

*Regional
Bodies*

United States Senate



CHAIR: To Be Announced

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December 7th

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Letter from the Chair

To be Posted!

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A Note on Committee Procedure

This committee will be run the same as a standard GA committee, with working papers and resolutions, with one notable exception: the senators have the same powers and abilities as the actual senate. This includes the ability for delegates to have enforceable solutions, which is different from a standard UN body, which is limited to advising rather than mandating policies and solutions. Furthermore, for the sake of the ease of our chairs and the ease of delegates, we will not have the delegates write bills; instead, we will have them adhere to the standard GA format. Additionally, due to the lack of a house body (which has the exclusive power to levy taxes), this senate body will have the authority to raise taxes in their resolutions. For any questions on committee procedure, please contact our USG of Regional bodies, Liana Moldovanu (regional_gwcia@email.gwu.edu).

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Committee description

Welcome to the Senate committee! This unique MUN committee will provide you with the opportunity to represent a body that makes decisions on the everyday lives of Americans. The Senate was established by the constitution of the United States and is made up of 100 representatives, two from each state, known as Senators. Senators serve terms of 6 years and there are no limits on how long a senator can serve. The current longest-serving senator is Chuck Grassley, who has served as an Iowa senator since 1981 (over 43 years!).

The Senate is one-half of the legislative branch, which is the part of the government that writes and creates laws that govern the country. The other half of the legislative branch is the House of Representatives, which has 435 members from the 50 states, with a different number of representatives for each state based on population. The representatives are elected every 2 years and are usually responsible for creating any legislation that requires taxes to be raised from the people.

The Senate is responsible for ratifying treaties that the president signs and approving presidential appointments, such as Supreme Court justices and ambassadors. The Senate writes legislation on both domestic (within the United States) and foreign (outside the United States) policy issues. The legislation they write impacts not only the lives of 333.3 million Americans but also billions of people around the world.

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Topic 1: Infectious Disease Spread

Background

The United States has faced many serious infectious disease outbreaks throughout its history, each shaping how we handle public health today. Smallpox arrived with European settlers in the 17th century, causing high death rates until the vaccine in the 1800s led to its eradication. Yellow fever hit port cities like Philadelphia in the late 1700s, killing thousands before mosquito control measures helped. Cholera outbreaks in the 1800s spread through dirty water, highlighting the need for better sanitation. The 1918 flu pandemic, known as the Spanish flu, infected millions and caused many deaths, leading to better ways to manage viral outbreaks. Polio scared the nation in the early 1900s, causing paralysis and death in children until vaccines nearly eradicated it. In 2009, the H1N1 flu, or swine flu, spread quickly but was controlled with vaccines. The 2014 Ebola scare improved our disease response plans. Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic caused widespread illness and death starting in 2019, leading to lockdowns, mask mandates, and vaccines. These events have taught us the importance of vaccines, good hygiene, and being prepared for future health crises.

Each year in the United States, various infectious diseases spread, affecting many people across the country. Common illnesses like the flu see a significant increase during the fall and winter months, leading to millions of cases and thousands of hospitalizations and deaths annually. Other respiratory illnesses, such as the common cold and RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus), also peak during these colder months. Foodborne illnesses, caused by bacteria like Salmonella and E. coli, occur throughout the year but can see spikes during summer due to outdoor eating and improper food handling. Vector-borne diseases (diseases that are spread by other living creatures), such as Lyme disease and West Nile virus, rise during the warmer months when ticks and

mosquitoes are most active. Additionally, there are periodic outbreaks of more serious diseases, such as measles or mumps, often in areas with lower vaccination rates. Health officials continuously monitor these diseases to implement measures like vaccination campaigns, public health advisories, and hygiene education to help reduce the spread and impact of infectious diseases yearly.

