is simply no time to waste.

I welcome the state health officials with us and look forward to their on-the-ground assessments of the national COVID-19 vaccination effort. You are our vital partners in this extraordinary campaign, and you are being called upon to execute innovative solutions to unparalleled challenges. Thank you for dedicating your valuable time to sharing your important perspectives with the Committee today.

The COVID-19 vaccines authorized in the United States are potent tools in our fight against the virus. But vaccines in vials don't protect people—vaccines in arms do. We must act now to overcome the remaining logistical hurdles and strengthen the nation's COVID-19 vaccination campaign. There is no time to lose.