



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

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## Joint Hearing Statement of Emergency Preparedness, Response, & Recovery Subcommittee Chairman Donald Payne Jr. (D-NJ)

### *Reviewing Federal and State Pandemic Supply Preparedness and Response* July 14, 2020

For too many communities, the pandemic is continuing to get worse. The magnitude of this pandemic is devastating. It didn't have to be this way, but there was a clear lack of leadership, most importantly at the White House itself. This lack of leadership extended to the Federal government's procurement strategy, and those effects have been felt by states, local governments, and frontline workers who are trying to contain COVID-19 around the country without the proper PPE or supplies.

Instead of taking proactive steps early on to invoke the Defense Production Act, build up our supply reserves, initiating a whole-of-government procurement strategy, and quickly getting testing supplies and other vital medical equipment out into communities, President Trump was instead downplaying the threat of the virus and telling the American people that it was "under control" and was a "problem that's going to go away."

I hope that it is clear now, with more than 3 million cases and well over 130,000 deaths nationwide, and daily cases on the rise, the virus was not, and is still not, under control. During the pandemic, states have been left to fend for themselves while dealing with a market that was oversubscribed and underregulated. This led to chaos on the front lines with our health care workers having to reuse masks or use trash bags as gowns in an effort to try and protect themselves.

Efforts by the Federal government to address supply shortages have also been marred by problems. These problems, including lack of coordination, have plagued the entire Federal response. The initial response was disorganized and wasted valuable time that could have been used to better prepare for what was to come. These problems continue today:

Rear Admiral Polowczyk, head of the Supply Chain Stabilization Task Force, recently testified that the Federal government still does not have information on the state stockpiles of PPE and other supplies.

Or, Project Airbridge, which has now been retired, but where reports have stated that many additionally, states and cities were not aware whether supplies brought into the country through the Project Airbridge initiative were coming into their jurisdictions.

Further, the shipments of PPE that FEMA coordinated to nursing homes around the country were defective or an insufficient supply.

Finally, Federal government contracts for supplies were not vetted properly before being awarded. This includes a \$10 million contract to Fillakit for testing supplies that the Agency then had to tell states not to use because the supplies were produced in unsanitary conditions.

Given FEMA's history of procurement failures, Congress must conduct rigorous oversight to ensure past problems are fixed going forward. Neglecting to correct these mistakes will result in unnecessary lives

lost—an outcome we all want to avoid. Getting it right as soon as possible is especially important as there are growing reports of PPE shortages once again as states see a steep increase in new cases.

To help explore these topics, I'm glad that we have such an esteemed panel of experts here to help shed light on how we can do better in procuring and distributing supplies.

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