Past and Current National Action

The history of laws and legislative action on infectious diseases in the United States is marked by several key developments aimed at protecting public health. One of the earliest significant actions was the creation of the Marine Hospital Service in 1798, which later evolved into the U.S. Public Health Service. This agency was established to provide medical care to sick and injured seamen and to prevent the spread of infectious diseases from entering the country via ports. In the early 20th century, the Public Health Service Act of 1944 was a landmark law that consolidated and expanded federal efforts to control infectious diseases, granting broad authority to the Surgeon General. Another pivotal moment came with the establishment of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1946, initially focused on combating malaria but later expanding its mission to include all communicable diseases. Over the decades, additional laws have been enacted, such as the National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act of 1986, which established a compensation program for vaccine-related injuries and promoted vaccine safety. More recently, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010 included provisions for the prevention and public health fund, aimed at enhancing the country's preparedness and response to infectious diseases.

In response to ongoing and emerging health threats, several current bills in the U.S. Congress aim to enhance the country's ability to manage infectious diseases. One

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notable piece of legislation is the "Strengthening Public Health Workforce Act," which seeks to increase funding and resources for public health departments and improve workforce training to better respond to infectious disease outbreaks. Another significant bill is the "Improving Pandemic Preparedness and Response Act," designed to address gaps revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This bill proposes creating a permanent supply of critical medical supplies, improving disease surveillance systems, and establishing clear protocols for federal and state cooperation during health emergencies. Additionally, the "Vaccines for All Act" aims to ensure equitable access to vaccines by funding outreach programs and removing financial barriers for underserved communities. These bills reflect a proactive legislative approach to bolster the U.S.'s preparedness and response capabilities, ensuring that the country can more effectively manage future infectious disease threats.

Issues to Consider

Vaccine Access/Regulation: Improving vaccine access and regulation is crucial to containing infectious diseases. This includes national vaccination programs to ensure widespread access, funding for vaccine research and development, equitable distribution plans for underserved areas, public education campaigns on vaccine safety, and strict regulations to ensure vaccine quality.

Disease Tracking: Enhancing disease tracking involves developing robust surveillance systems for real-time monitoring, utilizing advanced data analytics and AI for predictive tracking, ensuring collaboration among health agencies, employing mobile health technology for remote data collection, and training a skilled workforce for epidemiological investigations.

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Creating Large-Scale Medical Capacity: Expanding large-scale medical capacity is necessary to manage patient surges. This can be achieved by increasing funding for hospitals, creating national stockpiles of medical supplies, establishing temporary medical facilities, maintaining a reserve of healthcare workers, and developing telemedicine platforms to provide remote care.

Public Health Education: Public health education is essential in preventing the spread of diseases. Launching campaigns to promote good hygiene practices, such as handwashing and proper respiratory etiquette, and providing clear, accurate information during outbreaks can help prevent misinformation and reduce disease transmission.

International Collaboration: Strengthening international collaboration is vital for coordinated responses to outbreaks. This includes partnering with global health organizations, participating in global surveillance networks to share information, and supporting efforts to improve healthcare infrastructure in low-resource countries to prevent outbreaks of diseases.

Quarantine and Isolation Protocols: Developing clear quarantine and isolation protocols helps prevent the spread of contagious diseases. This involves ensuring facilities and resources are available to support individuals, enforcing travel restrictions and screenings, and having guidelines in place to manage quarantines and isolations effectively.

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Research and Development: Investing in research and development is critical for finding new ways to combat infectious diseases. This includes funding for the development of new vaccines, treatments, and diagnostic tools, as well as supporting studies on disease transmission and the effectiveness of various containment strategies.

Healthcare System Strengthening: Strengthening the healthcare system's resilience involves improving primary care networks, enhancing system flexibility to handle surges in patient numbers, and implementing policies that ensure health insurance coverage and reduce financial barriers to accessing care.

Coordinated Response Plans: Creating well-coordinated response plans involves having clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders, ensuring effective communication, and regularly updating and testing the plans to address new threats. This ensures that responses to outbreaks are swift, organized, and effective.

Bloc Positions

Republicans

The Republican perspective on stopping the spread of infectious diseases focuses on personal responsibility, market solutions, and limited government action.

