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SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

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Chairman James E. Clyburn
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis
Briefing on “The Devastating Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic
in America’s Nursing Homes”

June 11, 2020

Thanks to our panelists and Members for joining us at today’s briefing.

40,000. That is the latest estimate of how many Americans in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities have lost their lives as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

The men and women who died in these nursing homes were parents and grandparents who sacrificed to provide for their families. Some were veterans who fought to protect our country.

Many were essential workers who kept showing up to care for the elderly and the sick, even when it meant risking their own lives as our nation faced more deaths from coronavirus than any other country on Earth.

So, let us be clear. These 40,000 Americans deserved better. Their deaths represent a failure of our nation to protect our people. We had warning. In February, the coronavirus attacked the Life Care Center in Kirkland, Washington. Three quarters of residents at that facility became infected with the virus, along with dozens of staff. 37 people died.

Four months later, nursing home residents or workers have been infected in every single state in the country. Nursing home residents have died from the virus in every state in the continental United States.

Many of these deaths could have been prevented, and we must ensure more lives are not lost unnecessarily.

We know that personal protective equipment like masks and gloves can help stop the spread of the virus. But without a comprehensive national plan to acquire and distribute PPEs, many nursing homes ran out. Workers were forced to reuse masks, create their own, or go without.

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Even today, these shortages continue. Federal data shows that more than 500 nursing homes lack N95 masks. More than 250 nursing homes have run out of surgical masks, and another 800 are close to running out. Hundreds of other nursing homes face critical shortages of gowns, hand sanitizer, and other supplies.

We know that rapid and frequent testing can save lives. Last month, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services recommended that nursing homes test all residents and staff. But without a comprehensive national testing plan and distribution of testing supplies, nursing homes in at least half of the states are unable to conduct the recommended testing.

We also know that healthy, safe nursing homes need to be fully staffed with workers who are treated well and paid fairly. Yet, many facilities have cut staffing to boost profits, while paying workers little more than minimum wage and providing no health insurance or paid leave.

Think about that for a moment.

If a nursing home worker feels sick, they may have no choice but to report to work anyway or risk losing their only means of supporting themselves and their families.

We must do better.

I hope that today's briefing will help lead us to simple, clear steps that the federal government can take now to protect vulnerable Americans in nursing homes who are relying on us to get this right. That includes stronger oversight and more federal leadership on testing and protective equipment.

Today, we will hear from briefers about the suffering at our nation's nursing homes. I am particularly grateful to Alison Lolley, whose mother tragically died after contracting the coronavirus in a nursing home in Monroe, Louisiana. Ms. Lolley, thank you for agreeing to join us today to share your story.

I also want to recognize that members of our Committee have been personally affected by the coronavirus crisis in our long-term care facilities.

Chairwoman Waters, I want to thank you for joining us in this important briefing and again extend my deepest condolences for the loss of your sister.

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Now, I am aware that some have tried to make deaths in our nation's nursing homes a partisan issue. I hope we won't fall into that trap today. Nursing homes residents have died from the coronavirus in states governed by Republicans and Democrats, in big cities and in small towns, in rural and urban communities. What unites them is that they are all Americans, and our nation's government must take responsibility for keeping them safe.

With that, I will turn to the distinguished Ranking Member, Mr. Scalise, for his opening remarks.