

Opening Statement of The Honorable Brett Guthrie
Subcommittee on Health Hearing
“Booster Shot: Enhancing Public Health through Vaccine Legislation.”
June 15, 2021
As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Chair Eshoo, for holding this important hearing on vaccines.

Vaccines are the exact reason we can and should be in person today in the hearing room. We are asking Americans to come back to work, Members of Congress should also be back at work. I look forward to the committee meeting together in person very soon. Without Operation Warp Speed, we would not have three safe and effective vaccines that are currently being administered to Americans. Congress and President Trump came together to help unleash private sector innovation to make this possible. Without medical innovation, we would be nowhere close to where we are currently with COVID-19 vaccination numbers. Roughly 52% of Americans have received at least one dose, and about 43% of Americans are fully vaccinated.

We have advanced and improved our COVID-19 vaccine distribution strategies and continue to do so. Congress has appropriated nearly \$4 trillion in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most recently, Congress provided \$1.9 trillion through the American Rescue Plan. I strongly disagreed with this legislation because it was mostly used as a trojan horse for progressive policies and only 9% of the funding went directly to fighting COVID-19. Of the 9% for

COVID-19 relief, \$7.5 billion was appropriated for vaccine planning, distribution, monitoring, and tracking; \$1 billion for vaccine confidence activities; \$6.05 billion for COVID vaccine supply chain; and \$7.6 billion for community health centers for activities including COVID-19 vaccine distribution and administration, testing, and community outreach and education. This bill became law four months ago. Have these funds been distributed? How are these funds currently being used? As the former Republican Leader of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, I believe that oversight is a very important aspect of our response. I have supported much-needed relief for American families, workers, and small businesses, but we must ensure it is being used effectively and wisely.

Specifically, I am concerned that a number of these bills are duplicative of current efforts already underway to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Let me be clear, I support efforts to give every American the opportunity to be vaccinated for COVID-19 and any other vaccine preventable disease where vaccination is recommended. But at this point, we need to fully evaluate the current situation – why are Americans not getting vaccinated? We need to tailor meaningful solutions to these problems. Cost may be a part of the problem, but there are likely other issues that are negatively affecting vaccination rates.

For example, we are considering today is **H.R. 979**, the “Vaccine Fairness Act,” which would require weekly reporting of vaccine distribution. I agree with

my colleagues that this is helpful information, but this is currently already being done by HHS and each member office receives this vaccine information weekly.

Additionally, today we are examining **H.R. 3013**, the “COVID Vaccine Transportation Access Act”. This bill would provide grants for transportation to receive vaccines. I certainly agree that transportation should not be a limiting factor for an individual, but currently there are already several resources available for these services, including Uber and Lyft who stepped up to provide transportation. Congress also authorized non-emergency transportation for Medicaid individuals in the December bipartisan COVID-19 relief package. Lastly, many areas offer a phone number that an individual can text and to make a vaccination appointment and they will also help you coordinate a ride.

We do currently still have gaps in our vaccine system, and I look forward to discussing **H.R. 3742**, the “Vaccine Information for Nursing Facility Operators Act” or the “Vaccine INFO Act,” which would require nursing homes to provide educational information on the value of getting all of the appropriate ACIP-recommended vaccines for health care workers to their staff in a similar manner to how they already provide educational information on certain vaccines for their residents. I also look forward to discussing **H.R. 1452**. This bill would require HHS to publish the formula used to distribute the allocation of COVID-19

vaccines. This bill will allow states, local governments, and certain entities to better prepare for vaccine distribution.

Lastly, I encourage all to get vaccinated for COVID-19. Vaccines saves lives and help protect against many diseases. The Democrat bill, H.R. 3 would disincentivize further development of vaccines and hinder development of lifesaving drugs. During a global pandemic, they want to advance polices that would lead to fewer cures and treatments. This is very backwards to me. I hope my colleagues fully evaluate how damaging a slowed vaccine development could have been for COVID-19. Many around the world, particularly the European Union, did exactly what the Democrats are trying to get us to do in the United States. These behaviors have resulted in the EU being way behind the U.S. in distributing COVID-19 vaccines to their citizens. We must continue to be a leader in medical innovation and encourage the development of new treatments and cures in our great country.