March 18, 2021

The Honorable Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D.
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Collins,

We write to request information, assistance, and needed-leadership from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to advance an independent, scientific investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the worst public health crisis in the U.S. in about a hundred years. Over a year has passed since the deadly virus reached our shores and yet, the origin of the virus has yet to be determined. An independent, expert investigation of the origin of COVID-19 is of paramount importance to public health and biosecurity. As noted by Stanford Medical School Professor David Relman:

A more complete understanding of the origins of COVID-19 clearly serves the interests of every person in every country on this planet. It will limit further recriminations and diminish the likelihood of conflict; it will lead to more effective responses to this pandemic, as well as efforts to anticipate and prevent the next one. It will also advance our discussions about risky science. And it will do something else: Delineating COVID-19’s origin story will help elucidate the nature of our very precarious coexistence within the biosphere.¹

Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) attempted to investigate the origin of COVID-19. The WHO said that this investigative mission would be guided by the science, be

¹ David A. Relman, Opinion: To stop the next pandemic, we need to unravel the origins of COVID-19, PNAS (Nov. 2020), available at https://www.pnas.org/content/117/47/29246.
“open-minded,” and “not exclude[e] any hypothesis.” Unfortunately, China did not provide complete access or independence for the critical WHO mission. On February 13, 2021, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan issued the following statement:

We have deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the COVID-19 investigation were communicated and questions about the process used to reach them. It is imperative that this report be independent, with expert findings free from intervention or alteration by the Chinese government. To better understand this pandemic and prepare for the next one, China must make available its data from the earliest days of the outbreak.³

Because of rising tensions between the U.S. and China, the WHO scrapped plans for an interim report.⁴ An international group of science experts, including specialists in virology, microbiology, and zoology, asked for a new review.⁵

The NIH, as a premier scientific institution, must lead in order to foster a transparent, independent, and science-based investigation into the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such an effort must meet the WHO’s stated goals of an open-minded investigation that does not exclude any plausible hypothesis.⁶ In addition, the NIH is well-positioned to gather and provide information through oversight of its grants and other federal awards. Thus, the NIH is in a unique position to investigate the possibility that the pandemic stemmed from a laboratory accident or leak, especially regarding the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV).

NIH raised concerns over a possible link between WIV and the COVID-19 outbreak during its review of federal awards to EcoHealth Alliance, a global environmental health nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting wildlife and public health from the emergence of disease. Of the $13.7 million in federal awards that NIH authorized for EcoHealth Alliance, 17

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⁵ Jaime Metzl, et al, Call for a Full and Unrestricted International Forensic Investigation into the Origins of COVID-19 (March 4, 2021), available at https://s.wsj.net/public/resources/documents/COVID%20OPEN%20LETTER%20FINAL%20030421%20(1).pdf. The co-organizer of the letter and a WHO advisor on human genome editing, Jaime Metzl, PhD, said there is an eighty-five percent chance the pandemic started with an accidental leak from the WIV or Wuhan CDC laboratory, available at https://jamiemetzl.com/origins-of-sars-cov-2/. (“I have no definitive way of proving this thesis but the evidence is, in my view, extremely convincing. If forced to place odds on the confidence of my hypothesis, I would say there’s an 85% chance the pandemic started with an accidental leak from the Wuhan Institute of Virology or Wuhan CDC and a 15% chance it began in some other way (in fairness, here is an article making the case for a zoonotic jump “in the wild”). If China keeps preventing a full and unrestricted international forensic investigation into the origins of the pandemic, I believe it is fair to deny Beijing the benefit of the doubt.”)
projects sponsored by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID) have provided over $7.9 million in federal awards for research of viral emergence from bats in Southeast Asia.7 EcoHealth Alliance passed some of its funding to the WIV, and in 2020, NIH made efforts to obtain information from EcoHealth Alliance about WIV related to concerns about the origins of COVID-19. In April 2020, NIH wrote to EcoHealth Alliance and Columbia University about an NIH-funded project entitled, “Understanding the Risk of Bat Coronavirus Emergency:”

