



The House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

COVID-19 Response

June 4, 2020

Member Opening Statements

Subcommittee Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT): DeLauro said that the oversight and response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been bipartisan. DeLauro said the federal response has been inconsistent and incoherent. DeLauro said she is alarmed that the Administration has put political expediency over public health. DeLauro said that the subcommittee has increased funding by billions of dollars. DeLauro said it is dangerous that the CDC is being sidelined. DeLauro said our country can not reopen until there are safety measures in place. DeLauro asked why states are opening before the CDC guidelines came out. DeLauro listed the ways that the CDC has failed and has not provided specific guidelines. DeLauro said we need the CDC to be leading and that she is angry that their work has been pushed aside for a political agenda.

Subcommittee Ranking Member Tom Cole (R-OK): Cole thanked Redfield for his leadership. He said that the numbers in the United States are not the worst in the world regarding COVID-19. Cole said that we are not the best and we are not the worst. Cole said that the response to the virus has been bipartisan and that it needs to continue. Cole said the United States was prepared to face this, but you can never be fully prepared.

Full Committee Chairwoman Nita Lowey (D-NY): Lowey said that the President has been pushing aside experts to focus on the stock market. Lowey said that the President has been irresponsible by suggesting medicine that does not work. Lowey said we need a plan to track and contain the virus now. Lowey said this plan should not be partisan.

Witness Opening Statements

Dr. Robert Redfield, Director, Center for Disease Control (CDC): Redfield agreed that this is the biggest public health crisis in the past hundred years. Redfield said that the nation is not only hearing a wake-up call but that the nation wants positive social change. Redfield said that the CDC is taking action to create more guidelines and implement tracking measures. Redfield said that the pandemic has shown the need to contract more comprehensive data. Redfield quoted Rep. Elijah Cummings and said the cost of doing nothing is not nothing.

Questions

Subcommittee Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT): DeLauro said there are concerns that politics and not policy are driving the decision making. DeLauro asked how what the White House is doing makes sense from the public health perspective. Redfield did not answer. DeLauro asked if we had a vaccine, if we had herd immunity, if the virus has become less contagious and if states are meeting guidelines. Redfield said no to all of these questions. DeLauro said the President shut down the economy with a small number of cases but not with growing cases. DeLauro said she has concerns that the CDC is not doing what they are supposed to and leading the country with science.

Subcommittee Ranking Member Tom Cole (R-OK): Cole asked if there are other countries that are not doing as well as the United States. Redfield said that there are areas that are not doing as well. Redfield said it is important to bring our economy back but to do it strategically and prudently. Cole asked what investments we should be making going forward through Congress. Redfield said we need to fund public health infrastructure and do it soon.

Full Committee Chairwoman Nita Lowey (D-NY): Lowey said that we are testing 50,000 residents each day in New York. Lowey asked why the CDC has not established testing benchmarks. Redfield said that they have a plan that they are developing a plan and that it was recently due, and they are reviewing it. Redfield added that not every state lab has the ability to do testing as well as New York and that he hopes they are moving towards that. Lowey asked if Dr. Messonnier was removed for telling the truth about the virus and if people at the CDC are fearful of retaliation. Redfield said that she has not been sidelined.

Rep. Andy Harris (R-MD): Harris said to say that this is politics is ridiculous and that everything the Administration has done is based on science. Harris asked if there is anything in CDC guidance that says indoor dining is unsafe after Phase 2 guidelines were met. Redfield said that there is nothing in the guidelines that says that. Harris said there is a cult of masks. Harris asked if there is evidence behind the instruction that food workers should be wearing cloth masks instead of surgical masks. Redfield said the instruction is based on reserving surgical masks for the medical community and that there is nothing that says one mask is better than another.

Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA): Roybal-Allard asked about mask-wearing and why the CDC initially recommended the masks were optional. Redfield said the importance of recognition on asymptomatic cases led to changing the recommendations and the U.S. has been receiving medical advice from China. Roybal-Allard asked Redfield to elaborate on his concerns about people not wearing masks. Redfield said he is concerned that the public health message is not resonating and that he sees people not wearing them and this could continue the spread.

Rep. John Moolenaar (R-MI): Moolenaar asked what needs to be done in regard to data modernization and IT infrastructure. Redfield said the data system has been started but needs more investment. Redfield said that they are able to catch lags in the data. Moolenaar asked about the effect this virus has on nursing homes. Redfield said it has had a large one and they are studying it.

Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA): Lee asked how the CDC is going to target resources to black and brown communities, especially if they do not have the data. Redfield said that he needs to apologize for the inadequacy of the response affecting these communities and that they need to collect more data. Redfield said that due to the CARES Act provision, zip code and type of test will be included. Lee asked

what type of report is going to be released today. Redfield said they will be able to generate exactly what Lee has been requesting the new requirements.

Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-WA): Beutler said that the heart and soul of the CDC is to protect people, but there have been problems, including that the New York Times called the culture of the CDC “risk-averse and perfectionist.” Beutler said the committee says yes to public health requests, but when it was supposed to work, it failed. Beutler asked if Redfield can start reforming the CDC’s shortcomings. Redfield said the issue that has to be corrected is that the private sector needs to fall in line and that the CDC has a public health test.