Republicans support making vaccines available and encouraging people to get vaccinated without making it mandatory. They believe in working with private companies to develop and distribute medical innovations quickly. Strengthening border security and having strict travel rules during outbreaks are seen as important steps.

They also think it's better to improve healthcare through technology and private sector incentives rather than expanding government-run programs. Republicans emphasize

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keeping individual freedoms and economic stability while implementing public health measures.

Democrats

The Democratic perspective on stopping the spread of infectious diseases focuses on strong government action, fair healthcare access, and following scientific advice. Democrats support mandatory vaccination programs to make sure most people are protected. They believe in increasing funding for public health agencies and research to develop vaccines and treatments. Improving the healthcare system, especially in areas that need it most, is a top priority, along with making sure everyone can afford healthcare. Democrats also want to have good systems for tracking diseases to quickly find and stop outbreaks. They support clear public health guidelines, like wearing masks and social distancing, to keep everyone safe and healthy.

Questions to Consider

- How has your senator voted on similar issues in the past?
- What solutions worked in the past and which ones did not?
- What funding is needed to put initiatives into place?
- What specific solutions are most going to benefit your senators' people?
- What additional factors need to be considered in order to address all aspects of a public health crisis?

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Topic 2: Access to Healthcare for Underserved Populations

Background

Access to healthcare for underserved populations is a critical issue in the United States, affecting millions of people, especially those in rural and low-income areas. Historically, these populations have faced significant barriers to obtaining necessary medical care, including a lack of healthcare facilities, financial constraints, and shortages of healthcare professionals. Despite efforts like the Social Security Act of 1935, Medicare and Medicaid in 1965, and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2010, disparities still exist. Rural areas often have fewer hospitals and doctors, making it harder for residents to receive timely care. Low-income individuals and minority communities also struggle with the cost of healthcare and limited access to quality services. These ongoing challenges highlight the need for continued policy efforts and innovative solutions to ensure equitable healthcare access for all underserved populations.

The current state of healthcare access in the United States shows that there have been improvements, but many challenges still exist. As of 2023, about 28 million people, or 8.6% of the population, do not have health insurance. This problem is worse for Black (9.7%) and Hispanic (16.3%) people compared to White (5.4%) and Asian (6.8%) people. Even with the help of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), many rural areas still struggle. People living in rural areas are 23% more likely to have trouble finding healthcare compared to those in cities. Over 80% of rural counties are considered medically underserved, meaning they don't have enough healthcare services such as hospitals, emergency rooms, and care facilities. Additionally, the cost of healthcare is a big issue. About 40% of adults said they delayed or skipped medical treatment in the past year because it was too expensive. These facts show that we need to keep working on making healthcare better and more fair for everyone in the United States.

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Past and Current National Action

Access to healthcare for underserved populations in the United States has been a long and challenging journey. In the early 20th century, healthcare was mainly available in cities, leaving rural and poor communities with little medical help. The Social Security Act of 1935 started to improve things by setting up public health programs. A big change came in 1965 with the creation of Medicare and Medicaid, which provided healthcare coverage for elderly people, low-income families, and people with disabilities. Even with these improvements, many rural and minority communities still struggled to get the healthcare they needed. In 2010, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) tried to make healthcare more accessible and affordable by expanding Medicaid and creating health insurance marketplaces. Despite these efforts, there are still gaps in access and quality of care, showing that more work is needed to ensure everyone gets the healthcare they need.

There are several bills previously proposed in Congress which would have improved healthcare access for underserved populations in the United States. One important bill is the "Health Equity and Accountability Act," which aims to provide better healthcare services to minority and low-income communities. Another key proposal is the "Rural Health Equity Act," which plans to increase funding for rural healthcare facilities, improve telehealth services, and support bringing more healthcare workers to rural areas. Additionally, the "Medicaid Expansion Act" seeks to expand Medicaid coverage in states that haven't done so yet, making sure more low-income individuals get the care they need. These bills show a strong effort to fix healthcare inequalities and make sure everyone, no matter where they live or how much money they have, can get quality healthcare.

