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Opening Statement Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney Hearing on “Coronavirus Preparedness and Response” March 11, 2020

Good morning. I want to thank everyone for being here for this important hearing. Let me say at the outset that our thoughts go out to everyone who is sick or is in isolation, including two Members of our very own Committee—our colleague Mark Meadows, the incoming White House Chief of Staff, and Congressman Gosar, who cannot be here to participate in today’s hearing.

We are now in the middle of a global health emergency. Our response as a nation must be swift, it must be coordinated, and it must be based on science and the facts. That’s what we all want—on a bipartisan basis.

Unfortunately, when we look at the last three months objectively, it’s clear that strategic errors and a failure of leadership impaired our nation’s ability to respond to this outbreak. This, in turn, endangers us all.

Let’s start with testing. The Trump Administration’s testing for coronavirus has been severely inadequate, plagued by missteps, and resulted in substantial deficiencies in our ability to determine who may be infected.

Yesterday, Director Redfield testified that CDC has tested about 4,900 people. By comparison, South Korea tested more than 66,000 people within just one week of its first case of community transmission. South Korea has now tested more than 196,000 people, but we aren’t even close to that. They started conducting drive-through testing, but people here in the United States can’t even get tested by their own doctors.

This is the United States of America. We are supposed to be leading the world. Instead, we are trailing far behind. How did South Korea test so many people so quickly, but we didn’t test even a fraction of that number? Why did it take us so long? We must do better.

Unfortunately, these delays have been systemic. Just last week, the Trump Administration promised to deliver a million tests by the end of the week. But it didn’t come close. On Sunday, they admitted that they delivered only 75,000. That’s more than 900,000 tests short. And this was their own stated goal to the American people.

Now, the Trump Administration is saying they have distributed a million tests and will be distributing four million by the end of this week. But that's difficult to believe given their record.

We need facts. We need information. And we need it quickly. If we don't have testing, we don't know the full scope of the problem. We don't know where community transmission is happening. We don't know where to direct resources. We are operating in the dark.

My question is whether President Trump is exacerbating the crisis by downplaying it. Over and over again, he has made blatant misstatements that consistently diminish this crisis, and negatively affect our preparations and response.

Last week, President Trump said: "anybody that needs a test gets a test." He said, "the tests are beautiful."

He was absolutely wrong.

The same is true of President Trump's top advisors. Larry Kudlow, the President's top economic advisor, made this incredible statement two weeks ago:

"We have contained this. I won't say airtight, but pretty close to airtight. ...The business side and the economic side, I don't think it's going to be an economic tragedy at all. ...The numbers are saying the U.S. [is] holding up nicely."

He could not have been more wrong. The stock market just had one of the worst weeks in history with the single biggest point drop of all time.

The President and his aides may think they are helping with political spin and happy-talk. But the American people want the truth. We need facts. We need accurate information.

The CDC has now reported more than 647 cases across 36 states. But according to experts at Johns Hopkins and others, the real number is far higher. My home state of New York has 173 confirmed cases. And every Member of Congress is worried about their constituents.

As we proceed this morning, I would like to recognize several of our Subcommittee Chairmen for their tremendous leadership. This is truly a team effort.

Chairman Lynch of the National Security Subcommittee held a hearing last year on our nation's biodefense capacity, and he paved the way for today's hearing. Chairman Krishnamoorthi of the Economic and Consumer Policy Subcommittee has been focused on the effects of this crisis on consumers. And Chairman Connolly of the Government Operations Subcommittee has been working with states and localities on the frontlines of our response efforts.

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