

**COVID CHILD CARE CHALLENGES:
SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS**

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS
CRISIS
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
REFORM

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

MARCH 2, 2022

Serial No. 117-68

Printed for the use of the Committee on Oversight and Reform



Available on: *govinfo.gov*,
oversight.house.gov or
docs.house.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

47-066 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2022

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Documents entered into the record during this hearing are listed below.

- * Research Brief, “COVID-19 means more students not learning to read”;
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- * Research Brief, “Learning during COVID-19: Reading and math achievement
in the 2020-21 school year”; submitted by Ranking Member Steve
Scalise.
- * Brief, Snapshot of Test Scores and Pandemic Learning Models - Virginia;
submitted by Ranking Member Steve Scalise.
- * Research Report, Pandemic Schooling Mode and Student Test Scores
Evidence from U.S. School Districts; submitted by Ranking Member Steve
Scalise.
- * Letter, MomsRising Together, to Chairman Clyburn and Ranking Mem-
ber Scalise.
- * Memo, Taking the Win Over COVID-19, from Impact Research.
- * Letter, from The Bipartisan Policy Center, to Chairman Clyburn and
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Documents are available at: docs.house.gov.

COVID CHILD CARE CHALLENGES: SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS
Washington, D.C.

The select subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:09 p.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, and via Zoom; Hon. James Clyburn (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Clyburn, Waters, Maloney, Foster, Raskin, Krishnamoorthi, Scalise, Jordan, and Miller-Meeks.

Chairman CLYBURN. [Presiding] Good afternoon. The committee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

The coronavirus pandemic has put tremendous strain on America's families and caregivers. Many of us have seen firsthand in our own families, with our friends, and among our co-workers the difficult challenges that parents, teachers, and other caregivers have faced in the last few years. In the first several months of the pandemic, families and childcare providers were largely left to face these challenges alone. As a result, many were forced to drop out of the work force or to close their businesses. Approximately 60 percent of childcare providers closed in the spring of 2020. These closures led to over 375,000 childcare workers losing their jobs. Although many of those childcare providers were able to reopen, thousands of providers had closed permanently by 2021, contributing to a shortage that persists to this day.

These sudden closures forced many parents to make difficult choices between keeping their jobs and caring for their children. Without the necessary support, parents with young children dropped out of the work force in the early days of the pandemic at alarmingly high rates. Now, nearly two years later, men with young children have returned to the work force at pre-pandemic rates, yet the labor participation rate of women with young children has not fully recovered. In January 2022, the most recent month for which data are available, more than 1.1 million women left the job or lost a job due to the need to care for young children. This disparity threatens to exacerbate longstanding gender-based economic inequality.

Families paid high costs for children even before the pandemic. With the onset of the pandemic, childcare became even less afford-

able to parents with prices rising by more than 5 percent in 2022. At the time that childcare costs for families were increasing, childcare worker pay remained low. In most states, the median wage for childcare workers, who are disproportionately women and minorities, was below the state's living wage. This combination of low wages and high costs is unsustainable and puts a great burden on childcare providers and families while slowing our economic recovery.

Congress has taken decisive action by passing three Federal pandemic relief packages that each included funding specifically for childcare. Most significantly, the American Rescue Plan included a historic \$39 billion investment in childcare. This investment has already had a positive impact on children providers. Early evidence indicates that these pandemic relief funds have helped childcare providers stay in business and raise wages. Forty-six percent of childcare providers surveyed in the summer of 2021 said the program likely would have closed without help from pandemic relief funds. Encouragingly, many recipients of relief funds also reported that their childcare workers have received increased compensation.

The American Rescue Plan also gave financial support directly to parents and families to offset the rising costs of childcare. It temporarily expanded the child tax credit and delivered advanced monthly payments of \$300 per young child from July through December 2021. American families have put these funds to good use. Census Bureau data shows that between 5 and 7 million households used child tax credit advance payments to help cover childcare expenses. The American Rescue Plan also expanded the child and dependent care tax credit, providing additional assistance specifically for care. Although pandemic-related relief programs have helped families and providers cope with the immediate effects of the coronavirus, sustained Federal investment is still needed to aid recovery and address problems that existed before the pandemic.

The Biden-Harris Administration's Build Back Better agenda includes comprehensive proposals to improve the quality and affordability of childcare while delivering the compensation that childcare workers and educators deserve. Continued investment in the childcare sector through existing Federal programs and the extension of the American Rescue Plan provisions would also support access and affordability. Extending and expanding the child tax credit with this advanced monthly payment structure would continue to aid the millions of households that have used those payments for childcare expenses. When we support American families and invest in the professionals who help to care for our Nation's children, we are making an investment in both our present and our future. The time is now to invest in childcare providers and families so that we can build a better, stronger, and more equitable economy.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to hearing more about what more we can do to give families and childcare providers the support that they needed during the pandemic and beyond.

I now recognize the ranking member for his opening statement.

Mr. SCALISE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am glad we had this meeting here in the committee room in person. I would also like

to thank all of our witnesses who are here with us today. I look forward to hearing their testimony.

A hearing on this topic is long overdue. For more than two years, we have heard about the damage that U.S. COVID policies have done to our Nation's children as well as working parents. Parents pleaded with their local school boards to inject actual science and common sense in these rules. Congressional Republicans have sent letters, asked for hearings and briefings, and begged the CDC to explain the science that justified the harm that their ridiculous policies were causing to our kids.

Here is what we know. Remote learning hurt children, both academically and emotionally, and scheduling disruptions at school and daycare centers created chaos for working families, hindering them from returning to the work force at a time when we need more workers. It is clearly one of the largest U.S. failures in policy that we have seen during this pandemic. Many Democrat-led states and teachers' union bosses refused to reopen schools for more than a year in some places, despite evidence that closures and instability harm America's children. In the summer of 2020, Republicans repeatedly called on Governors and school systems to fully reopen schools.

Student learning loss due to remote or hybrid learning is astronomical. Millions of kids are behind in math and reading. Amplify, which is the curriculum and assessment provider, examined its test data for about 400,000 elementary school students and found that, "At the middle of the 2021–2022 school year, in every elementary grade, K through 5, the number of students at risk of not reading is higher than it was at the same point in the 2019–2020 school year." Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit four different studies into the record that have been done to detail the data and the detrimental impact that remote learning has had on America's children. Thank you.

Mr. SCALISE. On top of learning loss, children and teenagers are now experiencing a mental health crisis of historic proportions. The American Academy of Pediatrics declared a national state of emergency in children's mental health, and the U.S. Surgeon General issued a youth mental health advisory. Suicide attempts by 12-to 17-year-old girls rose 51 percent from early 2019 to early 2021. This is having a devastating impact on our young kids. When kids have been able to go back to school or to daycare, the CDC has pushed extreme quarantine policies, especially for kids that can't wear masks. This means that if one kid in a class gets COVID, the whole class is shut down for up to 10 days. Can you imagine the negative impact this is having not only on students, but also on their parents? Abrupt closures and long quarantines mean they miss work unexpectedly for many days at a time. These disruptions are caused by irrational COVID policies, and they continue to this day in many cases.

According to a survey by *The New York Times*, in January, more than half of American children missed at least three days of school, about 25 percent missed more than a week, while 14 percent of students missed nine or more days. This keeps parents from returning to the work force, and data shows that it especially has had a negative impact on women. On top of that, until last Friday, the CDC

said that everyone over the age of two had to wear a mask, even though worldwide, most countries don't mask young kids in school due to the harm that it causes those kids. And the protection masks provide to children is unknown and might be very small. The CDC said kids should be masked for the last two years. This is something Republicans in Congress as well as parents across the country have been begging the CDC to change since we have come to learn so much more about COVID and its largely minimal impact on young kids compared to the well-documented massive damage that masks and remote learning are having on young children.

Over the last few weeks, we have started to see mask mandates lifted in most major cities, including New York, Chicago, and Washington, DC, as well as Los Angeles in restaurants and other public spaces, yet, unbelievably, the mask mandates for children in schools and daycare centers remained. Their plan was to force kids to mask all day in school or at daycare, in most cases, even while they are outside, but yet, adults would be allowed to be maskless in grocery stores, restaurants, bars, and, of course, sporting events.

I would like to note here that this hypocrisy of some of these nonsensical political science policies have been ongoing throughout the entire pandemic. Prominent Democrats have been caught ignoring their own masking rules while forcing those same rules on children for the last two years. Liberal elites have been spotted without masks at hair salons, the Met Gala, professional football games, fancy restaurants, and many, many more, while those same hypocritical leaders shamed others who didn't comply with their nonsensical mandates.

But as we know now, we have had this COVID miracle in the last few days. Just in time for President Biden's State of the Union address last night, we saw just days ago Biden's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finally update its mask guidelines. The new guidelines mean that instead of recommending nearly the entire country mask indoors, now only 28 percent are recommended to do so. So overnight, more than 70 percent of the country, including kids in schools, don't have to mask anymore.

