



**Date:** June 26, 2020  
**Topic:** Senate Help, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee Hearing: COVID-19: Lessons Learned to Prepare for the Next Pandemic

On June 23, WSW staff monitored a Senate Help, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee hearing entitled “COVID-19: Lessons Learned to Prepare for the Next Pandemic.” This hearing centered on the U.S response to the COVID-19 pandemic and how to better prepare for future pandemics.

A link to the hearing page and livestream is [here](#).

### **WITNESS LIST, OPENING STATEMENT HIGHLIGHTS**

***Dr. William Frist***

*Former US Senate Majority Leader*

[Full Testimony](#)

- The U.S. needs to clear up communication with the federal government, modernize surveillance, and advance research, development, and stockpiling
- **An outbreak anywhere is a threat to America, and we must have predictable funding for public health security**
- Any pandemic response needs to cover vulnerable communities more fully

***Dr. Joneigh S. Khaldun***

*Chief Medical Executive and Chief Deputy Director for Health, Michigan Department of Health*

[Full Testimony](#)

- COVID-19 is still present so there needs to be focus on the current situation
- This pandemic has disproportionately affected communities of color
- The U.S. needs to develop and implement a national testing structure
- Public health infrastructure needs more long-term investments

***Dr. Julie L. Gerberding***

*Executive Vice President and Chief Patient Officer, Merck & Co., Inc.*

*Co-Chair CSIS Commission on Strengthening America's Health Security*

[Full Testimony](#)

- Preparation efforts need to be accelerated as more pandemics are likely to come
- We need a vaccine that neutralizes and protects, even if the virus changes over time, while not sacrificing safety for the sake of speed in creating a vaccine
- Sustained long term budget investment toward preparedness is the most important factor

***Governor Michael O. Leavitt***

*Former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services*

[Full Testimony](#)

- Everyone needs a pandemic plan (local governments, schools, churches, individuals, etc.)
- We need to clarify roles between state and federal government
- Vaccines are important but distribution planning is still needed
- Pandemic preparation requires investment every year

## **COMMITTEE MEMBER OPENING STATEMENT HIGHLIGHTS**

***Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN)***

[Full Testimony](#)

- Congress should assess what worked and what could work better for the future
- Released a white paper outlining the need to improve tests, treatments, vaccines, disease surveillance, stockpiles, public health capabilities, and coordination
- **The HELP Committee plans to draft and pass legislation this year based on white paper recommendations.**
- Many states struggled with funding and having enough medical personnel

***Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA)***

[Full Testimony](#) (found at the end of press release)

- Reflecting on how to respond to the next crisis is no substitute for the mistakes still being made during the current pandemic
- The U.S. does not have the testing and tracing capacity to return to normalcy
- Disparities and discrimination in healthcare need to be taken more seriously
- Developing a vaccine needs to be free of political influence and focus on science

## **COMMITTEE QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

**Chairman Alexander (R-TN) - Why are you taking time during this pandemic to prepare for the next one?**

- Dr. Frist - Preparing for the next pandemic will help with what is going on now

**What sort of manufacturing capacity should the federal government have on hand, or should it be left to the private sector?**

- Gov. Leavitt - We have not adequately maintained partnerships. The private sector can be very important in the process, but planning distribution is a critical need
- Dr. Gerberding - Influenza manufacturing companies are at full capacity, so we need an emergency capacity built up in public/private partnerships

**Ranking Member Murray (D-WA) - There has been a disproportionate impact on communities of color due to systemic racism. What can we do to address this?**

- Dr. Khaldun - We need to make sure testing is accessible to minority communities, eliminate costs for testing sites, and think about those who have been deemed essential and how to protect them

**What commitments should the administration make to ensure confidence in vaccines?**

- Dr. Gerberding - There needs to be transparency and the safety should be monitored by the National Academy of Medicine

**If we were to create a public health infrastructure fund, how do you think the next outbreak would look different?**

- Dr. Frist - It can build resilient communities and make sure public health is fully staffed

**Sen. Burr (R-NC) - Why was the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention so ill-equipped to put out agreements with private entities, and what would you suggest going forward?**