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Topics to Consider

Expanding Medicaid Coverage: Expanding Medicaid coverage in states that have not yet adopted the expansion is crucial to ensuring that more low-income individuals receive healthcare. This expansion would provide access to essential medical services for millions who currently lack health insurance, reducing disparities and improving health outcomes in underserved populations.

Increasing Funding for Rural Healthcare: Increasing funding for rural healthcare facilities can significantly improve the infrastructure and resources available in these areas. Enhanced funding would allow for the construction of more clinics and hospitals, the purchase of advanced medical equipment, and the hiring of additional healthcare professionals, thereby improving access to care for rural residents.

Creating Telehealth Services: Enhancing and expanding telehealth services is a vital solution for providing remote medical consultations, especially in rural and underserved areas. Telehealth allows patients to connect with healthcare providers from their homes, reducing travel time and costs, and ensuring they receive timely medical advice and treatment.

Establishing Mobile Health Clinics: Deploying mobile health clinics can bring medical services directly to underserved communities. These clinics travel to areas with limited healthcare facilities, offering services such as vaccinations, screenings, and basic medical care, making healthcare more accessible to those in need.

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Healthcare Workforce Incentives: Offering incentives like loan repayment programs and bonuses can encourage healthcare professionals to work in underserved areas. These incentives help attract and retain doctors, nurses, and other medical staff in regions where there is a shortage, improving the availability and quality of care.

Community Health Programs: Developing and supporting community health programs can provide education, prevention, and treatment services locally. These programs can address specific health needs within the community, promote healthy lifestyles, and offer preventive care, which can reduce the overall burden on the healthcare system.

Affordable Health Insurance: Creating more affordable health insurance options is essential to reducing financial barriers to care. By offering lower-cost plans and subsidies, more individuals can afford health insurance, ensuring they have access to necessary medical services without the fear of high out-of-pocket costs.

Transportation Services: Providing transportation services for individuals who have difficulty accessing healthcare facilities due to distance or lack of transportation is vital. Services like shuttle buses, ride-sharing programs, and partnerships with local transit can help patients get to their appointments, ensuring they receive the care they need.

Public Health Campaigns: Conducting public health campaigns can raise awareness about available healthcare services and the importance of preventive care. These campaigns can educate the public on healthy practices, encourage regular check-ups, and inform communities about resources they may not be aware of, ultimately improving public health outcomes.

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Bloc Positions

Republicans

The Republican perspective on fixing unequal access to healthcare for underserved populations focuses on market-based solutions, personal responsibility, and giving more control to states. Republicans usually support expanding health savings accounts (HSAs) and offering tax breaks to help people afford private insurance. They believe that increasing competition among insurance companies can lower costs and improve quality. Republicans also favor giving states block grants for Medicaid, so states can decide how best to use federal funds to meet their people's needs. They stress the importance of encouraging innovation in healthcare, like using telehealth to reach underserved areas. Overall, the Republican approach aims to reduce government control and promote individual choice and state flexibility to address healthcare inequalities.

Democrats

The Democrats' way of fixing unequal access to healthcare for underserved groups focuses on government help, fairness, and making public programs bigger. Democrats want to expand Medicaid to cover more people with low incomes and close the gap in states where it's not available to everyone who needs it. They also want to make the Affordable Care Act (ACA) stronger by making health insurance cheaper and easier to get through subsidies and better outreach. Democrats think it's important to help with other things that affect health, like mental health services and community health centers, and to make sure everyone, no matter their race or how much money they have, can get good healthcare. Overall, Democrats believe that by working together and with help from the government, we can make sure everyone gets the care they need.

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Questions to Consider

- How can healthcare be made more affordable without compromising the quality of care?
- What barriers lie to increasing rural healthcare access?
- What shortcomings exist within the current system that cause these inequities?
- What resources should be put in place to help communities that face the worst healthcare access?
- What have other countries done to improve healthcare access to their underserved populations?

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