So we should ask, Mr. Chairman, what changed? Did the science change? Again, it is not the medical science. It seemed like Democrats had an epiphany of political science, and what is that new science? Here we have excerpts from a memo by a group called Impact Research, which is a well-known Democrat polling firm that also happens to be where President Biden's pollster works. Note the memo, by the way, is dated February 24, 2022, just days ago. So this is what it said. This is an assessment from a poll, not from medical science. "Two-thirds of parents and 80 percent of teachers say the pandemic caused learning loss, and voters are overwhelmingly more worried about learning loss than kids getting COVID. Six in 10 Americans describe themselves as worn out by the pandemic. The more we"—and they are talking about Democrat-elected leaders right here—"The more we talk about the threat of COVID and onerously restricting people's lives because of it, the more we turn them against us and show them we're out of touch with their daily realities." I wish that was medical science that they were basing decisions on, but it was a poll just days before the State of the

Union that got them to change course. That is the kind of thing that is infuriating parents.

So Biden's CDC is only loosening its masking requirements now that Democrats' polling numbers are in the tank and the midterms are around the corner. During the campaign, Joe Biden promised repeatedly to "follow the science," but apparently, the science changes when his polling changes. The American people see right through these masking political theater guidelines and will never forget how they played politics with our children by shuttering their schools and masking their faces, even as doctors were noting the harm that those mandates were causing to our children. People have lost faith in the CDC, and this brazen political stunt is further eroding what trust was left.

Last night during the State of the Union, President Biden said, "Let's stop looking at COVID-19 as a partisan dividing line." By the way, this is from the same President whose Administration directed the Department of Justice to investigate parents who were passionately expressing their First Amendment speech rights in opposition to many of these same regulations by going to school board meetings. And what did President Biden's Administration do? They tried to deem them as domestic terrorists for going to school board meetings and expressing their views, and that is after last night the President said stop using COVID-19 as a partisan dividing line. Well, I think those parents wouldn't be so angry if President Biden paid them an apology for the things he said about them and allowed his Administration to continue to call them names and try to shame them for standing up for the rights of their kids.

So we are going to continue to push for medical science, not political science, and let's free up our children from this experiment that has destroyed millions of lives over these last two years. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman CLYBURN. I thank the ranking member for his statement. I would like to say as a parent of a school board member, it is not expressing. It is how you express that determines whether or not you are a terrorist. I would also like to say that I think it is because of the science and vaccinations that have begun to work that we had a change in policy, but that will not fall on deaf ears.

I would like now to introduce our distinguished witnesses. Gina Forbes is an early childhood educator, former administrator, and parent based in Brunswick, Maine. Ms. Forbes has a master's in education and a license in early childhood education. She brings a wealth of experience to this issue as a parent, pre-school teacher, and school director. Dr. Betsey Stevenson is a professor of public policy and economics at University of Michigan. She is a labor economist who has published widely about the impact of public policies on outcomes both in the labor market and for families. Dr. Stevenson's research focuses on women's labor market experiences and the economic forces shaping American families. Dr. Stevenson served as a member of the Council of Economic Advisors from 2013 to 2015 and served as the chief economist of the United States Department of Labor from 2010 to 2011.

Dr. Lea J.E. Austin is executive director of the Center for the Study of Childcare Employment at the University of California. Dr. Austin leads the Center's research and policy agenda aimed at im-

proving the status and well-being of early educators. She has extensive experience in the areas of work force development, early childhood education, and public policy. Carrie L. Lukas is the president of Independent Women's Forum. She previously worked on Capitol Hill as a senior domestic policy analyst for the House Republican Policy Committee and at the Cato Institute. Dr. Lynette Fraga is the CEO of Child Care Aware and a leading voice on children's policy, practice, and research. Dr. Fraga has 25 years of experience as an educator, program director, and executive leader, working on behalf of children and families. Since beginning her career in early childhood education as a teacher in infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms, Dr. Fraga has held positions at the local, state, and national levels within nonprofit corporations and higher education sectors.

Will the witnesses please rise if you are here and those of you who cannot be here, and raise your right hands?

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

[A chorus of ayes.]

Chairman CLYBURN. You may be seated. Let the record show that the witnesses answered in the affirmative.

Without objection, your written statements will be made a part of the record.

Ms. Forbes, you are now recognized for five minutes for your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF GINA FORBES, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR
AND PARENT, BRUNSWICK, MAINE**

Ms. FORBES. Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman Clyburn and members of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis. I am honored and grateful for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Gina Forbes, and I'm here to share my experience as a parent and early childhood educator. I currently have a 13-year-old son and an almost two-year-old daughter, and I've been working with young children and families for nearly 18 years. I'll begin today by sharing my experience of being an early childhood educator and past director of a childcare center and then share my experience of navigating the challenges of childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic as a parent.

From 2013 until June 2021, I worked at a program called Roots & Fruits Preschool in South Portland, Maine. I began as a teacher and was later hired as director in 2017. Roots & Fruits was nationally accredited and was of the highest quality rating. My own son attended at age four, and I watched him thrive in the program. I was able to witness firsthand how high-quality early education can set children up for lifelong success. As director, I became very intimate with the joys and challenges of running a childcare program. I was, first and foremost, committed to quality education for the children in our care. There was always a delicate balancing act of enrolling enough children to be financially successful while keeping prices affordable to families, and assuring that there were not too many children enrolled for our standard of care.

It was important to our organization that we serve a diverse array of families from a variety of backgrounds, including income levels. The business structure of our organization, and in the field in general, was set up so that the only way to address increased costs, including increasing staff wages, was to increase tuition rates for families. Keeping the cost of care accessible to families meant keeping wages at or below a certain level for staff. This lack of fair pay, inability to offer health and other benefits, and the high demands of the job is a recipe for teacher burnout, stress, and sometimes turnover.

I'm sharing this information about pre-pandemic times because it has everything to do with the crisis we found ourselves in when March 2020 came around. In the initial first wave of COVID-19, we closed our school and remained closed until mid-June when we had clear guidelines about how to run a childcare program safely. When we finally had a reopening plan, it was at reduced enrollment, just over half of our usual functioning. To run the program, we had to raise tuition for families, and even this was not going to be enough. We projected a deficit for the year due to the loss associated with lower enrollment and the cost of additional safety materials and procedures.

Thankfully, during the school year, we received a PPP loan and Federal COVID relief funds that made it possible for us to run our program. These funds covered costs related to additional cleaning supplies, PPE, and helped cover the losses from our closure and lower enrollment. We were also able to give some additional bonuses to staff in lieu of hazard pay. Ultimately, these funds helped us significantly, but it was not enough to keep us open long term. With razor-thin margins and challenges present long before the pandemic, what we needed to be truly sustainable was a significant and committed long-term financial investment from state and Federal funds. We could've chosen to continue to raise our tuition rates, but this would put our organization's values of offering care to diverse families at risk. It was for these reasons that I, along with our board of directors, decided to close the Roots & Fruits Program, and in June 2021, I handed over the keys to the building and closed our doors permanently.

As a parent, the impact of COVID-19 on the childcare sector has been felt in very challenging ways. Since Roots & Fruits closed, I have had to find a new childcare arrangements for my youngest child. We were able to find an amazing childcare provider who offers local in-home care. However, it is only part-time, and it is far more expensive than we had budgeted for or can truly afford. We have inquired about other childcare possibilities that would better fit our budget. However, every program we have spoken to have waitlists, and some for years to come. It is an understatement to say that it is a constant and persistent stress on me and my family to figure out how to afford high-quality childcare.

One small respite from this ongoing stress was receiving the monthly child tax credit payments, which went directly toward childcare costs. Without them, I'm struggling to figure out if I can continue to work or if I need to remove myself from the work force to care for our young child. I can't help but be reminded that childcare workers are truly the work force behind the work force.

The issues that I described today are not new but are built into the childcare system as it has existed for many years. The pandemic has significantly exacerbated those issues. High-quality early education and care is the backbone of our society, and I believe that we need to fund it accordingly. Our children, families, and educators deserve nothing less.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions. Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you very much, Ms. Forbes.

We will now hear from Dr. Stevenson. Dr. Stevenson, you are recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF BETSEY STEVENSON, PH.D., PROFESSOR OF PUBLIC POLICY AND PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Ms. STEVENSON. Thank you, Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, and distinguished members of the committee. I appreciate the invitation to speak to you today.

The U.S. economy and employment has evolved in a way that makes childcare now central to its functioning. While childcare is not a woman's issue, the pandemic did have a unique impact on women, and the evolution of women's role in the economy helps to explain how we've arrived at this critical juncture. While I detail the transition more in my written testimony, let me explain where we're currently at.

Women are now the most educated workers in our labor force, and at the start of the pandemic, women held the majority of jobs. In our recovery from the 2008 recession, the rise of women's labor force participation drove the strong recovery with two-thirds of the job growth going to jobs held by women. Families rely on women's earnings, and our economy relies on the skills and efforts of women.

