

HOUSE SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS: THE URGENT NEED FOR A NATIONAL PLAN TO CONTAIN THE CORONAVIRUS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis convened a [hearing](#) to examine the urgent need for a national comprehensive plan to address the coronavirus pandemic. The witness panel featured National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Robert Redfield, and Assistant Secretary for Health at the Department of Health and Human Services Admiral Brett Giroir. Republicans reiterated the following: all guidance issued by the White House and federal agencies make up the Trump administration's plan to address the pandemic; China is to blame for the pandemic; and reopening schools for in-person learning is important for the mental health of children and for detecting child abuse at home. Democrats continued to press for a national testing strategy that includes providing enough tests and reducing wait times. Chairman Clyburn pointed out that Jared Kushner, son-in-law of and special adviser to President Trump, had developed a national testing strategy in March, but he aborted the plan because the virus was spreading primarily in "blue states." The panel's remarks suggested that the administration does not intend to release such a strategy. Other topics discussed include contact tracing, vaccines, nursing homes, and hospitals.

OPENING STATEMENTS

In his opening statement, **Chairman James Clyburn (D-SC)** called for a comprehensive national plan that "prioritizes science over politics" and includes having enough tests and protective gear and clear public health guidance. He pointed out that Jared Kushner, son-in-law of and special adviser to President Trump, had developed a national testing strategy in March, which was then aborted because the virus was spreading primarily in "blue states." This story was [reported](#) by Vanity Fair on July 30, 2020.

Ranking Member Steve Scalise (R-LA) argued that the Trump administration has a plan to contain the coronavirus. Pointing to a large stack of printed documents, Rep. Scalise described guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [15 Days to Slow the Spread](#), [30 Days to Slow the Spread](#), and Operation Warp Speed, as all part of the President's plan. He also blamed China for "lying" about the pandemic.

WITNESS TESTIMONY

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), National Institutes of Health (NIH), [summarized](#) the NIH's strategic plan: (1) improving fundamental

knowledge about the novel coronavirus; (2) developing diagnostics and assays; (3) characterizing and testing therapeutics; and (4) developing and testing the effectiveness of vaccines. Dr. Fauci said that he is “cautiously optimistic” that a safe and effective vaccine will be available by late fall or early winter. He encouraged individuals interested in participating in a COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial to visit www.coronaviruspreventionnetwork.org.

Admiral Brett P. Giroir, Assistant Secretary for Health, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), [explained](#) that the [Blueprint for Testing Plans and Rapid Response Programs](#) (released in April); [Addendum to the Testing Blueprint](#) (released in June); and the COVID-19 Strategic Testing Plan delivered to Congress on May 23, as required by the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act (P.L. 116-139) outline the administration’s testing plan. Admiral Giroir remarked, “We know how to flatten the curve.” This entails wearing a mask, practicing physical distancing, washing hands, avoiding crowded spaces, staying home if you feel sick, and protecting the elderly, he explained.

In addition to echoing the public health measures mentioned by Admiral Giroir, **Dr. Robert R. Redfield, Director, CDC**, [said](#) the CDC has distributed over \$12 billion to state, local, and tribal health departments. He noted data modernization is underway and public health staff have been deployed. He appeared to advocate for Congress to provide support to essential workers and health care providers, stating, “Please take note and please tend to them. We cannot afford to do it without them.”

MEMBER DISCUSSION

Federal and State Response

Chairman Clyburn asked why Europe has largely contained the virus, while the United States continues to see a rise in cases. Dr. Fauci explained that when countries in Europe “shut down,” 95 percent of the country followed suit, whereas the U.S. “only functionally shut down about 50 percent of the country.” He also noted that some states did not properly follow the administration’s [gating criteria](#) for reopening their economies.

