

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
“Evaluating the Federal Government’s Procurement and Distribution
Strategies in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic”

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GARY C. PETERS

June 9, 2020

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to our witnesses for being here today and for your service to our country in this time of need.

In our lifetimes, we have encountered few, if any, challenges of the size and scope of the Coronavirus pandemic. Addressing this pandemic is a monumental task and the federal government’s failure to adequately prepare and quickly respond to this crisis led to costly and tragic missteps.

We have now lost more than 110,000 Americans to this pandemic – loved ones whose lives are irreplaceable. As families across the country grieve these unimaginable losses, we must make every effort to examine how we reached this heartbreaking point and ensure that we are better prepared to protect Americans from the challenges of the future, including a potential second wave.

My home state of Michigan has been hit hard, especially among our state’s minority communities in cities like Detroit. This pandemic has highlighted longstanding disparities and health inequities facing minority communities. When disasters strike, minority communities often suffer some of the most severe impacts but are among the last to receive assistance. This crisis has served as a chilling reminder that we must do more to protect our most vulnerable and underserved communities going forward.

A rigorous examination of the federal government’s response will help ensure that successes can be replicated and any shortcomings can be addressed. These efforts are critical to containing this deadly virus and to continuing the safe reopening of our economy.

In Michigan and across the country, Americans are eager to get back to work. But many industries are still struggling to access the personal protective equipment they need to reopen safely. Americans need these items so that they have confidence they are safe visiting a restaurant or a store.

I warned in a 2019 report that we faced a grave national security risk because of our overreliance on foreign manufacturers for medical supplies, including those in China. The pandemic only intensified those vulnerabilities.

I have heard from manufacturers in Michigan who want to do their part to help produce these critical supplies. Yet the White House was reluctant to fully use its authorities to mobilize private industry. There is no doubt in my mind that this hesitation slowed our response efforts, damaged our economy, and cost American lives.

I greatly appreciate the hard work so far to obtain and distribute supplies to those in great need. But as our economy continues to reopen, we must redouble our efforts to secure the resources to keep workers and customers safe.

Effectively addressing this pandemic will also require widespread testing. But months into the most severe public health crisis of our lifetimes, we still have more questions than answers about our national testing capacity.

Every state in the country has encountered challenges securing the resources to test people. Even now, my home state of Michigan only has the resources to conduct 15,000 tests per day.

Without sufficient testing, we cannot not fully understand the extent of this catastrophe or take the necessary precautions to protect our communities. Moving forward, we must adopt and implement a clear, effective, and comprehensive national testing strategy.

These are just a few of the issues that I hope to discuss with you today. The loss and heartbreak that we have experienced in this crisis are simply immeasurable and we must do everything in our power to prevent a return to our most difficult days. This hearing is long overdue, but I am eager to work with you on this vital mission.