Women's personal lives have also undergone a profound shift. The result is that mothers with kids in the home as the pandemic hit were older with more education and more likely to be working than mothers with kids in the home during previous recessions. Stepping out of the labor force for these mothers was a less viable option, and yet, for some of these mothers, it was the only option available. Two-thirds of the childcare centers had closed by April 2020, and the number of childcare workers dropped 34 percent. Schools around the country turned to remote learning, and many remained remote or partially remote for more than a year. The pandemic made it clear that schools and childcare both serve a dual purpose: educate and care for children.

Our childcare challenges are ongoing, both because the pandemic is ongoing and because our childcare infrastructure was inadequate prior to the pandemic. While childcare disruptions have occurred across the income spectrum, they have disproportionately impacted lower-wage workers and single parents with devastating effects on their employment and earnings. Childcare-related constraints led to more women than men losing jobs during the pandemic. However, childcare disruptions affected work way beyond just job loss. Fifty-nine percent of parents said that their employment was affected. They turned down promotions, changed employment, paused education or training, and fathers made these sacrifices even more

frequently than mothers. These decisions not only mean lower incomes for families, but they mean lower potential output for the U.S. economy.

Even in good economic times, finding high-quality, affordable childcare is challenging for parents. The cost of childcare, particularly high-quality childcare, prior to the pandemic made working too expensive for some parents, and yet the childcare market is still far from recovering due to these inadequate levels of access and affordability. Research has found that childcare is particularly sensitive to economic downturns and recovers much more slowly than the rest of the economy. Employment and childcare remains more than 10 percent below pre-pandemic levels even though non-farm employment remains only 1.9 percent below its February 2020 level. The American Rescue Plan authorized \$39 billion for childcare, much of which is just now starting to get disbursed. And while this crucial funding will serve as needed emergency support for a childcare infrastructure, it does not provide the long-term structural support childcare needs.

Early childhood educators generate enormous financial benefits by engaging in developmentally appropriate, curriculum-based activities that lead to higher lifetime earnings for the children in their care, and yet childcare workers are some of the lowest-paid workers in our country. Children need committed professionals to provide care and developmentally appropriate skills, but few people have the luxury of gaining training in early childhood education and committing to the profession for \$12 an hour, particularly if they can make twice as much by seeking employment now at Target.

The low pay is one reason that childcare has such a high turnover of workers compared to other jobs in education, creating even further instability in the childcare sector. The pay of childcare providers must and will rise due to market forces. These market forces will also ultimately raise the cost of childcare, making childcare and, thus, labor market participation for parents even more unaffordable. The biggest economic problem the U.S. currently faces is low labor force participation. It's likely to contribute to ongoing inflation. Solving this problem requires investing more in our youngest citizens and supporting their families with a more reliable, affordable, and higher-quality childcare sector.

Thank you, and I welcome your questions.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you, Dr. Stevenson.

We will now hear from Dr. Austin. Dr. Austin, you are recognized for five minutes.

**STATEMENT OF LEA J.E. AUSTIN, ED.D, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF CHILD CARE EMPLOYMENT,
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

Ms. AUSTIN. Hi. Thank you, Chairman Clyburn and members of the committee, for the opportunity to speak with you today about the plight of childcare in America.

If nothing else, the pandemic has made visible that stable, quality childcare is not something that is just nice to have. It is a necessity, yet it's severely under resourced and a crumbling component of our Nation's social infrastructure. Leading up to the pan-

demic, about half of families who needed childcare in the U.S. didn't have access to it. Parents, as we have heard, mostly mothers, were losing about \$37 billion in income each year because they had to reduce work hours or drop out of the work force entirely because of childcare issues. Businesses were losing an estimated \$12.7 billion a year due to childcare challenges among employees, and childcare workers were subsidizing the true cost of services with the poverty-level wages paid to them.

The pandemic didn't create these circumstances, but it exacerbated them, and it brought childcare in this country to the brink of collapse. Unfortunately, it's no wonder. Care and early education, work that is performed almost exclusively by women, has long been de-valued. Childcare businesses, most of which are small and women-owned, operate on very thin margins, and the slightest drop in enrollment and income was all it took for many to permanently close. By July 2020, 1 in 5 childcare providers in California, for example, had already fallen behind on mortgage or rent payments for their business. Most childcare programs have to rely on what parents can afford to pay to fund their programs, and this renders childcare workers, as we've heard, among the lowest-paid workers in every state with an average wage of about \$12 an hour. And within that, we see racial pay gaps and pay penalties, especially for those who are working with the youngest children: our infants and toddlers.

For programs that have managed to stay open, they're having trouble staffing up. They simply can't compete with businesses, like retail and food service, which are now paying starting wages of \$15 or more and also offering benefits. It's not hyperbole to say that conditions are dire for the childcare work force. Ninety-eight other occupations in this country are paid more than childcare workers. Poverty rates are double those of other workers in general and, on average, eight times higher than that of K-8 teachers. In another study, we found that a third of childcare workers we surveyed were food insecure, and fewer than 15 percent would be able to withstand a \$400 emergency. These findings aren't unique to California. Researchers have identified similar financial stressors in states, for example, like Nebraska, Louisiana, and Oregon.

To bring attention to their persistently low wages, for decades, childcare workers have posed this riddle: "Why did the childcare worker cross the road? To get to her second job." It wasn't meant to be funny then, and it is certainly no joke today. My colleague, Dr. Caitlin McLean, met Shania Bell, a childcare worker who literally crossed the street for a better-paying job at a hardware store, every day walking past the job and the children she loved and that she was really good at for a job that allowed her to actually pay her bills. A similar scenario is playing out all across the country as evidenced by the program closures and the childcare jobs shortages. We have lost, to date, 131,000 childcare jobs since February 2020.

The Federal pandemic relief programs have provided important stopgap measures. Many states jumped at the opportunity to invest in their work force. We know of at least 28 that are specifically using Federal relief funds to intentionally support wages and the recruitment and retention of early educators. Critically, relief has

helped many hold on, but it cannot, nor was it designed to, provide long-term fixes. Our economy relies on workers who are parents, and so many parents cannot work without reliable childcare, and childcare cannot work effectively until its own work force is secure. Dependable, long-term investments that de-couple what parents can afford from what workers are paid is the key to ensuring that childcare programs are able to stay open and to recruit and retain staff who can meet America's childcare needs.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee, and I look forward to your questions.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you, Dr. Austin.

We will now hear from Ms. Lukas. Ms. Lukas, you are recognized for five minutes.

Ms. LUKAS. Oops, sorry.

STATEMENT OF CARRIE LUKAS, PRESIDENT, INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM

Ms. LUKAS. Good afternoon. I am Carrie Lukas, president of Independent Women's Forum. Independent Women's Forum is a non-profit organization dedicated to developing and advancing policies that aren't just well-intended but that actually enhance people's freedom, opportunity, and well-being. I am also mother to five kids between the ages of 7 and 16. I am going to quickly run through what I think of as five key lessons we learned during COVID-19 about childcare and supporting families and caregivers.

First and most importantly, we should reject any public policy changes that would make our childcare and preschool systems function more like our K through 12 public schools. Like many working parents during COVID-19, I had to juggle my job along with managing my kids schooling online. Where I live, most private schools provided in-person learning service by fall 2020, but our public schools fought to stay closed for another seven months. That was long after it made any sense from a COVID or health perspective, long after our teachers had been given priority access to vaccines, and long after it was obvious that it was an utter catastrophe in terms of emotional health and lost learning for students, particularly for children from low-income families, those with disabilities, and those for whom English is a second language.

The failures of our K through 12 schools contrast with the childcare sector. At the height of the pandemic, according to HHS, about 60 percent of childcare centers closed. The rest stayed opened to serve children of critical workers. By the end of 2020, however, an estimated 73 percent of daycare, preschool, and childcare programs had reopened. In contrast, at the end of 2020, only about a third of K through 12 public schools were providing fully in-person services. Public schools behaved this way because they do not see parents and students as their customers. Why would they? Their ability to pay the bills and keep their jobs depends on pleasing government officials, not on serving families. Parents should fight to keep this from becoming the same situation for childcare and preschools.

The second big takeaway is that policymakers at all levels of government should seek to eliminate regulations that aren't directly related to safety and quality so that a greater diversity of pro-

viders, especially smaller-and at-home providers, enter the marketplace so that parents have more and better options. As the other witnesses have attested to, COVID has forced many daycare providers out of business, but, as we all know, sadly, this was a bad trend that was already ongoing. The number of at-home daycare providers fell by half between 2005 and 2017. A review of state-based childcare regulations reveals ludicrous examples of rules that dictate the minutiae of care: the number of art supplies you have to have, the exact size of balls per children. This clearly isn't necessary for kids and just creates headaches and drives up costs for providers.

Third, policymakers should consider tax relief for those who have very young children since they often do face large expenses. However, policymakers should not make that financial support conditional on childcare arrangements. Incentivizing the use of paid childcare isn't fair to all the families with loved ones—parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles—who provide loving care for children in their lives for free while foregoing paid employment.

