

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

Hearing on “A Shot at Normalcy: Building COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence”

May 26, 2021

Today we continue our critical oversight of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign in the United States—our best shot at containing the virus and beating this pandemic.

Through the collective efforts of the American people over the past year, we have overcome the initial challenges of developing, producing, and distributing safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines. But we now face the difficult task of reaching those Americans who have yet to embrace this life-saving tool.

Vaccine doubts and fears are not new challenges. In fact, this Committee has a history of addressing these issues in a bipartisan manner.

In 2019, for instance, we held a hearing on the Measles outbreaks and renewed our efforts to provide resources to support vaccine confidence and uptake throughout the nation. We followed that with bipartisan legislation led by Representative Schrier, finally passed late last year. The legislation authorized a campaign to educate and inform Americans on the benefits of vaccines and increase our understanding of how best to reach unvaccinated individuals.

Earlier this year, we significantly expanded upon those activities in the American Rescue Plan, which invested \$160 billion in COVID-19 response efforts. This included \$20 billion in dedicated resources for vaccine distribution and administration, vaccination clinics, mobile vaccination units, and a vaccine awareness campaign.

While issues surrounding vaccine confidence are not new, the gravity of the challenges facing us today is unprecedented as we continue to combat this pandemic. Millions stricken ill. More than half a million lives tragically lost. And enormous tolls taken on the mental and financial well-being of too many Americans.

In the face of all this pain and hardship, this nation has again risen to the occasion. We have worked together at the federal, state, and local levels; through public and private partnerships; and across political lines to develop several safe and effective vaccines. We have also solved supply issues and continue our work to ensure equitable distribution throughout the country.

As a result of this collective effort, if you are 12 years or older and you want a COVID-19 vaccine, there is one waiting for you.

May 26, 2021

Page 2

And, thanks to decisive action by Congress, combined with the Biden Administration's bold leadership and determined commitment to science, more than 160 million Americans have received at least one dose of a vaccine, and more than 130 million of those are fully vaccinated.

Because of this, the number of new daily cases and deaths have fallen significantly since the start of the year.

This is cause for celebration. Our efforts, however, must not stop until more Americans are protected from COVID-19. And, as we will hear today, more work is needed.

Today, there is no single factor causing eligible, unvaccinated Americans to sit on the sidelines. Some people are skeptical of the vaccines' safety or worry about long-term side effects. Some have been misled by bogus and misleading information that pollutes social media. Still others have an understandable distrust of the medical system or the government's role in developing the vaccine. Many more Americans—particularly in our rural communities and in communities of color—are open, or even eager, to be vaccinated, yet continue to face barriers to access.

Just as there is no one reason why some Americans remain unvaccinated, there is no single solution to building vaccine confidence to get more people vaccinated.

The encouraging news is that our efforts have been successful so far: Poll after poll has shown increasing confidence in COVID-19 vaccines since the first one was authorized more than five months ago. But that progress has begun to plateau while millions of unvaccinated Americans still remain vulnerable to the virus.

That's why we must redouble our efforts to understand who can be reached and how best to reach them. We must do the hard work of meeting people where they are.

The importance of this work cannot be overstated. As we enter a critical juncture of our vaccination campaign, I am pleased to be working alongside our Republican colleagues to encourage Americans to roll up their sleeves.

If we are to have a true shot at normalcy, we need every eligible American to make the right choice: Get a shot and protect themselves, their community, and the nation.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today, I yield back.