

Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Health
“Protecting Scientific Integrity in the COVID-19 Response”
May 14, 2020

As Prepared for Delivery

The world is coping with an historic, deadly pandemic that we always knew was possible, but prayed would not happen. In a bipartisan way we did everything the experts said we needed to do to be prepared should a pandemic or other hazard strike.

Madame Chair, the work you, Dr. Burgess, Rep. Susan Brooks, and I did over two Congresses – when each party has controlled the House – resulted in one product: The Pandemic All-Hazards Preparedness Act.

Dr. Bright, I know you were part of our efforts in writing and reauthorizing that law. In fact, given the role you once played at ASPR before going to BARDA, you had a big responsibility to make sure Congress provided the Strategic National Stockpile what it needed, or to inform us if there were shortcomings, especially as we were modernizing the Pandemic All-Hazards Preparedness Act.

I went back over the three hearings we held in the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee where you testified regarding the Zika outbreak May 23rd of 2017, the seasonal flu on March 8, 2018, and the hearing on June 15, 2018,

entitled: *“The State of U.S. Public Health Bio- Preparedness: Responding to Biological Attacks, Pandemics, And Emerging Infectious Disease Outbreaks.”*

I wanted to make sure we hadn't missed something. Nothing jumped out at me. Congress dramatically increased funding to ASPR and BARDA. We granted new authorities. We followed your recommendations, and those of others who play a role in this combined effort.

Unfortunately, some of the systems that we put in place to prepare for a pandemic – systems designed without actually living through something like this – have not performed as expected.

We've learned we didn't have enough of the basic supplies that we've always taken for granted. While Chair Eshoo and I have warned about the potential vulnerabilities with our medical supply chains – especially from China – not enough was done to address the problem. And it still hasn't been addressed.

I am thankful that President Trump invoked the Defense Production Act to ramp up U.S. manufacturing of masks and ventilators. And the President has used the emergency powers and money Congress has provided to launch unprecedented efforts to search the globe for supplies, to rapidly advance development of treatments and vaccines.

But we still have much bipartisan work to do to respond and adapt to the challenges presented by COVID-19 and the lessons we're learning.

We have asked for, and this committee should hold, hearings to find a path forward to reform the Strategic National Stockpile, increase domestic manufacturing of critical supplies, and disentangle our supply chains from China.

We should be exploring strategies for increased testing, so that we can begin to safely reopen our economy.

We need to find ways to improve access to mental health and provide relief both our health care providers on the front lines treating COVID-19 cases, and our health care workers who have been furloughed because their hospitals are closed.

We should be conducting rigorous oversight of the trillions of dollars and myriad new policies that Congress has appropriated and enacted in the last three months.

And we should be investigating – really investigating – allegations like Dr. Bright's that raise concerns about our nation's coronavirus response.

But that does not appear to be why we are actually here today, and frankly, that saddens me.

Dr. Bright, your allegations are serious, and they deserve a real investigation. I know the Office of Special Counsel, with whom you filed your complaint, will do just that. I know they take their work seriously and will hear you out, and importantly, will give those named in your complaint an opportunity to have their side heard, too.

I must tell you that many of us on this committee were confused when we learned from a tweet that this hearing was scheduled in the wake of your whistleblower complaint.

As you know, that's certainly not how the Energy and Commerce Committee does its business. Not long after that notice of this being a whistleblower hearing, we were advised that you were here as a government witness, not as a whistleblower. But then we were told you were not here representing the government, just yourself. The hearing title suggests the hearing is about protecting scientific integrity – yet, the Chairwoman invited a witness who will not be speaking to that issue.

This is all very confusing and unusual, to say the least.

Here we are in the middle of the pandemic, and we weren't given time to secure other witnesses, conduct appropriate research or acquire documents that could aid in our understanding of the situation. Our first discussion with the Majority occurred just three days ago.

This is serious business, but this is no way to run a serious investigation.