Fourth, government funding for childcare is often sold as a sure-fire way to improve life outcomes for children. However, the evidence simply doesn't bear this out. A recent study in Tennessee of their state-run pre-K program revealed it had long-term negative effects on children's achievements and behavior. Now, that doesn't mean that no study will ever find benefits associated with preschool, nor does it mean that daycare and childcare isn't a vital service for millions of children and families. But it should encourage some more humility and caution among policymakers and warn us away from trying to push all children into government-approved childcare centers since that could do more harm than good.

Finally, the recent proposed Build Back Better Plan would have made the Federal Government the biggest player in daycare and preschool programs, and this approach is incredibly dangerous and should be rejected. Put aside the enormous cost to taxpayers and potentially for millions of families. These government regulations will discourage innovation and create a less diverse childcare sector. In fact, all of the battles that we see raging about public K through 12 schools over the content of curriculum, the use of pronouns, sex ed, masking policies, they will be coming to your local daycare and preschool if government becomes the primary funder and sets the rules for what constitutes an approved daycare provider.

We see some of this happening already with Head Start. You know, right now, everyone's unmasking, but not the poor 2-and 3-year-olds that are in our Head Start Programs, and that seems a tragedy. Two-year-olds shouldn't be political footballs for Federal officials, and we need to keep the Federal Government as far away as possible from deciding what happens in daycare and preschool.

Thank you.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you, Ms. Lukas.

Finally, we will hear from Dr. Fraga. Dr. Fraga, you are recognized for five minutes. Am I pronouncing that name correct?

Ms. FRAGA. "FRAH-gah" is correct. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF LYNETTE M. FRAGA, PH.D., CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CHILD CARE AWARE OF AMERICA

Ms. FRAGA. Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, members of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, thank you for inviting me to testify here today.

Without question, the pandemic highlighted the growing lack of access to affordable, quality childcare in the United States. To be clear, childcare was already in crisis before the pandemic. The pandemic only made it worse. This longstanding, exacerbated state of childcare crisis has negatively impacted child development and family economic security for too long.

Child Care Aware of America is the leading voice on childcare, and as CEO, I have the good fortune of working with a network of childcare resource and referral agencies, childcare programs and educators, and families across the country. We lead projects that increase the quality and availability of childcare, conduct research, and advocate for policies that positively impact the lives of children and families. Simply put, our work places is at the nexus of nearly every challenge and stressor facing our Nation's childcare system today.

Last month, CCAOA released, "Demanding Change: Repairing Our Childcare System," which outlines how the U.S. childcare system has changed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. We found that between December 2019 and March 2021, nearly 16,000 childcare programs across 37 states have permanently closed, representing a nine-percent decline in the total number of licensed childcare providers, both center and home based. At the same time, childcare continues to be unaffordable and inaccessible for too many families.

In 2020, the national annual average price of childcare was between \$9,800 and \$10,200 if you take into account the annual average price of all settings and types of care. In many states, the annual price of center-based childcare for an infant exceeds the annual cost of in-state tuition at a public four-year university. Additionally, almost half of parents with children under age six searching for care in the past two years said the greatest barriers to access were cost, lack of available spaces, and location. This is partly due to the specific impacts of the pandemic. Childcare providers are experiencing higher operating costs, challenges retaining their work force, and lower or fluctuating attendance, which directly impacts their financial viability.

Even before the pandemic, the supply of childcare was decreasing, and the price of childcare was out of reach for parents. Insufficient public investment in childcare has left families and childcare providers to bear the financial burden of supporting an unsustainably, under-resourced system. Thankfully, Congress stepped in to help the childcare system cope with immediate pandemic-driven issues with three relief packages. States have leveraged these flexible funds to meet their unique needs, and no two states are spending dollars in the same way.

Relief funds have helped thousands of childcare programs remain open during the pandemic, given more families access to high-quality care in a variety of settings so they could return to work, and have helped many early childhood educators to be more fairly com-

pensated. Simply put, COVID relief funds have been a lifeline for many childcare programs. The March 2021 American Rescue Plan included \$39 billion dedicated for childcare relief, and those funds were divided up into two pots: \$24 billion for Stabilization grants and \$15 billion in discretionary funding. While state disbursement of funds was initially slow, states have made progress. As of February 2022, 47 states and the District of Columbia launched their Stabilization Grant applications. Good examples have emerged of how states, many in partnership with intermediaries like childcare resource and referral agencies, are ensuring the Stabilization Grant process is equitable, efficient, and transparent.

States have also made progress spending their discretionary funds. The most common policies nationwide have included increasing subsidy eligibility and eliminating co-pays for families, increasing compensation and benefits for educators, and improving provider payment policies. This is welcome news given the pandemic has added to the challenges of work force recruitment and retention with workers leaving the field temporarily or permanently to find higher-paid work and benefits during a time of health and economic uncertainty. We are already seeing the impact of these relief funds. In Maryland, 90 percent of the 5,757 applications for funding received grants. In New York, 14,866 funding requests have been approved with over 10,000 payments fully dispersed.

Despite relief funds, the childcare industry is still facing serious challenges. The positive changes secured by the short-term addition of relief funding make a strong argument for why longer-term investments are needed. All the stories you have heard and will hear today are connected to why we need a system of childcare that honors its work force, supports its families, and truly cares for its children.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee today. I look forward to answering your questions.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you so much, Dr. Fraga.

I am going to yield first to Ms. Waters for five minutes of questions.

Ms. WATERS. Thank you so very much. I heard what you said, "questions," but I want to thank you for your patience and your tolerance.

[Laughter.]

Ms. WATERS. I want to thank you because when I first heard Mr. Scalise start to talk about this issue, I thought, oh my God, we are going to have bipartisan support for childcare, and then he went into this political argument about math. So I thank you for your tolerance.

Let me get to the question. The pandemic hit many of our essential workers very hard, and childcare providers were among those who felt the brunt of the pandemic's impact. More than 370,000 childcare workers lost their jobs, and thousands of childcare centers closed. And so this is a graphic that shows the pandemic caused dramatic decline in childcare capacity. It is dramatic, absolutely. So, Dr. Austin, your center has published reports showing the impact of the pandemic on childcare workers and early educators, who are overwhelmingly women and disproportionately women of color. Like many essential workers and small business

owners, they faced incredible economic challenges during the pandemic. Dr. Austin, what financial difficulties did the pandemic bring for childcare workers and early educators?

Ms. AUSTIN. Thank you for your question. The pandemic really just pulled the rug out from under our childcare work force. Again, you know, these are folks who are earning \$12 an hour. As you know, the country closed in the early stages of the pandemic. Childcare continued to show up, and they continued to show up without resources for quite some time until we finally got some relief packages. So we saw that programs were falling behind on their mortgage. For our home-based providers, the mortgage is their house. That is where they live, and so they were taking on debt. People were working without paying themselves and falling further and further behind.

And we see, you know, high rates of economic insecurity being reported. People are food insecure, and the result is we see that people are walking away. They have been demoralized by the treatment that they received, that they did stay open. Very few states initially in that first year offered hazard pay for childcare workers, and so folks are walking away. There are saying, you know, we have had enough, and we are going to go get those jobs at Target and Starbucks where they are paying \$15, \$17 an hour and able to offer them benefits. So it really undermined folks in their own lives.

Ms. WATERS. Well, thank you so very much. Is that Dr. “FRAY-gah” or “FRAH-gah?”

Ms. FRAGA. Dr. “FRAH-gah.”

Ms. WATERS. “FRAH-gah.” You talked about this being a problem prior to the pandemic, and I reflected on my early years as a young mother with two children and desperate for childcare, and the best I could do was get the lady who lived in the back of me, who was half ill herself and aged, to try and watch my children while I worked. And so many of us have been struggling for years when we are young mothers, you know, before our careers, where we absolutely, you know, realized that we needed something better. We needed more. And, of course, I come from the Head Start Program having worked in Head Start while I could not get childcare for my children. And so, tell us how bad it is. I know you alluded to this, but would you again reiterate for Mr. Scalise, in particular, about how bad it is?

Ms. FRAGA. Yes. Thank you for your question, Representative Waters. It is a challenge, and a trauma, and a tragedy, frankly, for so many of our early care and education providers and for our families. This is creating a tremendous amount of stress. Prior to the pandemic, we were already seeing a decrease in the early childhood work force. Subsequent to the pandemic, we are seeing hundreds of thousands of jobs being lost by the early care and education work force and the stress that is created that Dr. Austin named—housing insecurity, financial insecurity, et cetera—that these small business owner women, and often minority-owned women business owners, really experiencing a great deal of stress, not only for families who are unable to access care, but also for those early care and education providers who are also under a great deal of stress. And remember, these are the individuals who are in classrooms and in

early learning programs with our Nation's children, so incredibly important for us to continue to move forward and supporting our children.

Ms. WATERS. Thank you so very much. I hope Mr. Scalise heard you.

Mr. SCALISE. Would the gentlelady yield? I would be happy to—

Ms. WATERS. The gentlelady has no time.

[Laughter.]

Mr. SCALISE. That is clear. I will answer your question on my time.

Chairman CLYBURN. It is now your time.

Mr. SCALISE. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Laughter.]