- Dr. Gerberding - I am not sure what the CDC was doing, but there are some complexities in working with the private sector and the government. We need to leverage the power of the private sector going forward

**How can we enhance the coordination with innovators against threats like this?**

- Dr. Gerberding - There needs to be less focus on efficiency, and we need to have a broader perspective on experimentation

**What should this committee do to encourage creation of domestic manufacturing facilities?**

- Gov. Leavitt - Annual support, even where there is not a crisis
- Dr. Frist - It comes down to how we increase funding. Annual appropriation would allow discretionary funding that has the advantage of timeliness

**Sen. Casey (D-PA) - Spoke on disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on minority communities. How have the social determinants of health impacted the ability for individuals to protect themselves?**

- Dr. Khaldun - Poverty, housing, and public transportation are some areas we believe contribute to disparities

**What part of the response so far has required federal coordination?**

- Dr. Khaldun - We should have had a more urgent testing response and PPE. Many places ran into delays so a coordinated strategy would have helped

**What are mechanics of an immunization infrastructure?**

- Dr. Gerberding- Distribution of the vaccine is going to be challenging. The infrastructure should be local

**Sen. Collins (R-ME) - Spoke on the U.S. dependency of foreign manufacturing of active pharmaceutical ingredients. What incentives should be given to encourage domestic manufacturing?**

- Dr. Frist- The incentives will have to be financial, such as tax credits. The challenge with public/private partnerships is the lack of funding

**Spoke on COVID-19's impact on long term care facilities, and the racial disparities that arise. What would you recommend to us to help address the racial disparities affecting workers in nursing homes?**

- Dr. Gerberding- It is important to test everyone in nursing homes often. It is critical to not overlook the most vulnerable

**Sen. Baldwin (D-WI) - The US has not created worker safety standards for those going back to work. Do you believe giving employers clear and mandatory rules would help protect workers, families, and communities?**

- Dr. Khaldun- Yes

**How do shortages of testing supplies and protective equipment hinder states ability to respond to the pandemic?**

- Dr. Khaldun- We had to delay testing in our state. Our hospital labs still do not have access to testing, so it is still a huge concern

**Sen. Cassidy (R-LA) - Spoke on the shortfalls of the CDC and other public health agencies. If we are going to give public health agencies more money, is reform necessary?**

- Dr. Gerberding- Modernization needs to be the framework of where to go from here

**There have been communities that have moved beyond mitigation that should still be in suppression. What would be your response to that?**

- Dr. Gerberding- I do not agree with that

**Should Congress get recommendations through science and not through the lens of politics?**

- Gov. Leavitt- That would be a good thing. Scientists from public health agencies need support during times like this

**Sen. Murphy (D-CT) - We are preparing for the next pandemic, but not doing anything now to help with the current one. Why should we join SEPI, Inc. now and not wait?**

- Dr. Gerberding- It would be good to join SEPI now. They are in a position now to provide credibility and scientific oversight

**PPE is still not available in many places. Have the supply chain problems been fixed?**

- Dr. Khaldun- No

**Sen. Roberts (R-KS) – How can we facilitate interactions between public health and agricultural agencies?**

- Dr. Frist- Almost certainly the next virus will arise from animals to humans. Exercises and testing need to be built into every administration and done on an annual basis so we can predict what will happen

**Sen. Warren (D-MA) - The federal government has implemented ways to ensure that states with rising COVID cases will have equipment and supplies that they need. Is that what has been happening?**

- Khaldun- We have been receiving supplies in Michigan, but it is not enough. Much of what is sent is expired

**Experts agree that contact tracing is essential. Are more resources needed for this work and would a nationwide contact tracing system be helpful?**

- Dr. Khaldun- Yes; it would be very helpful if the federal government offered more support

**If the federal government does fix not the failures of their response to the pandemic, how will communities of color be impacted?**

- Dr. Khaldun- African American, Latino, and tribal communities are going to be hit the hardest, which is very concerning

**Sen. Murkowski (R-AK) - Public health infrastructure for contact testing is still lacking in Alaska. Do we need to have a national contact tracing program?**