It is our understanding that one of the sub-recipients of the grant funds is the Wuhan Institute of Virology (‘WIV’). It is our understanding that WIV studies the interaction between corona viruses and bats. The scientific community believes that the coronavirus causing COVID-19 jumped from bats to humans likely in Wuhan where the COVID-19 pandemic began. There are now allegations that the current crisis was precipitated by the release from WIV of the coronavirus responsible for COVID-19. Given these concerns, we are pursuing suspension of WIV from participation in Federal programs. It is in the public interest that NIH ensure that a sub-recipient has taken all appropriate precautions to prevent the release of pathogens that it is studying. This suspension of the sub-recipient does not affect the remainder of your grant assuming that no grant funds are provided to WIV following receipt of this email during the period of suspension.8

In January 2021, the U.S. Department of State issued a fact sheet about the activity at the WIV.9 Among other revelations, it reported the following:

- The U.S. government has reason to believe that several researchers inside the WIV became sick in autumn 2019, before the first identified case of the outbreak, with symptoms consistent with both COVID-19 and common seasonal illnesses. This raises questions about the credibility of WIV senior researcher Shi Zhengli’s public claim that there was “zero infection” among the WIV’s staff and students of SARS-CoV-2 or SARS-related viruses.10

- Starting in at least 2016, WIV researchers conducted experiments involving RaTG13, the bat coronavirus identified by the WIV in January 2020 as the closest sample to SARS-CoV-2 (96.2 percent similar).11 There was no indication that this research was suspended at any time prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

- The WIV has a published record of conducting “gain-of-function” research to engineer chimeric viruses.12 But the WIV has not been transparent or consistent about its record of

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10 Id.
11 Id.
12 Id.
studying viruses similar to the COVID-19 virus, including “RaTG13,” which was sampled from a cave in Yunnan Province in 2013 after several miners died of SARS-like illness.\textsuperscript{13}

- WHO investigators must have access to the records of the WIV’s work on bat and other coronaviruses before the COVID-19 outbreak. As part of a thorough inquiry, they must have a full accounting of why the WIV altered and then removed online records of its work with RaTG13 and other viruses.\textsuperscript{14}

- Despite the WIV presenting itself as a civilian institution, the U.S. has determined that the WIV has collaborated on projects with China’s military.\textsuperscript{15} The WIV has engaged in classified research, including laboratory animal experiments, on behalf of the Chinese military since at least 2017.\textsuperscript{16}

- The U.S. and other donors who funded or collaborated on civilian research at the WIV have a right and obligation to determine whether any of our research funding was diverted to secret Chinese military projects at the WIV.\textsuperscript{17}

Notably, the State Department’s former lead investigator who oversaw the Task Force into the COVID-19 virus origin stated recently that he not only believes the virus escaped from the WIV, but that it may have been the result of research that the Chinese military, or People’s Liberation Army, was doing on a bioweapon.\textsuperscript{18}

Accordingly, it is imperative to determine not only where SARS-CoV-2 originated, but also how and if NIH’s funding and research to projects at the WIV could have contributed to SARS CoV-2. To assist our requests and inquiry, please provide the following by April 19, 2021:

1. An assessment from a classified U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report included the possibility that the origins of SARS CoV-2 could have emerged accidentally from a laboratory in Wuhan, China due to unsafe laboratory practices.\textsuperscript{19} The DIA report cited U.S. government and Chinese researchers who found “about 33 percent of the original 41 identified cases did not have direct exposure” to the market.\textsuperscript{20} That, along with what is known of the WIV’s work in past few years, raised reasonable suspicion that the

\textsuperscript{13} Id.
\textsuperscript{14} Id.
\textsuperscript{15} Id.
\textsuperscript{16} Id.
\textsuperscript{17} Id.
\textsuperscript{18} Jennifer Griffin, Former top State Dept. investigator says COVID-19 outbreak may have resulted from bioweapons research accident, Fox News (March 13, 2021), available at https://www.foxnews.com/world/top-state-official-coronavirus-bioweapon-accident
\textsuperscript{20} Id.
pandemic may have been caused by a lab error, not a wet market.\textsuperscript{21} Further, a WHO inspector on the recent mission noted that “we know not all of those first 174 early COVID-19 cases visited the market, including the man diagnosed in December 2019 with the earliest onset date.”\textsuperscript{22} What information does the NIH have on the earliest COVID-19 cases?