Mr. SCALISE. To followup where the gentlelady from California left off, she was, I guess, criticizing the politics, and, frankly, I would share with her that same criticism. The problem is that I was quoting President Biden's polling firm. There was no science that the CDC fell on to change the guidance. It was the polling firm from President Biden that said, literally days before CDC changed the guidance, "Two-thirds of parents and 80 percent of teachers say the pandemic caused learning loss, and voters are overwhelmingly more worried about the learning loss." They went on to say, "The more we talk"—"we," being the Democrats—"The more we talk about the threat of COVID and onerously restrict people's lives because of it, the more we turn them against us and show them we're out of touch with their daily realities." Then they went on to say, "And if Democrats continue to hold a posture that prioritizes COVID precautions over learning, how to live in a world where COVID exists but does not dominate, they risk paying dearly for it in November." So President Biden's polling firm just days ago released this memo warning Democrats that their radical positions on COVID are hurting their chances of winning in November, and then the CDC turned around and changed their rules.

Now, we have been urging them to change the rules for a long time because their rules were wrong, but they wouldn't do it because it was hurting kids. They did it because their pollster told them it was going to hurt their chances of getting elected in November. And so—

Mr. FOSTER. Would the gentleman yield for a question?

Mr. SCALISE. That is the political science that President Biden's polling firm laid out. I would be happy to yield.

Mr. FOSTER. Are you presenting evidence that that affected their decision rather than the simple fact that the amount of virus circulation has been dropping like a rock, and when the virus in circulation drops to a low enough level, you no longer need masks?

Mr. SCALISE. Reclaiming my time. We have seen the circulation drop in previous months, and yet they didn't change the guidance from CDC for that. You know, what we do know, and, again, there is a history within the White House of manipulating the science and their decisions based on influencing. Here it is, polling influence. We saw the teachers union influence their recommendation on schools in the past. That is well documented, by the way. We have talked about that in this committee before. So the Biden Ad-

ministration has a history. Despite Joe Biden as a candidate saying we are going to follow the science, he has manipulated the science in the past about union bosses. Now he is manipulating the science to bow to his own horrible polling. I would be happy, by the way, to submit this for the record, Mr. Chairman. This was a memo February 24, 2022, from President Biden's polling firm where they made these recommendations that this is based upon.

Mr. SCALISE. Now, I would like to get to some questions. Ms. Lukas, I appreciated your recommendation. Ms. Waters, I am glad we got to clear that up.

Ms. Lukas, your recommendations I very much appreciate. I want to talk about the damage we have seen with kids. We have had many hearings in this committee where we talked about the damage that kids are experiencing in the classroom from not learning properly if they are not in the classroom, but also even the masking guidelines, what it is doing to the psyche of our young children. Suicides through the roof. Again, looking at the data, suicide attempts by 12-to 17-year-old girls are at 51 percent from early 2019 to 2021. Can you explain how the CDC's flawed guidance has actually contributed to the mental health crisis that we see our young kids facing?

Ms. LUKAS. Well, certainly. I mean, it is interesting because different localities have made different decisions when it comes to how to handle schools. So there have been some schools that have been open and providing in-person learning, and you can see the differences where schools have been closed the longest. There has been the greatest learning losses and then these increases in mental health and other issues, including rising obesity from kids being prevented from sports. All of these are contributing to problems when we come to school closures.

With masking, it will be interesting because this is a tremendous experiment that we have been conducted on young children. We knew that young children are not very vulnerable to COVID and that COVID-19 was, you know, mercifully gentle with kids and the kids' risks are low. We don't yet know all of the damage that we have done in terms of kids' speech development. We know that speech development, there are evidence that there have been declines, but the mental health impact we will be discovering for years to come just how damaging this has been to this next generation.

Mr. SCALISE. Thanks. And we know from other studies that kids who don't learn proficiently, especially in reading and some of the basic skills, if they don't read, for example, by the third grade, that they are more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers. So if you look at these disparities where, again, some school systems followed the science and stayed open, some bowed to the unions and closed, do we know what kind of damage this is going to cause to our kids long term?

Ms. LUKAS. Yes. I mean, McKinsey & Company just came out with a study that showed that there is an estimated net learning loss because of the learning gaps that have been created by school closures of about \$50,000 of lost potential income in the future, and this isn't evenly distributed. Obviously, the places where the in-person learning was denied for the longest, which tended to be

overwhelmingly lower-income minority communities, that they were disproportionately affected and will have the longest harm long term.

Mr. SCALISE. Well, thanks. And, Mr. Chairman, we will try to get that study and see if we can get that included in the record later. Thank you very much.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you very much. The Chair now recognizes himself for five minutes.

Dr. Fraga, I want to, you know, ask you questions about \$39 billion of support for childcare recovery, including the \$24 billion for Stabilization Grant providers. I want to know how important you think these stabilization grants are.

Ms. FRAGA. Thank you for the question, Chairman Clyburn. Well, every state has actually approached the Stabilization grants differently. There have been a number of trends that we have seen across the country that support equity, efficiency, and transparency in distribution of the Stabilization grants. To be clear, these grants have been incredibly helpful for states, for example, in the realm of equity, populations like infants and toddlers and those programs who are open during non-traditional hours. In some states, there are additional tiers of support for those programs. And efficiency, we are seeing distribution of funding being through direct deposits, for example, though they are available for checks, simple opt-out processes in some states, so the ability for there to be some level of efficiency. And also transparency, which is incredibly important, a wealth of information on who has applied for and been approved for the ability to be able to receive grants.

So these are all ways that these Stabilization grants have been able to be helpful for programs, and for providers, and for families so that they can be able to access programs, and we have really seen a tremendous amount of effort. We are now at almost all states who have at least applications up online so that folks can access them, and we are seeing thousands of these grants being distributed to providers who really need it in real time.

Chairman CLYBURN. Well, thank you for that. I want to go back. The ranking member talked about the child needing to be reading by the third grade or what the catastrophic consequences are. As a former public school teacher, I want to ask you, are you familiar or are you keeping up with how this \$15 billion is being spent and what kind of programs coming forward, because I am particularly interested in the fact that we keep talking about grade school. We aren't talking about those childcare centers that got closed when kids were 3, 4, and 5 years old and what would happen then when they finally get to school because the childcare centers were closed.

Ms. FRAGA. Yes.

Chairman CLYBURN. These kids weren't getting anything: no preparation, no Head Start, no nothing, if I might use that double negative. Can you tell us about that \$15 billion?

Ms. FRAGA. Of course, yes. So I think one of the initial and sort of most important things that we need to emphasize is that it is so critically important for childcare programs to be affordable, accessible, and of quality. And that is really where a lot of our intention and what we are seeing happening in states, is to ensure that accessibility comes by way of families lowering the eligibility for

programs, ensuring that for programs, that they are getting the supports they need in order to stay open, the grant funding that they need so that they can stay open. We need to ensure that as we are thinking about, and what we are seeing in the trend data right now is that there are real intentional dollars going to the fact that, again, to your point, some of these programs have closed either temporarily or leading to permanent closure. What that impacts are the inability for parents to be able to access quality childcare, for these families to be able to return to work, for children to be able to be nurtured and safe in quality settings. That is where these dollars are going in order to support the whole system of care, which is incredibly important for our children and for our families.

We talk about issues related to mental health and stress. Those are not only experiences of children in the classrooms or early childhood programs, but this is impacting parents who can't get to work, can't get food on the table, can't be able to pay the bills, and this is affecting children and their stress levels as well. So it is going to take a whole system approach in order to really make a difference. We need to look at robust long-term public investments to make these kinds of things a reality.

Chairman CLYBURN. Well, thank you very much for that. I could get deeper into this, but I don't want Mr. Jordan to get too nervous. So the Chair now recognizes Mr. Jordan for five minutes.

Mr. JORDAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On September 29 of last year, the National School Board Association sent a letter to the Biden Administration asking them to implement, to use the Patriot Act against moms and dads showing up at school board meetings. Five days later, the Attorney General the United States sends a memorandum to the director at the FBI doing exactly what the School Boards Association asked the Biden Administration to do. Namely, he says in the memorandum, "I'm directing the FBI, working with United States Attorney General, to convene meetings and to set up an open, dedicated line of communication for threat reporting," to set up a snitch line on parents. Two weeks later, on October 20, because of a whistleblower—because of a whistleblower—we find out that the FBI then sent an email to agents around the country where they say, apply a threat tag to parents, put this label, this designation on parents. Here is what the whistleblower told us. He said, "I believe this email is evidence that the FBI is proceeding to collect information on parents who protest at school board meetings." All that happens in 22 days.

The first question I would ask is, I have never seen the Federal Government move that fast on anything, but all that happens in 22 days, which made me wonder about it because we learned that it actually didn't start with the School Board's letter. We know that the Department of Education and the Biden Administration went to the School Board, so it didn't come from the School Board to the government. The government went to the School Board to say, give us the pretext to do what we want to do, namely, go after moms and dads.

