



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE
STATEMENT

**Opening Statement of Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), Republican Leader
Committee on Education and Labor Hearing:
“Inequities Exposed: How COVID-19 Widened Racial Inequities in Education,
Health, and the Workforce”
June 22, 2020**

(As prepared for delivery)

“Mr. Chairman, you’ve heard me express my concerns about these virtual Committee hearings, but it bears repeating – they fly in the face of 230 years of congressional and legislative precedent. These virtual events undermine what our Founders intended when they created our representative republic. Americans are stepping up to help combat this virus, while their elected leaders in the House, entrusted with the job of representing their constituents, stay home. It’s SHAMEFUL. A number of my Republican colleagues and I are participating in this hearing today from the Committee hearing room in Washington, DC. I encourage you to return to congressional precedent and hold our hearings in person.

Turning to the topic of today’s virtual hearing, the coronavirus and related state-imposed shutdowns have caused devastating job losses and unemployment rates not seen since the Great Depression. Additionally, schools were forced to close their doors abruptly and switch to remote learning overnight, which impacted 97 percent of our country’s students.

But let’s remember that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. economy and labor market were strong. Real GDP increased 2.3 percent in 2019 and 2.9 percent in 2018. In February 2020, the unemployment rate was at a historic low of 3.5 percent. Black unemployment was 5.4 percent in August 2019, the lowest ever recorded. In September 2019, the Hispanic unemployment rate was 3.9 percent, also the lowest ever recorded. And in June 2019, Asian unemployment was a record-low 2.1 percent.

Furthermore, at the beginning of 2020, workers in the bottom 10 percent of income had higher average wage growth than those in the top 10 percent. By January 2020, low-income earners saw a 15 percent increase in pay since the President took office.

However, we know that Americans, including minority communities, have felt the negative effects of these unprecedented times. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that blacks and Hispanics account for nearly 40 percent of COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. Minority communities have also been impacted economically by pandemic-related shutdowns, with the rate of black-owned businesses falling 41 percent, Hispanic-owned businesses falling 32 percent, and Asian-owned businesses falling 26 percent.

We know the pro-growth policies enacted by congressional Republicans and the Trump administration benefited workers, employers, and families before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reopening the economy responsibly and ensuring public health are NOT mutually exclusive. We can, and we must, open America again while taking into consideration the recommendations from our public health officials. Look at the May jobs report for proof. Last month, 2.5 million jobs were added to the economy—a significant indicator that reopening the economy safely is the best way to help all Americans get back on their feet. Also, just last week the Wall Street Journal reported that “new layoffs are being offset by employers hiring or recalling workers as states have allowed more businesses to reopen in recent weeks.”

The White House and CDC have issued ‘Guidelines for Opening Up America Again.’ These detailed guidelines—which include three phases based on professional guidance from public health officials—are intended to help state and local leaders make timely decisions about reopening the economy and getting people back to work while protecting lives.

And in fact, every state has started implementing phased reopening plans, allowing non-essential businesses to reopen and operate safely, allowing employees to return to work, and allowing Americans to begin resuming daily activities.

As I previously mentioned, the pre-pandemic economy—ushered in under the Republican-led Congress and the Trump administration—benefited workers, employers, and families alike. Unemployment was at record lows, including minority unemployment; low-income earners saw a 15 percent increase in pay; and 7 million jobs were available and ready to be filled.

If we hope to achieve pre-pandemic economic conditions that enabled Americans to flourish and reach their greatest potential, we must continue forging a forward-looking path to help minority communities to recover and prosper as they were prior to the pandemic.

The nation's economic recovery and path to prosperity for all Americans is contingent upon reopening our nation's schools and businesses safely and responsibly. Mandating further top-down federal laws and policies as proposed by House Democrats will only compound the challenges that all Americans currently face as we continue to combat COVID-19.

I want to thank the witnesses for participating in this hearing, but I hope that in the future we can have all our witnesses testifying here with us in Washington as we work in person on behalf of hardworking Americans.”

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