Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

April 29, 2026

Hearing on "Unmasked: How Biden Health Officials Purposely Turned a Blind Eye Toward COVID-19 Vaccine Safety Signals"

Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal Opening Statement, As Delivered

Thanks, Chairman Johnson.

Amid everything that's been said, I think we ought to remember what it was like during the height of the COVID pandemic. Literally, the fear, the death, the loss, and then the relief as a result of Operation Warp Speed, which President Trump ordered, in having a vaccine that gave people hope, and many people life.

At the same time, none of the relief or hope enabled loved ones to come back. They lost lives, and families had their lives upended. And we can never forget the heroes in our health care system who braved COVID in delivering care to people who needed it, and hospitals, many of them for weeks, sometimes months.

We are fortunate to have with us Maria Young—thank you for coming here today— who spent many days in a hospital, close to 70 days in intensive care. Most lives were forever changed as a result, but the vaccine offered a path forward for so many people, and we should be thankful for Operation Warp Speed.

In January 2021, more than 20,000 Americans were dying each week from COVID-19. Between 2020 and 2025, more than 1.2 million Americans lost their lives to COVID-19. That's 1.2 million parents, children, friends, loved ones and those deaths changed not only their families, but their communities and our nation.

Husbands lost wives, parents, lost children, and in addition to those who perished, millions were infected, and many of them suffered life-changing injuries from the virus. And employers suffered economically, as did our overall economy. And the survivors still bear many of them still bear the scars of that experience emotionally, if not physically.

Years of scientific analysis have shown that COVID-19 vaccines save lives and prevent serious illnesses, like the one that Ms. Young suffered. I don't agree with President Trump on a lot, but I have to give him credit for the work that was done

to create COVID-19 vaccines in record time. But instead of talking about the success and remembering the ones we lost, vaccine opponents have turned one of the greatest scientific breakthroughs in our country's history into fodder for political attack.

I don't get it. Today's hearing purports to discuss a cover up of side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine, as if serious flaws in vaccines were purposely ignored. And let me be clear: They were not ignored. They were not disregarded; they were not covered up.

The majority's report cherry picks emails and misconstrues an internal debate between scientists who were actively looking for ways to detect side effects to support a predetermined and flawed thesis that COVID-19 vaccines have done more harm than good. That's not the scientific method, to have a preconceived result and then frame the evidence to fit the outcome.

The reports and documents that the majority has released simply do not support the notion of any kind of cover up, nor do the reports and documents do anything to change our understanding of the vaccines as safe and effective.

These points are important for the public to understand. And with all due respect, nothing that Chairman Johnson has released shows the vaccines were linked to any adverse effects beyond the rare ones that health officials have acknowledged. Indeed, the risk of stroke he claims was hidden not only was studied openly but later shown not to exist.

Without objection, I would like to enter into the record four studies demonstrating the COVID-19 vaccines and boosters save lives, Mr. Chairman.

[RON JOHNSON:

Without objection*.]*

[RANKING MEMBER BLUMENTHAL COTINUED]:

There is also a really deep irony in the majority's argument, given the current administration's overt effects to skew science and undermine public health. Last week, I wrote to the acting CDC director, Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, about reports that

he has blocked publication of a recent study showing that COVID-19 vaccines were extremely effective at preventing hospitalizations last winter.

That study still has not been formally released, although I understand that a copy was somehow leaked literally hours before this hearing. Magically released, but not officially. And therefore, I call on the CDC director to officially release that report again. I asked my letter to him to be entered into the record if there's no objection.

[RON JOHNSON:

Without objection.*]*

[*RANKING MEMBER BLUMENTHAL CONTINUED]*:

I sincerely hope we never face another pandemic. I think most Americans join in that hope. And that we are still able to find dedicated scientists and yes, pharmaceutical companies, willing to work around the clock to find vaccines and cures, and public officials who are willing to support and encourage, and to fund them with resources.

I fear that this administration's actions to politicize science and slash scientific funding and to expel talented scientists are doing irreparable harm to our nation's ability to counter the next pandemic. The threat remains real and present, and we must respect science and encourage our scientists to continue to do their work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.