



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

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight Hearing:
The New Normal: Preparing for and Adapting to the New Phase of COVID-19

March 31, 2022

Thank you Chairman Foster for holding this hearing, and thank you to all of our esteemed witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today. The fight against COVID-19 today looks much different than it did in March 2020. That progress is thanks to the tireless healthcare workers, researchers, public health officials, and citizens everywhere working to protect their families and communities. We must continue to build on our successes and learn from the hardships of the last two years. Today's witnesses bring a wealth of experience from many facets of pandemic response. I am looking forward to their testimonies on how we can best prepare ourselves for the next phase of COVID-19.

As we've discussed before on this Committee, this is a global battle. It will not be solved anywhere until progress is made everywhere. So long as low- and middle-income countries remain under-vaccinated, the virus will continue to circulate and mutate. Surveillance of emerging variants requires strong international research partnerships, so our world-class scientists can offer their expertise and get real-time information about variants emerging abroad.

On a national level, we must position our public health authorities to receive and share timely, good quality data. To get reliable projections of COVID surges, we need a wealth of data. We need to know the test positivity rates, which gets more difficult as take-home tests become more common than PCR tests. We need insight into how immunized a population is, whether their immunization comes from vaccines, natural infection, or a combination. We need to know whether hospital systems are overwhelmed by dwindling capacity or worker shortages. Public health communication is a two-way street. Bolstering communication among individuals, healthcare facilities, and public health officials will be imperative to detect COVID surges early and equip our communities with the tools they need.

So much of the fight happens in the last mile. We've made such great strides in answering the grand scientific questions of how this virus spreads and kills. And how vaccines and therapeutics can save lives. We must also focus on translating knowledge to health outcomes. We need more research into how misinformation can derail effective public health communication, and how we

can deliver accurate information to counteract these lies. We need to be thoughtful about reaching those who remain unvaccinated. We need to learn from past COVID surges when it comes to how we implement personal protective measures. Researching these issues can help us overcome future hurdles in public health messaging.

It is tragic that we are still battling this virus more than two years after it reached the U.S. But it is truly remarkable to reflect on the progress that has been made. We can now face the next phase of the pandemic building upon the knowledge and the infrastructure we've put in place since March 2020. I thank our witnesses for joining us today and I yield back.