In his opening statement, Ms. Lukas, the chairman of this committee said—this is a quote—"Give parents the support they need." I think what the Federal Government needs to do is quit treating

parents as domestic terrorists. Maybe we should start there. So I think in your opening comments, Ms. Lukas, you said you had five children. Is that right?

Ms. LUKAS. Yes.

Mr. JORDAN. And your kids go to school, right?

Ms. LUKAS. Public school here—

Mr. JORDAN. All public school right here, right across—

Ms. LUKAS. Fairfax County.

Mr. JORDAN. Right across the river in Fairfax County, Virginia. You ever show up at school board meetings?

Ms. LUKAS. I have.

Mr. JORDAN. You been to a few of them?

Ms. LUKAS. Just one.

Mr. JORDAN. Did you speak out at it?

Ms. LUKAS. I certainly did.

Mr. JORDAN. Do you think there is a threat tag associated with your name now at the FBI?

Ms. LUKAS. I don't know. You guys would have to tell me who is listening. It is possible. It certainly is a concern. I know that that type of concern discourages a lot of parents from speaking out for just those reasons.

Mr. JORDAN. Yes, I think that is the goal, I think, is to try to intimidate parents from speaking out on COVID policies, on CRT, or, frankly, anything they care about, speaking out about their kids' education. I think it is an effort to intimidate and chill First Amendment free speech. Would you agree with that?

Ms. LUKAS. Very much.

Mr. JORDAN. Yes, and what did you speak out about? I am just curious. When you spoke out at your school board meeting, what did you speak out about?

Ms. LUKAS. About the masking policy. This was after Governor Youngkin had provided the executive order to give parents the right to unmask, and my kids were denied that right and suspended when I tried to exercise that right. And so I went to tell the school board that I thought it was an inappropriate and abusive policy.

Mr. JORDAN. What kind of response did you get from the school board?

Ms. LUKAS. Nothing. They yawned and kept the school mask policy on, and it took another act of law and some brave, finally, bipartisan push back from parents demanding that our kids be unmasked since everybody else in Virginia essentially had been unmasked for a long time and there was tremendous concern about what it was doing to kids.

Mr. JORDAN. Well, it seems to me that the science has been pretty clear on this with kids for a long time, as the ranking member, Mr. Scalise, pointed out earlier. Why do you think they continue to do it then?

Ms. LUKAS. You know, I do think that it became a bit of a political symbol and because mostly I think because they think they can. I do think that public school parents are a captive audience. It is very expensive to leave a role in a private school, and so they didn't have to. And I would just add quickly that, you know, I think that as we talk about the problems with childcare and the

decline in services that happened during COVID-19, I think we should kind of imagine the counterfactual that if our childcare centers had been run like our public K through 12 schools, like a build back better plan had been in place where the government was the primary funder of schools, just how more pronounced the problems would have been because all of those schools would have had the same incentives as our public schools did and would have denied in-person service for as long as humanly possible, as they certainly did in Virginia.

Mr. JORDAN. Yes, I am just amazed at everything they told us that was wrong. I mean, I remember Joe Biden telling us when he ran for the job that he had a plan. I mean, it is obvious he didn't. He told us that he would never impose a vaccine mandate. He did, so much so that the Supreme Court had to say it was unconstitutional. They told us this virus didn't come from a lab. It was a gain-of-function and didn't involve our tax dollars. All three of those things look like they were false. They told us the vaccinated couldn't get it. They told us the vaccinated couldn't transmit it. They told us that there was no such thing as natural immunity. So there are eight lies, eight pieces of misinformation they told us. And then, forever, they told moms, who know a little bit more about their kids than the government does, they told them, you have to put a mask on your kid. I mean, it is just crazy.

So we got a little discussion earlier about the politics. It was totally about the politics, and anyone with common sense can see that. And I just want to read one last time what—well, I guess I won't read it because we are cutting them off even though everyone else got to go over time.

Chairman CLYBURN. Your time—

Mr. JORDAN. Mr. Chairman, I yield back. I yield back.

Chairman CLYBURN. Well, if you want to yield to me for a question, I would be glad to go over because I would like to know whether or not free speech at a school board meeting allows one to say to a school board member, "I know your address." "I just want you to know I know your address." Is that a way to address school board policy?

Mr. JORDAN. No.

Chairman CLYBURN. Just asking.

Mr. JORDAN. No. What I am asking is when moms' and dads' names get a designation or a label associated with their name that the FBI keeps, call me crazy, but I think that has the potential to chill speech. And I would argue that is exactly what they were trying to do, as evidenced by the fact it was Secretary Cardenas who went to the School Board Association and asked them to send a letter that prompted this whole thing, that within 22 days got the FBI to send an email out that a whistleblower gave to us—thank goodness for this whistleblower—where this whistleblower said, this is not how it is supposed to operate. That is what I know, and now we have seen the impact it has had on parents across the country. That is my point. It has been about politics. Again, I would just read what Mr. Scalise—

Chairman CLYBURN. Every terrorist in the country that has ever been arrested, I think, had children.

Mr. JORDAN. Well, I appreciate that profound wisdom.

Chairman CLYBURN. With that, the chair yields to Mrs. Maloney for five minutes.

[No response.]

Chairman CLYBURN. Mrs. Maloney?

Mrs. MALONEY. OK. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The pandemic has made clear that affordable, quality childcare plays an essential role in promoting gender equity and economic opportunity. Ms. Forbes, I understand that you are a parent of a young child as well as an early childhood educator. You have dealt with the tradeoffs between furthering your career and obtaining quality childcare for your child. Can you discuss how the lack of affordable, available childcare has impacted your ability to work and develop your own career?

Ms. FORBES. Absolutely. Thank you for your question, Congresswoman. It has been an ongoing challenge since I even had my older son in 2008, where just the question of how can I work for wages that are not much higher or perhaps the same as what I would pay out for the cost of childcare, and it is just a no-win situation. So particularly now, raising a young child in the pandemic with the additional stresses of that, it has just been an untenable situation of every day figuring out can I go to work tomorrow. Can I go to work next week? Can I continue to teach in a field that needs me desperately? We need every educator to show up to work and be there for other families, yet I don't know if I am going to be able to pay my care provider this week or next week. And so, as I mentioned in my opening statement, the expanded child tax credit was very helpful for me. It came in and it went right back out the door to pay for childcare costs, and without that, it is just an everyday struggle to know what to do next.

Mrs. MALONEY. Well, thank you. I think many parents have had the same experience as you, including myself. A Federal Reserve analysis showed that the onset of the pandemic caused many, many parents of young children to drop out of the labor force with longer-lasting effects for mothers than for fathers. Mothers of young children, in particular, saw a larger drop in labor force participation than women without children. Professor Stevenson, could these pandemic impacts on childcare availability have long-term ramifications for women's careers and gender equity in the work force?

Ms. STEVENSON. They absolutely can, and one of the things I highlighted in my testimony is we even need to look beyond the people who dropped out of work because some people hung onto some kind of work, but different work than they would be doing if they had access to better childcare. That kind of reallocation is continuing to go on and explains why we see a shortage of workers today, why we see what people are calling the great resignation or the great reallocation, because people are trying to figure out what is the spot for them in an economy in which they have had to make sacrifices due to childcare and with so few childcare spots available right now at such a high cost. I think it is going to be a long time for women and parents to get back.

And I do just want to emphasize that, you know, I do think we need to realize this is impacting men's careers as well. It pains me to say it, that maybe people will pay more attention when I tell you

that the fathers are getting hammered here, too, but the fathers are getting hammered. And overall, the U.S. economy really depends on parents having stable, reliable childcare for both mothers' and fathers' sake.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you. The American Rescue Plan that President Biden signed into law last year is already helping to address this crisis. My home state of New York used the American Rescue Plan funds to support a \$2.3 billion investment in childcare early last year. Dr. Austin, your center published an analysis showing that New York City is one of the only areas where childcare employment was regained at a pre-pandemic level. How is the American Rescue Plan supporting New York's childcare recovery, and what lessons can be learned from New York's progress?

Ms. AUSTIN. Thank you for your question. New York City is very interesting. So when we look at New York returning to pre-pandemic levels, I think there are a couple things that have happened there, the combination of relief funds getting into the community. And another really important point about New York City is that New York City has a larger share of publicly contracted childcare programs than we see in many places around the country. Our research has found that publicly contracted programs, like state preschool programs and Head Start programs, which temporarily closed and then did reopen as most childcare reopened, were more stable, that they were able to withstand the pandemic better, keep their programs open, pay the bills, and continue to pay their staff. So I think that is part of what is going on in New York City, and New York state as a whole is also beginning to see more recovery again with those relief dollars providing important relief to keep people working in those programs.

Just the last thing I want to say there is, I think, one thing that is important to remember. As we see this return to pre-pandemic employment, which is important, it doesn't signal that the communities have totally recovered because, of course, we had incredible shortages of childcare before the pandemic hit. But this does show that the pandemic relief dollars and public contracts are helping programs move forward.