- Dr. Frist- We need to expand contact tracing. States probably do not have the capacity to increase that infrastructure, so the federal government should help
- Gov. Leavitt- A national strategy is required, especially with funding. It will still require local input and execution

**Sen. Kaine (D-VA) - Are aggressive early testing, contact tracing, isolation, and treatment the template that should be used in future pandemics?**

- Gov. Leavitt- These are fundamental measures so yes, but there will be side effects of the economic and psychological stresses

**Sen. Hassan (D-NH) - What steps were taken in Michigan to ramp up testing capacity?**

- Dr. Khaldun- We have focused on working with community partners, and doing contact tracing

**What can the federal government do?**

- Dr. Khaldun- We need a clear strategy from the federal government about what supplies we are getting and when so we can be prepared

**What investments are needed to give support to communities of color to help with the health disparities?**

- Dr. Khaldun- We need to make sure they have access to healthy housing and access to health insurance

**Sen. Smith (D-MN)- Spoke on implicit bias in health care. What can we do so black women are not turned away from getting the healthcare they need?**

- Dr. Khaldun- There should be mandatory implicit bias training. We need to make sure practices have high standards set so everyone has access to equitable care

**What should we be doing to make sure public health messages are relevant to minority communities?**

- Dr. Khaldun- Community partnerships are incredibly important to make sure the messages are resonating

**How important is it to get state and local aid from the federal government?**

- Dr. Khaldun- Funding at the state and local level is incredibly important

**Sen. Jones (D-AL) - Spoke on incentivizing domestic manufacturing. What can we do to create those markets, other than tax incentives?**

- Dr. Frist- It is important to have timelines and public funding for markets over 10 or 15 years. We also need to modernize the stockpiles

**Would cutting Medicaid help increase public health funding?**

- Gov. Leavitt- Public health funding has been starved for years. There is a correlation that Medicaid budgets have gone up and public health budgets have gone down

**Sen. Rosen (D-NV) - What challenges arose from not having information on the latest research?**

- Dr. Khaldun- We are still learning about the disparities and how it affects people. It would be great to have that research and data.

**What recommendations do you have to get this data to local public health officials?**

- Dr. Khaldun- We need uniform data and surveillance systems across the country

**How has telehealth improved patient outcomes?**

- Dr. Khaldun- Telehealth has been very helpful. I hope we keep using it going forward

**Chairman Alexander (R-TN) What are the top three things you would suggest for preparing for a pandemic going forward?**

- Dr. Frist- We need to work with the private sector, put in place a public health budget, and continue using telehealth
- Dr. Khaldun- We need to focus on disparities, ramp up surveillance, testing, and tracing, and increase funding for state and local governments to help with long term infrastructure

- Dr. Gerberding- We need a national vaccine plan that includes science, allocation, and uptake, we need to exercise the health care surge under influenza and COVID, and focus on the importance of budgetary authority for sustained investment
- Gov. Leavitt- We need to advance clarity on division of labor between state and federal government, rejuvenate public health infrastructure, Health and Human Services and the CDC need data modernization, and we need to focus on annual appropriations for emergency managements

**COMMITTEE MEMBER ATTENDANCE**

<b>Present</b>	<b>Democrat Members</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Republican Members</b>
x	Patty Murray (WA)	x	Lamar Alexander (TN)
x	Tammy Baldwin (WI)		Rand Paul (KY)
x	Tim Kaine (VA)	x	Pat Roberts (KS)
x	Doug Jones (AL)	x	Mitt Romney (UT)
	Bernie Sanders (VT)		Michael Enzi (WY)
x	Christopher Murphy (CT)	x	Susan Collins (ME)
x	Maggie Hasan (NH)	x	Lisa Murkowski (AK)
x	Jacky Rosen (NV)		Mike Braun (IN)
x	Robert Casey, Jr. (PA)	x	Richard Burr (NC)
x	Elizabeth Warren (MA)	x	Bill Cassidy (LA)
x	Tina Smith (MN)		Tim Scott (SC)
			Kelly Loeffler (GA)