2. According to an editorial on February 23, 2021, in \textit{The Wall Street Journal} by former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Miles Yu, “[China’s] army of scientists claim to have discovered almost 2,000 new viruses in a little over a decade.”\textsuperscript{23} How many of these discovered viruses does the NIH have information on and were any of these viruses discovered at the WIV?

3. According to \textit{The Wall Street Journal} editorial mentioned in the previous question, some have alleged that the WIV’s virus-carrying animals were sold as pets and may even show up at local wet markets.\textsuperscript{24} Is the NIH aware of these allegations? If so, please provide any information the NIH has related to these allegations.

4. Please provide all information that NIH has about laboratory accidents and/or biosafety practices at the WIV since January 1, 2015.

5. Please provide all information that NIH has from NIH staff, grantees, sub-grantees, contractors, or subcontractors about communications and events at the WIV from August 2019 to the present.

6. Please provide all information that NIH has from NIH staff, grantees, sub-grantees, contractors, or subcontractors about their communications with China-based NIH, Chinese National Science Foundation, CDC, and China CDC about events at the WIV from August 2019 to the present.

\textbf{State Department Cables}

\textsuperscript{21} Id.
\textsuperscript{22} Dominic Dwyer, I was the Australian doctor on the WHO’s COVID-19 mission to China. Here’s what we found about the origins of the coronavirus, \textit{THE CONVERSATION} (Feb. 21, 2021), available at\url{https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/feb/22/i-was-on-the-whos-covid-mission-to-china-heres-what-we-found}. See also Jeremy Page and Drew Hinshaw, \textit{China Refuses to Give WHO Raw Data on Early Covid-19 Cases}, \textit{THE WALL STREET JOURNAL} (Feb. 12, 2021), available at \url{https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-refuses-to-give-who-raw-data-on-early-covid-19-cases-11613150580#:~:text=BEIJING%E2%80%94Chinese%20authorities%20refused%20to,over%20the%20lack%20of%20detail.\textsuperscript{23} (Chinese authorities refused to provide World Health Organization investigators with raw, personalized data on early Covid-19 cases that could help them determine how and when the coronavirus first began to spread in China, according to WHO investigators who described heated exchanges over the lack of detail. The Chinese authorities turned down requests to provide such data on 174 cases of Covid-19 that they have identified from the early phase of the outbreak in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019. Investigators are part of a WHO team that this week completed a monthlong mission in China aimed at determining the origins of the pandemic.”)
\textsuperscript{24} Id.
7. What information does NIH have about the WIV’s responses to the 2018 U.S.
   Department of State cables (attached to this letter) regarding safety concerns?

8. The April 2018 cable from the U.S. Department of State stated that the WIV planned to
   invite University of Texas Medical Branch Galveston (UTMBG) researchers to do
   research in Wuhan’s labs. Please provide any information NIH received that indicates
   whether the WIV invited UTMBG researchers, and whether UTMBG researchers
   conducted any research in Wuhan’s labs.
   
   a. If there was such research, please provide information and any documents related
      to this research.

9. Why was it pertinent to the NIH investigation that the “nonprofit [EcoHealth Alliance]
   must provide the “WIV’s responses to the 2018 Department of State cables regarding
   safety concerns”?”
   
   a. Did EcoHealth Alliance provide this information? If so, how did NIH use the
      information to further its investigation?

EcoHealth Alliance, Columbia University Health Sciences

10. Was the 2019 NIH federal award to EcoHealth Alliance reviewed and approved by the
    HHS Potential Pandemic Pathogen Care and Oversight (P3CO) committee?

   a. If so, please provide the documentation with the committee’s decision.

   b. Please also provide the names of the individuals who were members of the
      committee at the time.

