



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas

Investigations & Oversight Hearing

Repurposing Therapeutic Drugs for COVID-19: Research Challenges and Opportunities

June 19, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Foster. And thank you to our witnesses for your participation today.

The COVID-19 pandemic is unlike anything we have faced since the 1918 Spanish flu. At the time, we had very few tools to slow the spread of the virus, develop treatments, or produce a vaccine to make ourselves immune to it. Thankfully, that has changed.

Our nation's research enterprise, including government, academia, and industry, has the expertise, resources, and talent needed to fight this pandemic. The work they're doing to model the virus, screen potential treatments, and engineer new medical equipment is truly lifesaving.

We have supercomputers, advanced manufacturing techniques, and even advanced photon sources being used to fight COVID-19. From PPE manufacturing and new vaccine development to repurposing existing therapeutics, America's scientific community has heeded the call to action.

An excellent example of public-private collaboration leveraging technology to fight a common cause is the COVID-19 High Performance Computing Consortium. Through this OSTP-led collaboration, COVID-19 researchers can access the world's most powerful computing resources to run complex models and perform large numbers of calculations at astounding speeds.

By leveraging these computing resources and employing artificial intelligence and machine learning techniques, researchers can determine which drugs have the potential to be repurposed against COVID-19, at a speed and scale previously unthinkable. Technology will continue to play a critical role in saving lives and preventing the spread of COVID-19. And our federal research enterprise must have access to the resources and technology necessary to do their jobs, and to do it well.

That's why I introduced the COVID Research Act of 2020, which would create an interagency working group and establish a national strategy to address infectious diseases. Additionally, this bill authorizes \$50 million for DOE's Infectious Disease Research Program over the next two years. Working together with NASA and NSF, this program gives us the ability to fully utilize the federal government's computing resources to respond to infectious diseases.

Our National Labs have already demonstrated the value of using high-performance supercomputing and advanced research facilities to model the novel coronavirus, understand its effects on human cells, and predict its spread. I'm pleased to learn that there is work underway at Argonne National Lab that is particularly relevant to repurposing therapeutics to fight COVID-19. Thank you, Dr. Stevens, for being here today. I look forward to learning more about this important work. And, more broadly, I'd like to extend my thanks to the entire scientific community. Researcher after researcher and lab after lab pivoted immediately to fight COVID-19 when it reached our shores.

When I began serving as Ranking Member of this Committee, I said that one of our most important responsibilities is to tell the story of science and make sure our constituents understand the tremendous research being done, and why it matters to the next generation of Americans.

This story in particular – how American scientists, researchers, and engineers responded to COVID-19 – is one everyone should know, and I hope my colleagues will use this hearing as one more opportunity to share this work.

I yield back.