Mrs. MALONEY. Well, we definitely have to do more. My time has expired. I thank the panelists for investing in our childcare system. I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CLYBURN. Thank you very much, Mrs. Maloney. As we go to Mrs. Miller-Meeks for questions, I am going to hand the chair to Dr. Foster so I can go vote.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I recently heard in this room, and I have heard this before, about the pandemic being politicized. And if the left didn't politicize the pandemic, can someone help explain to me the science of Democrat Governors lifting mask mandates for adults, but not for children in schools, or them posing with children in schools completely masked, even though they have low levels of transmission, almost infinitesimally low levels of illness or death, but yet the lawmaker being unmasked?

[No response.]

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. I didn't think so because there is no science that would support masking children with adults unmasked. Hav-

ing said that, I would like to thank our witnesses for coming before us and sharing their testimony today.

Mothers disproportionately shouldered the responsibility for children during remote or hybrid schooling and daycare disruptions. Many are unable to return to the workplace because, at any given moment, their child's class, school, or childcare facility could be shut down over a single positive COVID test with no illness. In January 2022, the male labor force participation rate was up to 70 percent while the female rate was just at 58 percent. This is likely related to the fact, in early January 2022, that there were nearly 7,500 school closures due to the Omicron surge, even though we knew that there was little risk of illness. Ms. Lukas, how has the instability in school and daycare systems contributed to women's exodus and continued absence from the work force, and how can we get women who choose to work back to work?

Ms. LUKAS. Yes. You know, it is interesting because there has been a drop-off in both men and women's labor force participation and with children, but, actually, the labor force drop-off has been larger among parents of school-age kids, not in childcare in the 0 through 5, which really is the focus of this hearing, which, you know, we absolutely need to make it easier for more childcare centers to open so that people do have those options, reduce regulations, and the kind of forced closures and the really expensive, disruptive policies that have made running a daycare center so difficult. But, again, I think that when we look at the real problems with labor force participation, a lot of it is driven not by the lack of childcare. It is about the total undependability of our public school system, particularly in Democratic states where the schools remained closed for more than a year.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. According to emails obtained by the Americans for Public Trust, the American Federation of Unions was provided a pre-release copy of the CDC's updated school guidelines in February 2021. The pre-released version of the guidance, written prior to the influence of the AFT, stated that, "Schools could provide in-person education regardless of the community transmission." And, in fact, in Iowa, Governor Reynolds opened schools to in-person learning in the fall of 2020 without significant consequence of illness, or transmission, or super spreader events. Unfortunately, the CDC bowed to the pressure of the AFT, forcing thousands of schools to remain virtual. In fact, the AFT's exact suggested language appeared in the CDC's final guidance. Ms. Lukas, do you think it is fair that the teachers union had the ability to edit the guidance?

Ms. LUKAS. No. It is absolutely appalling, and I do think it is a clarifying moment in seeing one of the problems with how children have been treated as pawns during this pandemic, and really, really opened our eyes to the problems that are inherent in our public school system, which did not prioritize children, did not prioritize families during this pandemic, and why we need to change. We should not move in the direction of moving toward a public-funded and government-controlled daycare system. Instead, we should be thinking about how to liberalize and how to give parents more leverage over our public school systems, so they would be more re-

sponsive, care more about children's mental health and development, and not sacrifice them as they did during COVID.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. That is so well said. Democrats, unfortunately, chose the teachers union over teachers who wanted to return to school, parents, and, most importantly, children. Now we are seeing the effects of their harmful choices. America's children are broken. Do you agree, and shouldn't the CDC base its guidance off science?

Ms. LUKAS. Absolutely, and I do think it is interesting. We will be learning about this. In years, we will be having conversations about the lasting damage that has been done due to school closures, the increased mental health problems not just for little kids who are forced to mask and are still masking today in Head Start programs and in many daycare centers, but that have affected preteens, vulnerable. I know among my kids, I feel the worst for my middle-aged children. It is such a hard age, and I think this has made it just incredibly worse. So we will be seeing this for years to come, sadly.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Yes, and a spiraling level of youth suicides. Thank you so much. Mr. Chair, I yield back my time.

Mr. FOSTER. [Presiding.] Thank you, and at this point, I will yield to myself for five minutes of questioning.

When you see our society coming under stress, our labor market coming under stress, one of the places that I look to for lessons are the Greatest Generation because we have been here before. There was a tremendous labor force shortfall during World War II, and one of the most fundamental and successful ways of plugging that labor force shortage was Rosie the Riveter. But Rosie the Riveter needed daycare, and so in response to that, the Federal Government stepped up. They passed something called the Lanham Act, which was the Federal Government setting up a bunch of federally funded daycare centers. And as a result of that natural experiment, we learned a lot about the long-term benefits of providing kids daycare. And so, Ms. Stevenson, could you say a little bit about this program and what the lessons learned have been?

Ms. STEVENSON. Yes. As you noted, it was popularly known as the Lanham Act. It was also called the Defense Housing and Community Facilities and Services Act of 1940 because it was attached to the defense industry. We were at war, and we needed to try to figure out how to get women into factories, and so the issue was, well, their kids are going to need childcare. So all families, regardless of income, were eligible for what was really high-quality childcare at a very, very low cost. A ton of research has been done into what did that do for the kids, what did that do for the families. And early research showed that the childcare strengthened family bonds, that the children enjoyed the childcare, and that the primary goal, increasing mother's employment, was achieved, and that children's long-term outcomes were improved. We saw that these children went on to have higher high school graduation rates, higher education rates in general, and went on to earn more money as an adult.

So to give you a little bit of math behind it, \$100 in Lanham Act funding increased high school graduation rates by 1.8 percentage points—that is a super cheap way to increase high school gradua-

tion by 1.8 percentage points—college graduation rates by 1.9 percentage points, and employment for these kids, when they grew up and were in their late 40's and early 50's, by .7 percentage points, and increased earnings by 1.8 percent. So these are big, big effects, and I think that they speak to the broader point, which is we know high-quality early childhood education can have huge effects on people's earnings as adults. And so the idea of investing more in childcare, it is not just about parents and getting parents into the work force. The Lanham Act did that. It got the moms into the work force, but it did something even more important, and that is what I think childcare is really about, which is it got those kids to earn more as adults.

I am going to end with just giving you one last fact, which is, a study that was done just around a decade or so ago found that a high-quality kindergarten teacher can generate \$320,000 in value by increasing the earnings of the kids that are in her classroom. You know, I don't know the estimates for high-quality preschool or an early childhood educator, but it is reasonable to say that it would probably be around \$100,000 or more. So there is a lot that these educators do, and yet, you know, we simply don't have the findings to pay people appropriately and to give all kids access.

Mr. FOSTER. And so the big increase in lifetime earnings will presumably also be associated with a big increase in the amount of tax revenue collected from these people. Well, you don't have to do the math to see that. It is clearly the case that the Federal taxpayer won with this investment, that it paid off, and it actually allowed us to lower tax rates over time because we made this early investment and won from that investment. Is there any way around that conclusion or is it clearly true?

Ms. STEVENSON. That is clearly true, and when we look at high-quality early childhood education, what we see is about \$1 in spending returns \$9 to the taxpayer down the line. You got to wait for it because when you are investing in a two-year-old, you might not get it all the way back until they are in their 50's. So it is a long wait, but these are net present value numbers, so that means that I am adjusting for that long wait and still telling you that the taxpayers get it back in the long run. You know, the research on parents is parents even know this and that parents would make these investments themselves if they could afford to, and, you know, in fact, that is why very high-income parents do make these investments. Other parents just are unable to make the choice, unable to afford making those high-quality investments in their kids, but the taxpayers can do it and they would get the money back.

Mr. FOSTER. Thank you, and my time has expired. It is one of the large number of things that the Greatest Generation got right, and we haven't re-learned yet.

And at this point, I will recognize Representative Raskin for five minutes.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I heard the ranking member announce the apparently breathtaking discovery that politicians take polls, and some even pay attention to what the majority believes. I would remind him of a President who responded neither to the science nor to the polls, and that is the President whose lethal recklessness in public health and whose sickening pro-Putin

policies for four years, they did everything they could to obscure and explain away. Donald Trump's own COVID-19 advisor, Deborah Birx, has said that we lost unnecessarily hundreds of thousands of people because of the failures of Donald Trump, who never developed a plan to combat and defeat COVID-19, but rather trivialized it, denied it, waved it away, hocked fake miracle cures like hydroxychloroquine and injecting yourself with bleach, and did everything he could to prevent us from creating the social cohesion that we needed to defeat the disease that we finally have under President Biden.

Here's a poll that Donald Trump and his party should consult: the vast majority of the American people reject fascist Vladimir Putin's war of imperial aggression against the democratic nation of Ukraine. The vast majority of Americans reject it. The vast majority of the world rejects it. But Trump, who has been trying to undermine NATO for many years now, calls his hero, Vladimir Putin, a genius. Mike Pompeo quickly called him savvy and professed his admiration. Fascist Trump follower, Nick Fuentes, called for a round of applause for Russia just a couple days before the invasion at a right-wing rally in Florida, and the crowd then began to chant "Putin, Putin, Putin." And Marjorie Taylor Greene and Paul Gosar joined in this pro-Russian circus of extremism.

