



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee Hearing:
*Data for Decision-Making: Responsible Management of Data during COVID-19
and Beyond*

Wednesday, September 23, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Foster, and thank you to our panel of witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today. The COVID-19 pandemic has claimed 200,000 lives in the United States. In my home state of Texas, there have been over 28,000 new cases reported in the past week alone. This is the highest number of any state in the nation. The country still faces many challenges in overcoming the pandemic including preparing for the upcoming cold and flu season, providing aid to businesses in this new coronavirus economy, and helping students navigate new learning environments. Experts agree that the virus will likely continue to circulate until there is a vaccine. It has never been more important to rely on the scientific community to guide our decision-making with the best available research and data.

However, over the past few months, we have seen an increasing number of attacks against career scientists and their work in responding to the pandemic. Most recently, we learned that political officials at HHS have routinely challenged the science behind the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports*, a vital and objective source of COVID-19 data, and tried to silence agency officials in order to paint the Administration's pandemic response in a better light. Last week, Assistant Secretary Michael Caputo even accused CDC scientists of "sedition" and of organizing a "resistance unit" against the President. As Members of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, we do not stand for such blatant disregard of scientific integrity in the Federal government.

Our ability to fight the pandemic depends greatly on accurate, objective, and accessible data. With it, the Federal government can efficiently distribute personal protective equipment, testing supplies, and therapeutics. We can better understand the spread of the disease and make prudent decisions about the economy. Without it, hospitals, patients, and state and local jurisdictions can be left in the dark, fighting on their own without critical supplies. The American people must be able to trust that decisions made at all levels are based on trustworthy data and unmarred by political influence.

We have the world's top scientists doing their best to respond to the pandemic. Yet if we allow their work and our public health institutions to be influenced by political games, we could lose

the nation's trust at a critical time. Already, many communities of color do not trust the government's role in their health. Yet we know—from the CDC's own *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports*, in fact—that these communities have been the hardest hit by the pandemic. As we get closer to the possibility of a COVID-19 vaccine, we must ensure that the Federal government is trustworthy and transparent in its decision making.

Thank you again to our witnesses for testifying today. I yield back.