

Prepared Statement of Ranking Member Richard Burr
Executive Session on the PREVENT Pandemics Act

March 15, 2022

Good morning. This legislation before us is a true milestone in recognizing lessons learned during our nation's pandemic response, and the Chair and I want to thank each of our colleagues for their efforts to bring us to this markup today.

I am pleased that the Committee is building on the bipartisan foundation of three decades worth of work to enhance the preparedness policies that our country has relied on to respond to this terrible pandemic.

My friends, we should remember that this Committee last acted on preparedness legislation in May 2018 to reauthorize the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act.

While we knew it was an important bill at the time, we had no idea just how much our work then would impact our daily lives now.

When COVID-19 first arrived in the United States two years ago, Congress responded in a bipartisan and unprecedented way to bring relief to Americans and shore up our country's response.

In my 27 years in Congress, I have rarely seen this body move so quickly – an extremely difficult task.

The work of this Committee was the foundation of the government's response.

Our Committee must once again step up to the task of considering legislation that will help us be better prepared against future threats.

All of us on this Committee have spent countless hours compiling policies that drive at one point – how do we do it better next time.

I am proud of the work we have done together. The PREVENT Pandemics Act is a very good bill.

The central issue facing us today is how can we better anticipate what threat we will face next, and innovate quickly enough to rise to the challenge.

The future, unfortunately, is hard to predict.

I introduced one of my first pieces of preparedness legislation in 2001.

At the time, I knew that we needed rapid medical response teams to surge for emergency events.

So, I wrote a bill to create the National Disaster Medical System, which still plays a key role in surging to address pockets with high COVID-19 cases across the country. One of these teams was sent to North Carolina just six weeks ago.

What I've learned is that when we write preparedness legislation we do not always know what our tools will be used for, but we know that we need them.

Over the last two years we have learned that more effective leadership is needed to direct and coordinate the work of federal departments during a response. So, we have created the White House mission control office to bring a unified, whole-of-government approach to responses and to keep us sharp during peace time.

During each of our hearings, members on both sides of the aisle rightfully challenged the CDC for their actions, confusing directives, and inability to provide realistic guidance to Americans. Through this bill, we are putting into place real, meaningful reforms that take important steps to improve the culture of the CDC, which desperately needs changing.

Along with cultural reforms at the CDC, the modernization of public health data and surveillance capabilities will be key in providing early warning signs of the next threat we face. I especially appreciate the work of Senators Cassidy, Romney, Hickenlooper and Kaine to bring these capabilities into the 21st century.

Senators Cassidy, Romney, Collins, Marshall, Smith, and Hassan identified critical gaps in our medical supply capabilities, so we are adding new tools to engage states and private industry in stockpiling and ensuring that we maintain a warm base for countermeasure manufacturing.

Senators Marshall, Braun, and Paul helped to highlight vulnerabilities in our research enterprise. This legislation brings a new strategy to federal high-

containment labs in the US, reforms our approach to overseeing federally funded research with high-risk pathogens, and protects American innovation against the efforts of our adversaries to steal our discoveries.

The historic success of Operation Warp Speed illustrated the importance of countermeasure research. Senators Hickenlooper, Braun, and Kaine worked to incorporate provisions ensure access to virus samples to help bring tests, treatments, and vaccines to Americans in record time.

The FDA stood out as a success among our public health agencies, leaning heavily on its emergency authorities this committee provided.

This bill builds on that success, creating a new designated pathway for platform technologies to support the technologies we saw create life-saving vaccines and therapeutics, and a program to support advanced manufacturing technologies, an effort led by Senators Scott and Rosen. Senator Scott has also championed policies to encourage broader use of innovative and adaptive clinical trial designs, which are included in this bill.

Ultimately, we learned that countless lives were saved because of new and creative partnerships with the private sector. This bill preserves and encourages these partnerships, so that next time they are not stood up on the fly, but are established, well-oiled agreements with innovative partners.

My colleagues worked on many more provisions included in this legislation – all with the same preparedness focus for the threats of tomorrow. With this bill, Americans can rest assured that we will be ready with better tools, better partners, a stronger workforce, and more leadership, for the next threat that we will face.

I was pleased to also work with the Chair to authorize ARPA-H so that we establish a framework by which to advance breakthrough technologies that will revolutionize biomedical science. By partnering with innovators across sectors and fostering an environment where innovation is the norm, I hope that this will result in the discovery of platform technology to treat and cure many diseases.

Our manager's amendment makes many important improvements to the bill we introduced last week and adds many of your important priorities to make this legislation stronger. I appreciate the work of you and your staff to make these improvements.

As we open this bill up for amendment and debate, I would like to ask my colleagues to resist the temptation to add legislation that is not related to preparedness policies to this bill. This legislation should stay focused on the important task at hand.

I look forward to working with you to continue to improve the bill both here in Committee and as we work to move the bill to the Senate Floor and to the

House. My hope is that the President will be able to sign this bill into law as soon as possible.

Madam Chair, thank you for the long hours and hard work that have gone into this bill. What we are doing is important and reflects the best traditions of this Committee.

I thank the chair.