

Ranking Member Tim Scott's Opening Statement

Hearing: COVID-19 One Year Later: Addressing Health Care Needs for At-Risk Americans

Date: 03/18/21

Thank you Chairman Casey, and congratulations on your new chairmanship. I look forward to continuing the long tradition of having the Aging Committee be the most bipartisan Committee in the United States Senate, and hopefully in all of Congress. It is certainly a wonderful opportunity for me as the Ranking Member to lead our side in the conversation around the issues of the aging community.

I think back to my own life and my mother Frances Scott who was a nurse's assistant. So many of the folks who are on the front lines are CNA's in nursing homes, and having been raised by a single mother who spent 16 hours a day working in hospitals. I thank God for someone who instilled in me the dignity of hard work and of focusing on going the extra mile for those who cannot do it for themselves. That is something that I hope that we as a Committee can focus on. I do also want to welcome all the new committee members to this committee.

Interestingly enough, by the year 2034 the seniors in America will for the first time outnumber the children in America. That means we are literally sitting on the type of transformation in our country that requires complete and total focus on improving the quality of the outcome of our aging population. Unlike Bob who seems to not have aged at all, I am aware of the fact that I continue to age myself.

Nearly 18 percent of South Carolina's population or 900,000 people in South Carolina are over the age of 65. The Demographic shifts highlights the importance of the Aging Committee and the work we will have to do in the years to come. I will certainly champion every single day the priorities of those folks who continue to age, including issues of financial security and healthcare, these are two pillars that must be our focus on the Aging Committee.

I also want to extend my gratitude to the entire healthcare community as they confronted COVID-19 in a way that brought tears to our eyes, a lump to our throats and warmth to our hearts. We were heartened by those who were literally going into dangerous places because of this COVID-19 pandemic. Nurses and doctors traveling across this country to the hot spots, and once again I focus on those who are CNA's who were working in nursing homes; where we see nearly 40 percent of all deaths in America come out of nursing home facilities.

That means so many folks who were on the front line trying their best to save a life, and 60 to 70 percent of those folks who are CNA's are African Americans, and about 80

percent of them are women. So we can't say it often enough, I certainly can't say it often enough, thank you. Thank you for your willingness to be the difference for so many people who are trapped without their loved ones, isolated and scared. You were their loved ones, you were their extended family, and for that our nation will always be grateful.

When this Committee held its first hearing on COVID-19 last May the idea that we would find a way to a vaccine quickly was according to NBC news "impossible", and it would take a miracle they said, and thank God for miracles. Operation Warp Speed was that miracle, and in a historic fashion President Trump's administration, partnering with the private sector found a way to bring a vaccine to the market, so that in December, less than nine months or so after the virus started we had a vaccine being shot into arms. He also purchased three million doses from three different companies which allowed us to see the revolutionary start that we seen.

I am also thankful and welcome president Biden's declaration that by the middle of May every single American adult will have an opportunity to be vaccinated if they want to. This is a very important point because as we watch the roll out today the numbers in the African American community and the Hispanic community are lower than we want them to be. We are going to have to shore up vaccine confidence and availability. Our rural community suffers the same fate in so many ways, they too need easier access to the vaccine. We need to do a better job of making sure that our seniors and all of our Americans in our rural land scape understand the importance of getting the vaccine and participating in this process.

South Carolina has certainly been a model of transparency though out the pandemic, I look at the fact that 40 percent of the deaths nationwide have come out of the nursing homes and in the state of South Carolina has been around 20 percent. I think what we want to see nationwide is a real focus on helping us improve the outcomes in nursing homes throughout this nation and specifically for our senior population throughout his nation, and to me this is common sense. Increasing funding for the production and distribution for the COVID-19 vaccine is incredibly important for us to focus our attention to focus on the logistics right now is necessary.

The one thing I will say about the COVID-19 relief package that was disappointing, was that 1 percent of the resources went to more vaccinations production and only 9 percent went specifically on the health care issues on the vaccine.

This is one of the reasons why many of us on the right had troubles with this package because too few dollars actually focused on the COVID-19 challenge we have before us and too many dollars focused on a progressive policy position that is not supported by the right.

We love the days in 2020 when we all voted, and 90 plus Senators voted for five different packages, and I certainly hope we find ourselves back letting the Aging

Committee leading the Senators in a bipartisan fashion presenting solutions to the American people that we could all be proud of. I thank you all to the witnesses for being here with us today, and I look forward to the meaningful dialogue about the way forward, thank you Chairman Casey.