11. Please provide all correspondence and communications between NIH and EcoHealth
    Alliance, since January 1, 2020, related to federal funding involving the WIV. The
    documentation should include, but not be limited to, correspondence between NIH and
    EcoHealth Alliance dated sometime in April 2020, on July 8, 2020, and sometime in
    August 2020.

12. In April 2020, NIH suspended a 2019 federal award to EcoHealth Alliance, in part,
    because NIH did not believe the work aligned with “program goals and agency
    priorities.” Please specify the work that was done by the EcoHealth Alliance that did

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27 Id.
not align with the agency’s program goals and priorities, and when that work was conducted.

   a. Was an evaluation of EcoHealth Alliance’s work and whether it aligned with the agency’s program goals and priorities conducted by the NIH before the award was issued? If yes, please provide any related documentation. If not, why not?

13. In April 2020 correspondence with EcoHealth Alliance, NIH wrote that it “received reports that the Wuhan Institute of Virology…has been conducting research at its facilities in China that pose serious bio-safety concerns.”

   What are the sources for those reports to NIH and what were the specific allegations reported?

14. Why did the NIH request that EcoHealth Alliance provide a sample of the pandemic coronavirus that the WIV used to determine its genetic sequence for SARS CoV-2?

   a. Why is this information important to NIH’s investigation?

   b. Has NIH obtained the sample and if so, what evaluations have been done, and for what purpose?

   c. If NIH has not yet obtained the sample, what are the planned studies and evaluations NIH will conduct with the sample when it is obtained?

15. What is the nature of NIH’s concerns about purported restrictions at the WIV including “diminished cell-phone traffic in October 2019, and the evidence that there may have been roadblocks surrounding the facility from October 14-19, 2019[,]” about the WIV lab or virus origin?

   a. What is the basis of information to NIH about the purported restrictions at the WIV?

   b. What are the other purported restrictions at the WIV in October 2019?

16. After terminating EcoHealth Alliance’s 2019 project entitled “Understanding the Risk of Bat Coronavirus Emergence,” the NIH later offered to reinstate the EcoHealth Alliance funding in July 2020 if EcoHealth Alliance agreed to meet certain conditions.

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30 Id.
a. Please provide all of the information presented to NIH from EcoHealth Alliance in response to NIH’s conditions for reinstatement.

b. What actions did NIH take based upon the information received? How has the information been used in NIH’s investigation?

c. One condition for the federal award reinstatement was for EcoHealth Alliance to arrange for an outside inspection of the WIV and its records, “with specific attention to addressing the question of whether WIV staff had SARS-CoV-2 in their possession prior to December 2019.” Why is it pertinent to the NIH’s investigation if staff at WIV had SARS-CoV-2 in their possession prior to December 2019? What is the potential significance if the staff did have the virus in their possession prior to December 2019?

d. What information does NIH have that was used for the basis of requesting that the EcoHealth Alliance “must ‘explain the apparent disappearance’ of a scientist who worked in the Wuhan lab,” and on social media was rumored to be “patient zero” of the pandemic?

i. What is the potential significance about the whereabouts of this scientist and the photo being removed from the website?

17. Please provide all correspondence and communications between NIH and Columbia University related to federal funding involving the WIV, including email correspondence in April 2020 between Dr. Michael Lauer, Deputy Director of extramural research, and Naomi Schrag of Columbia University.

a. In an April 2020 email, Dr. Lauer advised Naomi Schrag of Columbia University that it would be helpful for NIH “to know about all China-based participants in this work since the Type 1 grant started in 2014 - who they were and how much money they received.” Why did NIH request that Columbia University provide information about all of the China-based participants?

i. What is the pertinence of the timeframe starting in 2014 for the requested information?

ii. Did Columbia University provide the NIH with the requested information about all of the China-based participants from all grantees since 2014? If so, please provide the information. If not, why not?

Federal Funding Records

32 Id.
33 Id.
18. Please provide ledgers or any accounting for dispersion of all NIH federal funding awards that EcoHealth Alliance has sent to the WIV, including through contracts, grants, donations, cooperative agreements, staffing, or any other support or means. In addition, please provide the results and outcomes from the funding and support.  

