

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Full
Committee Hearing**

December 8, 2020

Senator Gary C. Peters, Ranking Member

Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Our nation continues to battle a worsening public health and economic crisis that has taken the lives of nearly 284,000 Americans. Over 2,200 Americans are dying every day from this deadly virus.

Thanks to the tireless work of our public health agencies, the private sector, and our scientific and medical communities, we have made progress in treating this disease.

The Food and Drug Administration continues to use scientific standards to authorize innovative and effective early treatments.

Unfortunately, today's discussion will not meet the same standards.

Mr. Chairman, I share your goal of ensuring patients across the country have access to early and effective treatments for Coronavirus. But those treatments must be based on evidence and not politics.

The American people are looking to Congress for accurate information, leadership, and relief. Last month, this Committee held a hearing that was billed as a review of early outpatient treatments for Coronavirus. Unfortunately, that hearing amplified unverified theories about treatments that are not supported by the scientific community.

Instead of hearing from expert witnesses about scientific developments in Coronavirus treatments, or how we can improve the pandemic response, the Committee was used as a platform to attack science and promote discredited treatments.

The minority witness, an expert in his field, was subjected to personal attacks from other witnesses and from the dais. After testifying, he faced an online harassment campaign unlike any he'd experienced after prior Congressional testimony.

This behavior damages the credibility of this Committee and does nothing to advance the health and safety of the American people.

Sadly, it appears that today's hearing will follow the same path, playing politics with public health, and will not give us the information we need to tackle this crisis.

The minority was not consulted about the scope of this hearing before it was noticed. The panelists have been selected for their political, not their medical, views. And for that reason, the composition of the panel creates a false and terribly harmful impression of the scientific and medical consensus.

The witnesses have made many harmful, inflammatory statements. Those statements include undermining a COVID-19 vaccine, promoting unproven therapeutics, discouraging commonsense measures to stop the spread of the virus like social distancing or masks, and even comparing physicians who support these interventions to supporters of the Nazi regime. I welcome diverse perspectives, but we have a responsibility to follow science and facts, not conspiracy theories and disinformation.

To that end, I would like to enter into the record this statement from 50 public health experts about the importance of science in our pandemic response.

I would also like to enter into the record this op-ed written by Dr. Ashish Jha, the minority witness in the prior hearing, regarding his experience before our Committee.

Finally, I would like to enter statements from four public health and scientific organizations that discuss scientific integrity and the needs of our communities during this pandemic.

Mr. Chairman, Senate hearings, like medical treatments, should be based on evidence. This hearing, like the hearing before it and the hearing before that, is not.

I very much regret that in their time of need, Americans cannot turn to this Committee for sound guidance.

Mr. Chairman, we can still turn the tide of this pandemic.

We can work together to ensure that scientists have the resources they need to conduct research, and federal agencies have the resources they need to support and evaluate these efforts.

We should be working to ensure doctors, nurses, and first responders have the personal protective equipment they need to care for patients safely.

We should be passing bipartisan legislation that provides desperately needed financial relief to families, states, and small businesses.

In the coming weeks, we expect that the first Coronavirus vaccines will become available. We should be conducting strong oversight, including hearing testimony from the government officials responsible for vaccine development and distribution.

The Commerce Committee will be holding a subcommittee hearing on how we'll ensure every American can get a vaccine later this week, and I look forward to participating in a robust discussion with scientific and logistic experts.

We owe it to the American people to get this right. Sadly, today's hearing will not provide accurate scientific information, or advance any useful efforts to slow the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic.