



NATIONAL GRANGE

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American Values. Hometown Roots.

March 3, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor & Pensions
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor & Pensions
217 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

As Americans around the country contended with this devastating pandemic, the federal government facilitated the fastest vaccine development in human history and has so far delivered nearly 30 million doses to medical facilities nationwide. In addition, there continue to be several promising candidates in clinical trials, including a vaccine delivered orally that has the potential to solve the logistics puzzle of this deadly virus.

The vaccine race has been a triumph, but, even so, roadblocks still stand in the way of mass immunization and an end to this crisis. Policymakers and government agencies must work together to diversify research and investment efforts in order to reach all corners of the country and all members of our diverse national family.

Rural and underserved communities, which have long struggled with limited access to health care services, have been some of the hardest hit by the pandemic. A disproportionate number of poor, elderly, and those with chronic health conditions live in rural areas, and they do not have broad access to care and higher-quality medical facilities. Millions of the most vulnerable Americans, who should be at the front of the line for a vaccine, are getting bumped to the back through no fault of their own. What facilities do exist have been battling just to stay afloat. In April, before the pandemic burned into summer, nearly half of rural hospitals were operating at a loss.

Add in skepticism about vaccines and the latest surge in cases and hospitalizations, and you find beleaguered systems under unprecedented pressure, trying to serve some of the sickest patients with vaccines in short supply. Current vaccination options are a medical miracle, but they are not effective if facilities cannot receive them because of distribution difficulties and infrastructure requirements – not to mention some patients' inability to reach the few options that do exist.

We have seen what government-backed innovation can accomplish, and rural communities are in desperate need for more. All options must be on the table, from investing in different vaccination methods – including an oral vaccine – to more robust distribution practices.

The progress we have made is unprecedented, but we still have so much more to do before we can successfully end this plague in every American farm, crossroads, and small town. We urge the committee to recognize the need to support further diverse innovation efforts.

Moreover, we welcome the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss the strategy for ensuring an equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, including to those Americans living in rural communities. We are confident that, if the government continues to invest in further vaccine options, more Americans – especially the most vulnerable living in America’s rural heartland – will be protected from this virus now and for years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Betsy E. Huber". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Betsy Huber, President
The National Grange