

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.**

Markup on “Budget Reconciliation pursuant to S.Con.Res. 5, the Concurrent Resolution on the Budget for Fiscal Year 2021”

February 11, 2021

We are here today to address this Committee’s top priorities – combating the COVID-19 pandemic, providing relief to struggling families, and rebuilding our economy.

Our nation and our people are hurting. It is essential that Congress act quickly to provide the resources and support needed to bring an end to the COVID-19 pandemic.

And that is exactly what we are doing today. We will be marking up four Committee prints to crush this terrible virus, to save lives, and to provide struggling Americans some much needed relief. These Committee prints put into legislative text President Biden’s American Rescue Plan. They are robust and bold because that is what is necessary to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are investing more than \$14 billion to speed up the distribution and administration of COVID-19 vaccines across the country. This will allow us to get more shots in people’s arms so that we can end this pandemic. The funding will support the development of community vaccination centers, as well as mobile vaccination units that can go into hard-to-reach areas that are often underserved.

We are investing \$46 billion in a national testing strategy, with funding for rapid tests, community-based testing sites, and expanding lab capacity. Testing, contact tracing, and mitigation are critical to reducing the spread of COVID-19, getting our kids back to school, returning to normal patterns of life, and rebuilding our economy.

We invest more than \$7 billion for the mobilization of a public health jobs program to support the pandemic response. This funding would allow public health departments to hire 100,000 new, full time public health workers to perform vital tasks like vaccine outreach and contact tracing.

We invest more than \$25 billion in addressing health disparities and protecting vulnerable populations. This plan provides additional investments in Community Health Centers and health services on tribal lands.

We are also incentivizing states to expand access to health coverage through the Medicaid program. Medicaid has provided a crucial safety net for millions of adults who have lost their jobs or income during the pandemic.

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We are also helping struggling families keep their lights on, the heat working and the water running by providing \$5 billion to critical utility assistance programs.

And we are providing \$7.6 billion to expand internet connectivity to students and teachers to help bridge the digital divide for those without home internet access.

The Committee prints include other critical funding needs during this pandemic including mental health, environmental health, and consumer protection provisions that we will discuss later in this markup.

Today, our nation faces unprecedented challenges, and those challenges must be met with decisive and bold action. We cannot delay – we must act now.