

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
“The Role of the Strategic National Stockpile in Pandemic Response”**

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GARY C. PETERS

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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Over the past several months, the United States has faced an almost unprecedented challenge, fighting a deadly virus that has infected millions and taken the lives of more than 120,000 Americans.

A pandemic can overwhelm even the most prepared communities.

That is why we have the Strategic National Stockpile, the nation’s largest store of lifesaving pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, to ensure the federal government has the resources to help states protect the health and safety of Americans during public health emergencies.

But the scale of the Coronavirus pandemic depleted our national stockpile in just a matter of weeks, leaving state and local governments scrambling to acquire the masks, gloves, and other supplies they so desperately needed to keep people safe.

Many communities facing the highest rates of infection struggled to obtain the supplies they needed, including in my home state of Michigan.

Instead of providing a coordinated, national approach that effectively used the Strategic National Stockpile and other tools to acquire and distribute supplies nationwide, the President told states that they were on their own. That move forced states to compete against each other and the federal government for lifesaving medical supplies that were already in shortage around the world.

Since this crisis began, Congress has passed several supplemental emergency appropriations bills to rebuild the stockpile. While this funding will help provide some stability, there is no question that our nation would have been better positioned to tackle the pandemic if Congress and both the current and prior Administrations had invested more in the stockpile before crisis struck.

It is abundantly clear that the federal government was not fully prepared to address a crisis on the scale of the Coronavirus pandemic. And the result is the tragic loss of 120,000 of our fellow Americans, and millions of families who have suffered the consequences.

Ensuring the preparedness of the Strategic National Stockpile is an issue of national security and should be treated as such. We cannot allow a disaster of this magnitude to catch our government off guard again. We must provide steady funding to all pandemic response efforts and also ensure the Strategic National Stockpile is well maintained and prepared to address a broad range of possible threats.

We must improve the communication between states and the federal government regarding available resources and strengthen the federal government's role in managing supplies during this and future crises.

Finally, we must also take steps to address our overreliance on foreign manufacturers of critical drugs and medical supplies.

This is a serious national security vulnerability. And the pandemic has only further highlighted just how significant this risk is to the health and safety of the American people.

Today's discussion will help us identify and prioritize critical decisions and investments to ensure we can continue to combat the Coronavirus as well as emergencies of the future. I look forward to hearing from all of you and to working alongside you to address these daunting challenges. Thank you.