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## Congressman Adam Schiff Joined the Armenian American Medical Society for Virtual Town Hall Meeting on the COVID-19 Response

*The congressman discussed the latest developments in the COVID-19 pandemic and addressed AAMS members' questions.*



*Left to right* | Top row: Congressman Adam Schiff, Vicken Sepilian, MD, FACOG, Kevin Galstyan, MD, FACOG, Rami Apelian, MD, MPH. Middle row: Boris Bagdasarian, DO, Elizabeth Zoryan, RN, Jenia Jasmine Tahmasian, PharmD, Garni Barkhoudarian, MD, FAANS. Bottom row: Oganen Karapetian, DDS, Silva Karchikian, MD, Hasmik Keyribarian.

The Armenian American Medical Society hosted a virtual town hall featuring Congressman Adam Schiff to provide members with a congressional perspective on the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Schiff fielded questions from participants on a wide range of pandemic-related topics of both local and global importance.

“We are honored that Representative Schiff could join us for this important discussion,” said Kevin Galstyan, MD, president of the AAMS. “As medical professionals, many of our members are on the frontline of this pandemic. With the situation evolving daily, his candid remarks gave us a sense of what we can expect in the weeks and months ahead, and the best course of action to take regarding our practice, our patients, and our community.

Schiff acknowledged the urgency of developing a vaccine for this new virus but cautioned about the unrealistic expectations for the timeline. While experts say it can be accomplished in a year, he said that is considered lightning speed for vaccine development. “We need to get this vaccine right,” he said. “We need to make sure this vaccine is properly tested so we don’t make an already terrible situation even worse.”

The representative shared his thoughts on the roles the Federal government, the states, and municipalities should play in reopening the economy. He believes there should be Federal leadership on this matter and Federal social distancing guidelines in place. Because every state or municipality is not in a similar situation, Schiff feels they should not all be opened at

the same time. He urged collaboration between the Federal government and the states in relaxing the guidelines, so these efforts are coordinated for maximum effectiveness.

Rallies to push states to open before their ready have put increased pressure on governments, but Schiff is adamant they not be swayed by the protesters' demands. He noted these rallies are not spontaneous creations but are organized and funded by political groups. "If we are guided by politics instead of science, we will lose tens of thousands more lives needlessly," he said. "People will be exploiting the pandemic for political gain in the fall, one way or another. This is way too serious and deadly for that. To agitate and encourage protesters to ignore science will lead to more misery and death. We need to be very careful about how we approach this and make sure we have the testing, tracing, and capacity to isolate in place before we can re-open or we will just do the country more damage."

When asked about the possibility of a second wave of infections, Schiff believes the country will encounter a series of waves as social distancing is relaxed, resulting in flareups that need to be suppressed. "This is going to be with us for a while and I think it is important for us to speak to the American public plainly and realistically about it," said Schiff. "We see this happening in other countries, such as Singapore and Taiwan, where infections surge when social distancing is relaxed too soon. These countries reimpose distancing and tracing measures to control outbreaks."

Schiff concluded his remarks by recognizing the work of medical professionals. He recalled being moved while watching news interviews with healthcare providers in New York City. "These are people who see their patients die every day," he said. "They are devastated and exhausted. They are working their hearts out and giving everything they have to patients and their families, at the risk of their own health, while people are protesting to make the problem worse. Your voices right now are respected, and they are enormously important."

This town hall was a part of the AAMS' broader response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on our healthcare providers and communities. The organization instituted the AAMS CME/CDE Educational COVID-19 Expert Series webinar to deliver the latest developments and information on COVID-19 by experts on the front line of the pandemic. The AAMS also provides the community with updated COVID-19 resources.

Vicken Sepilian, MD, AAMS Vice President, served as moderator of the town hall meeting. "Most participants in this town hall meeting are healthcare professionals, not just from the U.S., but from across the globe—the Middle East, South America, Canada, Uruguay, and Europe," said Dr. Sepilian. "Through our virtual outreach, the AAMS can share the latest science that is available with our colleagues, our community, and our patients. Despite the political bickering and partisanship that is unfolding, our message is to look at the science and use the most sound information to best care for our communities."

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The AAMS, with more than 500 members, is the largest Armenian medical society in the Diaspora. Our directory of health practitioners is a vital resource for patients seeking care in various health-related disciplines and specialties. Our mission is to promote excellence in healthcare and to cultivate professional development through service and education to its members and their communities in the Diaspora and the homelands. We achieve this by offering community health education, humanitarian assistance, medical services, and outreach, as well as providing professional development and networking opportunities for our health practitioners.

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