

Opening Statement
Chair Jan Schakowsky
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “Consumers Beware: Increased Risks During the COVID-19 Pandemic”
July 9, 2020

Good morning and thank you all for joining us today for a virtual hearing on consumer protection in the COVID era. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the lives of nearly every American consumer. And in so many ways, technology has made the isolation many Americans face far more bearable than, say, the social isolation experienced by Americans during the 1918 pandemic.

Unfortunately, the Trump Administration hasn't risen to the moment, and has instead dithered, reflexively deferring to the private sector instead of leading. Even before the pandemic, consumers reported a feeling of helplessness with respect to the digital economy. Despite the Trump Administration counting on the private sector to play a key role in the response and recovery, Big Tech has allowed fraud, fake news, fake reviews, and counterfeit and stolen products to thrive on their platforms.

Price-gouging has continued, mostly unfettered, on platforms, because of a weak and uneven Federal response. That's why I introduced the Price Gouging Prevention Act with Chairman Pallone. It was included in the HEROES Act, which Senator McConnell has sat on for months.

The current crisis has also laid bare how online platforms need to be doing more to protect consumers, and ensure they have the same rights online as they do when they're shopping in person. That's why I am proud to be introducing an updated version of the INFORM Consumers Act with my friend Richard Hudson. I would like to thank Senators Durbin and Cassidy for their partnership on this important matter. This commonsense legislation would ensure that consumers have the information they need when an online seller fails to deliver the good or service they promised. I hope our colleagues on both sides of the aisle will join us in supporting the bill, and that it might be favorably reported by this committee very soon.

But transparency alone is not enough. Agencies, like the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) must aggressively stop dangerous products that can kill or harm Americans from reaching consumers. The Administration, however, continues to prioritize corporate interests over safety and public health. Nowhere is this clearer than its continued support for Nancy Beck's nomination as Consumer Product Safety Commission Chair. Her resume tells the story of a career defined by disdain for consumers, whom she has exposed to toxic chemicals and left vulnerable to COVID-19. However, her nomination hearing featured a different narrative – that she was just middle management and was merely executing directives from the real decision-

makers. Either way, she is wholly unfit to hold this prestigious title. The Administration needs to withdraw her nomination and put someone forward who will put consumers first.

The next Chair of the Consumer Product Safety Commission must be a transformative figure with a vision to bring the agency into the 21st century. She or he must implement a strategic enforcement strategy that ensures foreign manufacturers don't have a leg up on their American counterparts due to weak or non-enforcement at ports of entry and ensures that consumers are purchasing safe goods online. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, and now recognize my friend and colleague, Ranking Member Rodgers.