



**“Vaccinations and the Economic Recovery”
Chairman Don Beyer – Prepared Remarks
April 14, 2021**

Recognitions

This hearing will come to order. I would like to welcome everyone to the first Joint Economic Committee hearing of the 117th Congress.

I look forward to working with Vice Chairman Heinrich, Ranking Member Lee, Senior House Republican Schweikert and all of our Committee members as we examine the many economic challenges and opportunities facing the country.

I want to thank each of our distinguished witnesses for sharing their expertise today. Now, I would like to turn to my opening statement.

The end is in sight

The pandemic and its tragic health and economic consequences have dominated our lives for the past year.

After more than a year of physical distancing and mask wearing, of fearing for our health and the health of our loved ones, of widespread and deeply unequal economic hardship, the potential for returning to a sense of normalcy is finally within sight.

The pandemic will leave no shortage of tragedy in its wake.

More than 560,000 people have died in the United States, many isolated in hospitals rooms and without their family’s last comfort.

31 million have been infected with the coronavirus, and many of them continue to live with the disease's debilitating symptoms.

Communities of color – particularly our Black, Latino and American Indian communities – have been hit especially hard, experiencing the highest rates of COVID-19 infection, hospitalization and death.

The economic damage persists as well.

After job gains of more than 900,000 last month, close to 10 million workers remained unemployed – one quarter have been jobless for a year or longer.

Another 4 million people have left the labor force since the pandemic began.

Thankfully, the economy is beginning to recover.

Vaccination progress to date

Much of that emerging recovery is due to the remarkable vaccination effort unfolding in our country and throughout the world right now, where millions of shots are going into arms every single day.

It's an unprecedented undertaking.

More than 190 million doses have been administered in the United States. More than one in three people in the U.S. have received at least one shot, and one in five Americans have been fully vaccinated.

At the current rate, we could vaccinate all adults in the United States by the end of the summer.

By then, perhaps our lives can begin to approach a new normal where we can see loved ones, where we no longer have to choose between going to work and keeping family safe, and where we can enjoy a meal inside at a restaurant or a trip to the movies.

Economists project a strong recovery

There is a consensus among economists that vaccinations will profoundly shape the course of the economic recovery.

Forecasts call for accelerating growth, with Goldman Sachs projecting annual GDP growth in 2021 will reach 8 percent.

In an interview that aired this past weekend, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said the economy and job creation are poised for faster growth and the principal risk is that “we will reopen too quickly, people will too quickly return to their old practices, and we’ll see another spike in cases.”

The pandemic recovery is precarious

Although the trajectory of the pandemic recovery is headed in the right direction, it remains precarious and can be derailed by hasty re-openings, new variants, anti-vaccine sentiment or lack of access to vaccines.

This means that our economic recovery is precarious as well.

Public health experts warn that state efforts to roll back mask mandates and physical distancing requirements can backfire, especially in light of highly transmissible and deadlier variants.

Michigan’s recent experience makes clear that we cannot rely on vaccines alone as our only way out of the pandemic.

We've seen recent spikes in cases as the more contagious B.1.1.7 variant has now become the most common strain of the virus in the United States.

Younger adults and children are comprising a larger share of new infections.

If we cannot bring the pandemic under control, both domestically and globally, new variants might become resistant to our current treatments and vaccines, creating a need for adjusted vaccine products, further delaying recovery efforts.

CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky has said repeatedly that because of these concerns, we cannot let our guard down and must continue to practice mask wearing and physical distancing until we reach herd immunity.

Deep inequities at home and abroad remain

There is also profound inequity in access to vaccines. Vaccination rates for people of color—especially Blacks and Latinos—lag far behind the rates for whites.

As a result, pandemic and economic recovery efforts in communities of color may fall behind recovery in white communities.

The reality is even worse abroad.

While wealthy countries have purchased enough vaccine to cover two, and sometimes even three times their populations, low- and middle-income countries—which account for 81 percent of the world's adult population—have collectively purchased only 33 percent of vaccines.

As Treasury Secretary Yellen laid out last week, some low-income countries don't expect to be able to fully vaccinate their populations until 2023 or 2024, which should be unacceptable to all of us.

To end this pandemic for good, the battle against the coronavirus must be won globally.

So, while we have made extraordinary progress in the past few months, we are not out of the woods yet.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the state of our recovery, where it's going, and what we can do to ensure things stay on track. And now, I turn it over to Senator Lee for his opening statement.