



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

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee Hearing:
Repurposing Therapeutic Drugs for COVID-19: Research Challenges and Opportunities

Friday, June 19, 2020

Thank you, Chairman, Foster, and thank you to all of our esteemed witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today. It is so important to learn from experts about these critical issues because the threat of COVID-19 has not diminished. I have seen in recent days, in Dallas and throughout the state of Texas, how precarious our situation truly is and how we all must reinforce our commitment to combating the pandemic. It has been clear from the beginning and it remains clear today: science-based policymaking, rooted in facts and guided by the best efforts of the scientific community, is the key to overcoming this challenge. I am glad that today's hearing can help inform the federal government's response to the pandemic in the months to come.

Repurposing existing therapeutics for COVID-19 treatment would be an important tool in the world's pandemic toolkit. Until a vaccine emerges, we must do everything possible to develop treatments that can save lives, and it makes a great deal of sense to evaluate drugs that have already been approved in other circumstances. I have been encouraged by the immense effort and resources that America's research community has dedicated to this cause. The federal government should be doing everything in its power to promote these research efforts, and I am eager to learn how we can do more to support the research community's critical work.

I also want to better understand how the federal government can work with the research community to prepare for the next pandemic. There may be opportunities for the federal government to collaborate with the research community on broad issues such as prioritizing certain drug candidates, efficiently deploying limited resources, and coordinating efforts among the vast network of research institutions engaged in this work. These questions must be approached in a deliberative manner, and we should start to consider them now so that we are better prepared next time.

As we think about these issues, we must never lose sight of the paramount importance of upholding scientific integrity at all times. Repurposing existing drugs in the midst of a pandemic carries high stakes, and federal policymaking must be done the right way, based solely on the

best available science and free from any political interference. The controversy surrounding the FDA's Emergency Use Authorization for hydroxychloroquine demonstrates all too well the damage that can occur when political considerations inappropriately influence the process. The government's actions to address the nation's needs during this public health crisis must only be guided by scientific evidence – never political pressure.

The research community is rising to the challenge of COVID-19, and I have no doubt that it will continue to perform magnificently. Thank you again to all of the witnesses. I yield back.