

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
“How New Information Should Drive Policy”

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GARY C. PETERS

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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

The Coronavirus pandemic has profoundly altered our world – putting millions out of work, threatening the futures of small businesses, exposing serious inequities in our health care system, and taking the lives, to date, of more than 70,000 Americans.

Like so many of us, I am ready to start getting America back to work. But we need a clear plan, backed by science and data, that will give us a roadmap to safely reopening our economy in stages.

While cases in some parts of the country appear to be plateauing, we know there are other communities experiencing rising numbers.

We currently don't have enough tests to fully understand how many people have contracted or succumbed to the virus.

We are still struggling to get enough masks, gloves and other personal protective equipment to our frontline workers, and we don't yet have the supplies needed to prevent a resurgence of the virus.

We need a robust contact-tracing plan to identify possible exposure to Coronavirus and prevent further spread that could result in another wave of cases, hospitalizations and tragic deaths.

We need to protect and grow the capacity of our hospitals to deal with localized outbreaks.

We need to take back production of life-saving drugs and medical supplies from China.

We need to develop and deploy a vaccine to inoculate Americans who have not contracted the virus.

We need clear data and metrics that are backed by science to tell us what is working and what's not. And we need to push these best practices out to our small businesses so that they can keep their employees safe and give their customers confidence.

This critical information, and the lessons we have learned, will help create a plan for how we can safely re-open.

Without this data-driven plan, we risk undermining the progress we have made and a repeat of the unbearable loss of human life and economic shock we are experiencing right now.

Despite all this hardship, I'm encouraged every day by the workers and entrepreneurs in my home state of Michigan that are finding new ways to keep their workplaces safe and retooling their businesses to meet the needs of frontline responders. I've talked with many of them over the last few months. They need clear guidance driven by reliable data to back up their actions.

We also must remain focused on the unequal impact this virus inflicts on communities of color. In Michigan, black residents make up 13% of the population but represent 40% of the deaths from COVID 19.

This disparity is rooted in systemic inequity. We must change our plans in response to the data and protect these communities – not simply accept the inequity as inevitable.

These decisions are a matter of life and death. And we cannot accept tens of thousands more Coronavirus deaths as unavoidable – just as can't we accept that reopening our economy while minimizing risks isn't possible. We must have a clear plan that provides people with guidelines that are backed by science to help us re-open.

I look forward to today's discussion and to continuing to work with my colleagues to ensure that we are taking appropriate steps that will allow us to safely reopen our economy while protecting our most precious resource: the American people.