

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations Virtual Hearing  
“Pathway to Protection:  
Expanding Availability of COVID-19 Vaccines”  
February 23, 2021**

*As Prepared for Delivery*

Thank you, Chair DeGette and Republican Leader Griffith for holding this hearing on expanding COVID-19 vaccine availability.

People are still struggling to get access to COVID-19 vaccines. The problem is that we need more supply.

Earlier this month, witnesses representing five state governments testified that there wasn't enough vaccine, and that each of the states could distribute more if they had more supply.

With more supply, we can accelerate our vaccination efforts and protect Americans from severe disease, COVID-19 hospitalizations, and death as quickly as possible.

In addition, the COVID-19 variants that have been detected thus far seem to spread more easily and quickly than other variants which can lead to more cases of COVID-19. Swift vaccinations may be able to help us combat the rising threat of the virus' mutations, and we may need to respond and pivot at some point in the future to address variants with things like booster shots.

While our current situation of limited vaccine supply is frustrating to the American people and may seem dire, we have reasons to be hopeful that the vaccine supply will skyrocket in the coming months and that we will be well-positioned to deal with the variants.

The nation's vaccine rollout is improving. According to the latest CDC data as of February 17, over 72.4 million doses have been delivered and over 56.2 million doses have been administered. Recently, the U.S. administered 2 million vaccine doses a day, which is at twice the pace of the President's goal for his first 100 days. In fact, the U.S. vaccine rollout, for all of its reported problems, is ahead of almost every country in the world.

The manufacturers are getting better, more efficient, and faster at making the vaccine. Pfizer projects it will supply 120 million doses to the U.S. by the end of March 20 million more doses than initially promised. Moderna also expects to provide 100 million doses two months earlier than expected.

Other manufacturers have submitted an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) or expect to submit an EUA soon. For example, Johnson & Johnson submitted an EUA to the FDA earlier this month and the Vaccine and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee has scheduled a meeting for this Friday to discuss the request for an EUA. If the FDA authorizes the Johnson & Johnson

vaccine, the U.S. supply will be further boosted, especially since the Johnson & Johnson vaccine only requires one dose.

As the President has noted, Pfizer and Moderna are projected to provide 600 million doses to the U.S. by the end of July, which is enough to vaccinate 300 million people. This is well more than the estimated 260 million people who are currently considered eligible for the vaccines.

This is due to the accomplishments of vaccine manufacturers, with the strong backing from the federal government, including Operation Warp Speed, actions taken by the Trump Administration to use the Defense Production Act, and the career professionals who continue these efforts in the Biden Administration. This is a strong foundation that needs more appreciation.

Further, Congress has already provided a tremendous amount of support, including funding to the states to fight the virus. Much of these resources remain unspent, including \$4.5 billion given to states to improve vaccine rollouts in the December COVID-19 relief package.

The COVID-19 variants pose a continuing threat. It is anybody's guess how much the variants could slow down our progress or worse. However, even here, there is room for optimism. Recent lab studies show that Pfizer and Moderna's vaccines are effective against the South African variant and all manufacturers report that their vaccine candidates are effective against hospitalization and death.

Bringing in new manufacturers, increasing production capacity, or modifying a vaccine in response to a variant would take several months lead time before additional supply will be ready. Our ability to get through the immediate threat of the variants will rely on a combination of mitigation measures, improved vaccine allocation and administration, advances in vaccine production and the use of therapeutics.

While there is progress regarding vaccine supply, unfortunately distribution and administration challenges remain in the states. For example, an investigation by the Seattle Times revealed that the Washington Department of Health neglected in its vaccine rollout to plan for basic logistics that would have allowed for quick vaccination of those most vulnerable to the virus. Just last week in my district, Governor Inslee foolishly interfered with Whitman County's plan to vaccinate teachers and school staff by threatening to withhold vaccines. I realize that the witnesses before us today don't have a role in distribution and administration efforts, especially at the state level, but I wanted to raise the issue since it remains a concern in my home state.

We will get through this pandemic by pulling together, not through the dictates of misguided leadership.

Thank you, Madam Chair, I yield back.