Rep. Mark Pocan (D-WI): Pocan said the CDC data shows that we have had one third of the cases on the planet and by far the most in the world. Redfield confirmed these are correct figures. Pocan asked who decided to delay the guidelines. Redfield said it was him. Pocan asked if there was consultation with anyone at the White House. Pocan said there were not. Pocan said tear gas can cause people to cough and spread COVID-19. Pocan asked if the CDC would recommend to the White House to not use tear gas on protestors because it is causing people to cough and spread COVID-19. Redfield said he will.

Rep. Katherine Clark (D-MA): Clark asked if it was predictable that this pandemic would affect communities of color. Redfield said he does not know if it was predictable, but it became evident quickly. Clark asked who wrote the plan that is being released today. Redfield said it is not a plan but a release of the required information. Clark said it is important to have a plan. Clark asked how to address the disparities in health care and asked if there is a way to do it by downsizing affordable health care. Redfield said it is not possible.

Rep. Lois Frankel (D-FL): Frankel asked if we would have benefitted from a greater global presence in discovery of the virus. Redfield says that we would have greatly benefited. Frankel asked about creating a contact tracing workforce. Redfield said that we need a bill to get funding for this. Frankel asked what is being done right now in regard to contact tracers. Redfield said that states are hiring people on their own. Frankel asked what the states are doing that are overwhelmed and do not have contract tracers. Redfield said this is not the time to be understaffed and they are committed to working with states.

Rep. Cheri Bustos (D-IL): Bustos asked if limited access to healthy food can lead to poor health conditions and put people at higher risk when they contract COVID-19. Redfield agreed that social determinants can lead to poor health outcomes. Bustos asked if poverty can lead to poorer health outcomes. Redfield said there is no doubt and it is important to research what social determinants of health are causing the worst health outcomes.

Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ): Coleman asked what will be in the report that is coming out today. Redfield said that the report coming out is an announcement of the data. Coleman asked when the data is coming out. Redfield said that he can only give the data that he has. Coleman asked when testing will be available to every American. Redfield said there is no impediment to any American getting tested. Coleman asked how to get tested if you are uninsured. Redfield said that there is additional testing being set up. Coleman asked if there is a role in the CDC being proactive reaching out to state health officials. Redfield said the CDC routinely reaches out to state health officials. Coleman asked if it was not obvious that this would affect the African American community from the beginning. Redfield said that the CDC did not have the data they needed to give the analysis they needed.

Subcommittee Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT): DeLauro said that Redfield has stressed a need for an enhanced vaccine for the flu. DeLauro asked what we need to have for this to be prepared. Redfield said everything is moving extremely quickly.

Subcommittee Ranking Member Tom Cole (R-OK): Cole presented data showing that other comparable and industrialized nations have similar COVID-19 numbers to the United States. Cole asked about the effect of COVID-19 on the Native American community. Redfield said that these communities are disproportionately affected, and they need more resources.

Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA): Roybal-Allard asked about the need to create a health defense force budget, which was suggested by former CDC Chairman Tom Freeman. Redfield said the challenge is getting it into long-term funding.

Rep. Andy Harris (R-MD): Harris asked if the numbers are down since reopening. Redfield confirmed. Harris asked about what information would have been helpful. Redfield said that they have been in contact with their Chinese counterparts to get information from the beginning.

Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CT): Lee asked on how contract tracers will be trained to come into minority communities. Redfield says that we need to ensure trusted individuals in the community will do this work.

Rep. Mark Pocan (D-WI): Pocan said Wisconsin has had a huge problem in getting supplies. Pocan asked what the CDC's plan is. Redfield said he will look into why Wisconsin is being delayed. Pocan said that a new report said COVID-19 cases are expanding and that it is due because of lack of national standards.

Rep. Sam Graves (R-MO): Graves asked about anti-body testing and FDA approvals. Redfield said that there are a number of anti-body tests that are safe and that there are some that the CDC recommends. Redfield said the clinical value of these tests has yet to be shown. Graves asked if anti-body testing has been paid for by the government. Redfield said that they are still trying to determine the clinical relevance.

Rep. Katherine Clark (D-MA): Clark asked if testing in communities of color would be a priority. Redfield said that they are and that the majority of free testing sites are in communities of color.

Rep. Lois Frankel (D-FL): Frankel asked if the CDC would have benefitted from increased collaboration with other agencies to meet the needs of older Americans. Redfield said that the CDC would have benefitted from this and that older Americans have different health problems that need to be addressed in regard to COVID-19.

Rep. Cheri Bustos (D-IL): Bustos asked about the CDC's guidelines for prisons and testing inmates. Redfield said that we have guidelines in place to help and that we are learning as we go, so some changes may need to be made.

Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ): Coleman asked if there is guidance on what percentage of the population needs to be tested for opening up safely. Redfield says no but that they are adding more guidance.