So now that Joe Biden has finally turned the corner on COVID, created and forged the social consensus we need to defeat the disease, turn the corner, and brought the numbers down, now our colleagues, rather than acknowledge the great success and the breakthrough that we have under President Biden and never came close to under Trump when the disease was spinning out of control, now what do they do? Well, they do everything they can to distract us from the humiliating record of Trump on both COVID-19 and Vladimir Putin, two plagues that he helped to circulate throughout the land and throughout the world. And I am just shocked to see that they continue to come back here and summon up all of their counterfeit outrage against us after it was Donald Trump who spread the plague across the land just like he continues to help to try to spread the plague of right-wing authoritarianism around the world.

Will one of our Republican colleagues—one of them—denounce Donald Trump or dissociate themselves from his remarks praising Vladimir Putin and calling him a genius and cheerleading for right-wing authoritarianism on the march against the free people of Ukraine? I wish one of them would do that now.

[No response.]

Mr. RASKIN. Well, hearing none, then I would like to ask a question beginning with Ms. Forbes. My question for you is about the American Rescue Plan's temporary expansion of the child and dependent care tax credit, which will allow families to at least offset a substantial portion of their childcare costs this tax filing season. The expansion allows low-and middle-income families to get refundable credits of up to \$4,000 for families with one child and up to 8,000 for families with two or more children. And actually, let me ask Professor Stevenson first: how might the expanded child and dependent care tax credit affect parents' ability to participate effectively in the labor market?

Ms. STEVENSON. Thank you. I think that tax credit is just incredibly important to help offset the cost of going to work. The bottom line is some parents cannot afford to work. I mean, that sounds like a crazy sentence to say, "I can't afford to work," but, actually, you heard Ms. Forbes describe her exact predicament of not being able to afford to work. And so when we look at these kind of tax credits that are primarily meant to offset the cost of childcare so the parents can work, I think that they are incredibly important. Right now, when childcare costs more than it has in the past, that tax credit really, I think, was essential for helping to get parents back into the labor force. And I will just end by saying women have come back at a faster pace than men to jobs, so women want to come back to work. If we can help them when we give them these kind of tax credits, we are going to succeed in getting them back into the labor force.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CLYBURN. [Presiding.] Thank you very much, Mr. Raskin.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Krishnamoorthi for five minutes.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you so much, Chair Clyburn. Can the staff put up the diagram for me? Well, they may not be able to. Oh, there it is.

Ms. LUKAS, I have a few questions about a book that you authored in 2006 called, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Women, Sex, and Feminism*. You wrote that book in 2006, right?

Ms. LUKAS. Yep.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. And as you can see from this rather provocative cover, there are some bullet points that are very interesting on this particular page. Let me just start with the bottom bullet point. It says—and you wrote this, correct—"Most women want a husband and a strong family, but independent feminists pine for a sugar daddy in Uncle Sam," correct?

Ms. LUKAS. Yes. Yes, I did write that.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. And then you also wrote the following. You said, "Why the happiest women spend more time with their families and less time at work," and then in parentheses you said, "Because you can't outsource parenting." You wrote that, correct?

Ms. LUKAS. Yes, sir.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Now, let me just ask Ms. Forbes. You know, Ms. Forbes, do you consider yourself somebody who is fulfilled in your job, and that is why you are kind of going to work and having to get childcare at the same time?

Ms. FORBES. Thank you for your question. I am a very passionate person about what I do. I love working. I love my job as an early educator, and I am growing a business as an early education consultant. And it is very challenging for me to not have that outlet for my intelligence and my passion and creativity.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Yes. I think, you know, it looks like Ms. Lukas may not think you are as happy as you could be. In fact, in the first bullet point, I will just read what you said. You said, "Careers can be baby deniers. Women can't postpone childbearing without serious consequences." That is your first bullet point, right, Ms. Lukas?

Ms. LUKAS. Yes, sir. I think there is a lack of—

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. You have spent a career at the organization that you are at. In fact, in 2006, you were the vice president there, and today you are the president of that same organization. You have 15 years there, which is a good, successful career there, right?

Ms. LUKAS. Yes, sir.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. And you have at least five children. Isn't that right?

Ms. LUKAS. I have five children, yes. Thank you.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. And it looks like your career did not prevent you from raising children very successfully. Congratulations.

Ms. LUKAS. Thanks.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. It looks like for other people, however, it is very difficult for them to potentially raise children—

Ms. LUKAS. No, sir, there is a lot of—

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY [continuing]. Having a fulfilling career. Let me ask Betsey Stevenson a question here because Ms. Lukas has been highly, highly critical of institutionalized daycare. In fact, she considers that to be a very negative influence on children and their futures, but I am hearing a totally different story from Betsey Stevenson based on the actual data. Ms. Stevenson, do you agree with the conclusion that institutionalized childcare that would be provided by "Uncle Sam," according to Ms. Lukas, would have a negative impact on children?

Ms. STEVENSON. You know, I think that the American public school system, K through 12, has been an enormous success. And, in fact, you know, to go back to the idea of what did we learn from the Greatest Generation, Americans built high schools when no other country in the world was, and it is actually what fueled our growth in the last century. I think what will fuel our growth in this century is actually expanding education down to our youngest citizens. And the evidence suggests that center-based care that is curriculum based, that is developmentally appropriate, does generate massive benefits for children because the science tells us when children develop.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Let me interrupt for one second. Ms. Lukas also said on page 197 of her book, "Families who want to keep a parent home with their children shouldn't have to pay taxes to support daycare for other people's children." How do you respond to that, Ms. Stevenson?

Ms. STEVENSON. Well, first of all, those children are allowing parents to go to work, and the parents are paying taxes on that income that they are earning while their kids are in childcare. That childcare is also allowing those kids to earn more as adults, and they are going to pay taxes on that. Actually, the bigger problem is that when people stay home and provide care for their children, they are providing a valuable service for their family, and unlike traded services, they are not actually taxed on those goods that they are creating and the value that they are providing for their family.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you so much. I yield back.

Chairman CLYBURN. I thank the gentleman for yielding back. I think that no other Republicans are going to return to the hearing.

In the interest of time, the Chair is going to yield for 2.5 minutes for any response that Ms. Lukas would like to make.

Ms. LUKAS. Yes. Thank you so much, Chairman. I really appreciate that because I do want to correct the record on a little bit of how my thoughts were characterized, particularly about working parents and some of the data that was in the book that I wrote 15 years ago now that I was trying to correct. I particularly went through and looked at some of the women's studies programs and some of the information that was being given and found that there was a tremendous lack of coverage of things like infertility. And there has been a lot of information showing that young women tend not to recognize the amount of difficulty that women often have in trying to get pregnant after the age of 35, and I think that is something that women should be aware of. One in three women suffer from infertility, and, you know, obviously not everyone wants a child, and you can have a tremendously fulfilling life without a child. But I hate to think of the heartbreak that many people experience when they aren't aware of the problems associated with infertility.

And similarly, I think there have been a lot of women—and this is looking at polling information—as we talked about, polling information can be very helpful and that there are a lot of women who do end up feeling a sense of regret when they haven't had time to spend at home with their children. I obviously think that daycare is incredibly important. I have used daycare at different times during my 16, 17 years as a mom now, but I do think that parents should have a recognition that sometimes it is better to stay at home and there is value in staying at home.

And just the final point I will make is I do think we should be cautious. You can find studies that show that high-quality childcare is associated with positive life outcomes, but there are also a lot that show the opposite. I am sure everyone, all the scholars here have seen this very recent program, finding from Tennessee. This was meant to be a high-quality childcare program, preschool program, and they found negative effects in third grade and then again in sixth grade, both in terms of education and in terms of discipline and mental health. So we need to be cautious. This doesn't mean that it can't work, but it does mean that we don't know everything, and we should have a little humility in knowing that we don't know exactly what a quality daycare is or what a quality provider is, which is why we need to empower parents and not just government. Thank you.

Chairman CLYBURN. I thank the witness for her statement. Now, I think the ranking member has informed me that he will not be returning to this hearing, so the chair recognizes himself for a closing statement.

I want to thank all of the witnesses for testifying before the select subcommittee today. We appreciate your insight, your expertise, and, most importantly, your dedication to the well-being of children and families. In light of your testimony, I want to make it clear to America's families and caregivers of young children that their sacrifice, determination, and hard work, especially in the face of the challenges presented by the pandemic, are recognized and valued. We must continue to dedicate the necessary resources to

ensure that childcare is affordable, caregivers are well paid, and that any parent who wants to rejoin the labor force is able to access the childcare necessary to do so. I applaud the Biden-Harris Administration for its leadership in responding to these challenges and prioritizing children, families, and caregivers. They recognize, as I do, that overcoming the challenges discussed today is essential to both our immediate economic recovery from the pandemic and this country's long-term prosperity.

With that and without objection, all members will have five legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response.

Chairman CLYBURN. This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, 3:53 p.m., the select subcommittee was adjourned.]

