

**Chairman Casey's Opening Statement
"COVID-19 One Year Later: Addressing Health Care Needs for At-Risk Americans"
March 18, 2020**

OPENING STATEMENT

"Good morning everyone, I want to welcome both new and returning members to the first hearing of this Committee for the 117th Congress.

"I am delighted that Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina will serve as the Committee's new Ranking Member. Senator Scott has been an active member of this Committee, and I look forward to working with him closely during this Congress.

"I particularly want to welcome the new members of the Committee, we have three: Senator Mark Kelly of Arizona, Senator Raphael Warnock of Georgia, and Senator Mike Lee of Utah. I look forward to all of your contributions over the next two years.

"We know that the Aging Committee has historically been a committee that fosters both bipartisanship and collaboration. As Chairman, I hope to adopt that same spirit of bipartisanship and advance an agenda to build health and economic security for seniors, people with disabilities and their families.

"Today's hearing will focus on the continuing and grave threat to those Americans and our Nation as a whole—the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects it has had on the health of people most at-risk due to the virus.

"We have lost more than 24,600 Pennsylvanians to this pandemic; these were our mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, sisters, brothers, neighbors and friends. We all know that older adults have suffered the brunt of the pandemic, accounting for 81 percent of all deaths.

"A tragedy within the broader tragedy of this pandemic has taken place in our Nation's long-term care settings where more than 178,000 residents and workers combined have died from COVID-19.

"Our witnesses today will help us better understand where we are one year into the pandemic.

“This is an important conversation, and it comes just one week after President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan into law. This historic legislation advances a bold vision to defeat the virus and begin to rebuild our economy.

“Through the American Rescue Plan, working families will have more money in their pockets, our children will return to school safely and everyone who wants to can be vaccinated. This bill ensures that home and community-based services are available for seniors and people with disabilities and will help put food on tables.

“The bill strengthens our long-term care workforce, provides resources to ensure the heroes on the front-lines have personal protective equipment, testing supplies and even premium pay.

“The bright light at the end of this dark tunnel are of course vaccines. Distribution and administration of the vaccine is the one of the greatest challenges the Nation has faced in our lifetimes. Getting the vaccine into people’s arms has been a huge undertaking.

“Local churches, senior service agencies, and many other members of our communities met this challenge head on, helping seniors and driving people to appointments. This bill gives states and communities the funding they need to further this important work and vaccinate those who need it the most.

“The plan will help us rise to the occasion and build on the progress President Biden and his Administration have made in the last two months.

“But the actions we are taking now are only the beginning. Our work is not done.

“This pandemic has highlighted long-standing injustices facing many Americans. We must enact policies to address the injustices that have plagued communities of color, people with disabilities and older adults for far too long.

“The conversation we are having today is just the beginning of a much longer and critically important dialogue for this Committee. But I look forward to the work of the Committee on these important issues and hearing from our witnesses today.”

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