Rep. Mark Green (R-TN) attempted to call out Chairman Clyburn for targeting only red states (Georgia, Florida, Oklahoma, and Tennessee) in his [request](#) for documentation detailing the states’ plans to control the spread of coronavirus. Chairman Clyburn clarified that letters were sent to those governors because they explicitly stated they would not comply with the White House Coronavirus Task Force’s recommendations. The request follows the New York Times’ release of an [unpublished report](#) prepared by the Task Force that “recommends far stronger public health measures than the Trump Administration has called for,” according to a [letter](#) sent by Chairman Clyburn to Vice President Mike Pence and Dr. Deborah Birx.

Reopening Schools

Ranking Member Scalise and other Republican members emphasized that reopening schools for in-person learning is critical to the physical, and especially mental, health of children, referencing [guidance](#) issued by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Along with CDC Director Dr. Redfield, they cautioned that not reopening schools would lead to cases of child abuse going undetected.

Recognizing that the Trump administration has misused their statement to back their argument for all schools to fully reopen, AAP, American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Education Association (NEA) and AASA, The School Superintendents Association issued a [new statement](#), emphasizing “Science should drive decision-making on safely reopening schools. Public health agencies must make recommendations based on evidence, not politics.”

Ranking Member Scalise pointed out that the \$150 billion Coronavirus Relief Fund, made available by the CARES Act and distributed to states, has “billions remaining,” according to the most recent issued by the Treasury Department [report](#) (updated July 23), that could be used by states to safely reopen schools. The latest [guidance](#) (updated June 30) does not specifically address how Coronavirus Relief Fund payments may be used to reopen schools. However, Ranking Member Scalise suggested the purchase of safety supplies for schools could be covered by Coronavirus Relief Fund dollars. See p. 3 of the Treasury’s [guidance](#) for more details.

Testing and Contact Tracing

In response to a question from **Rep. Andy Kim (D-NJ)**, Admiral Giroir said it is currently not possible to return COVID-19 diagnostic test results to all individuals within 48-72 hours “given the demand and the supply.” Admiral Giroir said he hopes that the nation can reach that benchmark through the help of technologies that allow testing outside of laboratories.

In an exchange with **Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez (D-NY)**, Dr. Fauci recognized that testing delays interfere with effective contact tracing. Regarding wait times for COVID-19 test results, Admiral Giroir stated that according to current data from large commercial laboratories, “59 percent of all tests are reported within three days, 76 percent within five days.” He noted that the waiting time of 12 to 16 days is an outlier.

Rep. Velázquez asked if the CDC has comprehensive information on wait times for test results in all states, and whether the agency publishes that data. Admiral Giroir said that the CDC has that information, but he avoided commenting on whether the agency would make that information publicly available. He mentioned that he talks about that data with journalists.

Vaccines

House Oversight Committee Chair Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) asked how COVID-19 vaccines would be distributed. He said the “standard mechanism” by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and CDC, complemented by the National Academy of Medicine. He noted that the Department of Defense and CDC will work together to distribute the vaccines.

In a discussion with **Rep. Jackie Walorski (R-IN)**, Dr. Fauci said that vaccines would be distributed in a phased approach, noting that every American would not receive the vaccine immediately but should expect to by the end of 2021. He further clarified that Operation Warp Speed is not compromising the safety standards to speed up vaccine development and assured that the Food and Drug Administration would base their decisions on science.

Nursing Homes

During the hearing, Ranking Member Scalise repeatedly criticized the governors of five states (but did not name them) for failing to follow guidance issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) regarding nursing homes. Last month, Ranking Member Scalise [sent](#) letters to the governors of New York, Michigan, California, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania for “mandat[ing] nursing homes and long-term care facilities [to] admin untested and contagious COVID-10 patients from hospitals.”

Hospitals

Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA) pressed Dr. Redfield on his role in the [decision](#) for hospitals to report COVID-19 data directly to HHS instead of the CDC. Dr. Redfield stated that CDC was not part of the decision-making process. He clarified that CDC still has access to that data.

Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer (R-MO) expressed concern about a “perverse incentive” for health care providers to claim COVID-19 as the cause of death. Dr. Redfield did not directly address his comments but noted that a perverse incentive could be at play “when it comes to hospital reimbursement issues.”