19. What is the total amount of NIH federal funding per year from 2017 through 2021 that has directly or indirectly supported the WIV scientists or research through grant recipients, including to EcoHealth Alliance; Wildlife Trust, Inc.; Columbia University Health Sciences; Trustees of Columbia University; University of North Carolina Chapel Hill; Vanderbilt University; University of Virginia; and Oregon Health and Science University?  

20. According to a report in The Washington Post on April 14, 2020, the WIV issued a news release in English about the final visit from U.S. Embassy scientist diplomats in Beijing, which occurred on March 27, 2018. Does the NIH have a copy of this news release? If so, please provide a copy.  

21. For NIH award recipients that have provided support to the WIV since January 1, 2012, please provide annual reports, trip reports related to the WIV, documentation of any survey or field trips by the WIV, and interim data summaries from the WIV.  

22. Please provide copies of all grantee annual reports, progress reports, projects, studies, and observations since 2014 where foreign sites for all Type 1 and Type 2 awards have been documented as involving the WIV.  

23. Please provide copies of all grantee annual reports, progress reports, projects, studies, and observations since 2014 for NIH domestic grantee awards with a foreign component involving the WIV.  

24. Please provide the name(s) of the NIH program manager(s) or officer(s) responsible for overseeing the grants to EcoHealth Alliance and time period(s) of responsibility.  

25. Please provide the name(s) of the NIH Scientific Review Officers responsible for reviewing and approving any NIH financial awards to EcoHealth Alliance and any other funding recipients that supported the WIV.

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26. According to an editorial in *The Wall Street Journal*, the WIV housed tens of thousands of bat samples and laboratory animals in 2019.\(^{38}\) Please provide any information the NIH has on the number of bat samples and animals at the WIV.

   a. Did any NIH scientists who are fluent in Mandarin review the Chinese scientific literature on the WIV research related to coronaviruses that is dated before February 1, 2020?

27. Does the NIH have the unpublished sequences of bat coronaviruses that were maintained in the WIV database before December 30, 2019, or before the database was removed from the internet?\(^{39}\) Does NIH have the full sequences of the eight viruses sampled in the Yunnan province on an EcoHealth Alliance bat-virus sampling trip in 2015?

   a. Please provide NIH’s analysis if the sequences have been analyzed.

   b. If NIH does not have the sequences, can NIH get this information from the EcoHealth Alliance or from other NIH-funded sources?

28. Please provide the original version of “Origin and cross-species transmission of bat coronaviruses in China” that was submitted to *Nature* by EcoHealth Alliance on October 6, 2019, published August 25, 2020, and funded in part by NIAID (award number R01AI110964).\(^{40}\) If NIH does not have the October 6, 2019 report, can NIH obtain it from EcoHealth Alliance for this response? If so, please provide the report.

29. Have NIH, EcoHealth Alliance, or other NIH award recipient(s) been denied permission or access to results of any WIV research, which indirectly received financial support from NIH awards? If so, please provide the date(s), individuals involved, and circumstances of each denial.

   We request that the NIH provide the requested documents and information in a coordinated response from all stakeholders and the appropriate divisions within NIH, including but not limited to subject matter experts from NIH’s Division of Security and Emergency Response, the Office of Management Assessment, the Center for Scientific Review, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and the Office of Extramural Research. After the requested information has been provided, we ask that the NIH provide a briefing to the Minority Committee staff to discuss the information that the NIH has related to the origins of SARS-CoV-2, including any potential links to the WIV. Finally, we request that you appoint an NIH working group representing an appropriate diversity of scientific disciplines to collect data and

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information related to COVID-19 origins (including the WIV), and that the NIH working group coordinate and consult with foreign scientific agencies involved in similar work.

Your assistance with this request is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, please contact Alan Slobodin or Diane Cutler of the Minority Committee staff.

Sincerely,

Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Republican Leader  
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Brett Guthrie  
Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Health

H. Morgan Griffith  
Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

Attachment

Cc: The Honorable Frank Pallone, Chairman  
The Honorable Diana DeGette, Chair, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
The Honorable Anna Eshoo, Chair, Subcommittee on Health