

Ranking Member Peters Opening Statement
Full Committee Hearing: The Testimony of Anthony Fauci
As Prepared for Delivery
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee has a long and proud history of conducting serious oversight on behalf of the American people.

When this Committee has been at its best, Democrats and Republicans have worked together to investigate complicated issues, follow the facts wherever they lead, and produce recommendations that strengthen our nation's security and improve government functions.

That bipartisan tradition has produced meaningful work following Hurricane Katrina, the January 6th attack on the Capitol, failures at the Secret Service, and countless other matters.

Unfortunately, today's hearing is the latest step in the Chairman's sharp departure from that tradition.

This hearing appears to be the culmination of months of biased and selective efforts by the majority under the guise of a "Committee" investigation, to legitimize a predetermined conclusion reached years ago.

Since 2021, the Chairman has called for today's witness to be fired, to be arrested, and has accused him of leading cover-ups and conspiracies. He has even featured the witness prominently in fundraising materials and on the cover of his book. He has also called for the cancelation of the witness's security detail, despite the fact that the witness and his family have received credible death threats.

When I served as Chairman, Senator Paul and I launched a bipartisan biosecurity investigation that included oversight of risky research and the origins of COVID-19 because we agreed that the Committee's work would be stronger if it was bipartisan and followed the facts. That was and continues to be an area of legitimate and needed oversight.

As Chairman, Senator Paul has taken the opposite approach. He has abandoned longstanding practice by blocking minority participation in Committee oversight actions and chosen to selectively release Committee records the minority has not been given access to in order to support his own pre-drawn conclusions.

The Chairman has repeatedly excluded the Committee's minority and withheld documents and evidence from Members entitled to review them, disregarding longstanding Senate rules and Committee precedent that have preserved the credibility of our oversight work for decades.

I have raised these concerns directly with the Chairman because it's not just what we investigate that matters, how we conduct the investigation matters too. One-sided investigations designed to

validate predetermined conclusions do not serve the American people, who sent us here to uncover the truth and solve problems.

I wrote to the Chairman requesting that he adhere to Committee rules. Instead of addressing the concerns I raised, he removed part of the Committee's website from public view. This move not only prevented the public from being able to view my list of concerns – it adds to serious questions about the desire for transparency and legitimate oversight of this matter.

But what makes today's hearing particularly disappointing is not simply the Chairman's actions, but what we could be using this Committee's time and oversight responsibilities to accomplish instead.

This Committee has not held its annual threats hearing at all this Congress, and we have not held a budget hearing for the Department of Homeland Security. These are important hearings where we would have the opportunity to discuss how to strengthen our homeland security across the board.

Instead of focusing on the national security challenges we are facing right now, today's hearing looks backwards, revisiting questions this Committee has already examined, including through bipartisan work that Senator Paul and I conducted together when I served as Chairman. Rather than building on that work to strengthen our preparedness against future disasters, we are instead relitigating the past.

COVID-19 exposed serious deficiencies in our nation's public health infrastructure. More than one million Americans lost their lives, and this Committee should absolutely continue examining how we can better prepare our nation against future biological threats.

Those are the kinds of forward-looking, life-saving questions that will help our nation be better prepared to protect the health and safety of Americans when the next emergency occurs.

Unfortunately, at precisely the moment we should be strengthening those capabilities, the Trump Administration seems to be doing everything in its power to weaken them.

The Administration has hollowed out the public health workforce. They have fired, pushed out, and cut funding for public health personnel – shrinking CDC's workforce by a quarter.

Thousands of experienced scientists have left government service, and with them has gone critical institutional knowledge that cannot be easily or quickly replaced.

The Administration, thanks to political operatives like Russell Vought, has slashed or illegally withheld funding for life-saving medicines and the cutting-edge technologies that let us rapidly develop them during an emergency.

Mr. Vought is now further politicizing the federal grantmaking process, proposing to subject all federal grants, including those for disaster relief, housing development, and cancer research, to the whims of political appointees – not the nonpartisan experts.

All of this has left the American people more vulnerable to infectious disease threats, and we are already tragically seeing the consequences.

Staffing and funding cuts have slowed the federal, state, and local responses to the ongoing outbreak of a foodborne parasite which has sickened thousands in my home state of Michigan and across the country.

At the same time, the Administration's cuts to global health programs and international partnerships have greatly reduced our ability to contain dangerous diseases like Ebola before they spread to our shores.

We should be examining whether our federal health agencies have the personnel and resources they need to effectively prevent, detect, and respond to these threats. We should be asking how to strengthen our biodefense efforts to deter our adversaries and prevent biological attacks against our country, and how our government can better coordinate and communicate during public health emergencies. These are the kinds of forward-looking matters that are worthy of this Committee's time.

Instead, we are here continuing the Chairman's years-long focus on one individual.

History tells us another pandemic is all but inevitable. The question is whether Congress – and this Committee – will work to better prepare our country for it or continue looking backward while our public health infrastructure crumbles around us. That is the hearing we should be having today. Unfortunately, I fear the intent of this hearing is only meant to further a purely partisan agenda and won't make Americans safer.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.