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ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

*Congress of the United States*

*House of Representatives*

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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Minority (202) 225-3641

May 6, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to request documents that will assist us in our inquiry into the origins of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. As leaders on the Congressional Committee with jurisdiction over public health, we strongly support a comprehensive investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the possibility of an accidental laboratory leak. Accordingly, we request that the U.S. Department of State release unclassified documents and declassify other documents for public release, as appropriate, related to the assertion in the Department's January 15, 2021 Fact Sheet that the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in Wuhan, China collaborated with the Chinese military in conducting classified research, including laboratory animal experiments.<sup>1</sup>

The WIV has been a major focus for the U.S. government and the World Health Organization (WHO) in examining the origins of COVID-19 and the possibility of a laboratory leak. In addition, the release of these documents from the Department could help to refute contradictory statements that have been made regarding the possibility of a laboratory leak from the WIV.

The Department's January 15 Fact Sheet notes that the WIV has collaborated on "secret projects" with China's military. Further, the Fact Sheet claims that "[d]espite the WIV presenting itself as a civilian institution, the United States has determined that the WIV has collaborated on publications and secret projects with China's military. The WIV has engaged in

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Fact Sheet: Activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology*, Office of the Spokesperson (Jan. 15, 2021) available at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/fact-sheet-activity-at-the-wuhan-institute-of-virology/index.html>.

classified research, including laboratory animal experiments, on behalf of the Chinese military since at least 2017.”<sup>2</sup>

However, the Director of the Center of Emerging Infectious Diseases at the WIV, Dr. Shi Zhengli, made contradictory comments about the Department’s claims in the January 15 Fact Sheet. During a March 23, 2021 seminar at Rutgers University, a WHO advisory committee member asked Dr. Shi if she had “knowledge of all of the research that was being done by everyone at the WIV and the full repository of viruses that were being held there by everybody, all the laboratories?”<sup>3</sup> She was also asked whether “the U.S. government claims of classified Chinese military research being carried out at the WIV [are] correct, and if so, did you have full awareness of and access to all aspects of this research?”<sup>4</sup> Dr. Shi answered:

From my knowledge, all our research work is open, is transparent. At the beginning of COVID-19, we heard the rumors that claimed our laboratory would have some project blah blah with army blah blah . . . but this is not correct, because I am the director and responsible for research activity. I don’t know any kind of research work performed in this lab.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding a full investigation of COVID-19 origins, you recently stated that “[w]e need to get to the bottom of this. We need to do that precisely so we fully understand what happened, in order to have the best shot possible preventing it from happening again.”<sup>6</sup> However, *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported that a government official said that the U.S. government’s recommendations to the WHO on further investigation of COVID-19 origins would not include pressing China for a deeper investigation into the laboratory accident hypothesis, unless a whistleblower emerged.<sup>7</sup>

If this individual’s statement reflects the official position of the U.S. government, this would undermine the WHO, including the WHO’s Director-General, Dr. Tedros. In addition, this would undermine the efforts of public health officials around the world to learn more about the origins of COVID-19, and to prepare better for future pandemics. Any credible investigation into COVID-19 origins must include an examination of the laboratory leak hypothesis. Dr. Tedros has stated that he supports further investigation into all COVID-19 origin hypotheses,

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<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Kerr, ‘Bat Lady’ Denial Of Chinese Military Involvement In Wuhan Lab Has Put China On Collision Course With US Intelligence, DAILY CALLER (Mar. 23, 2021), available at <https://dailycaller.com/2021/03/23/shi-zhengli-denies-chinese-military-wuhan-lab/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Chris Cameron, U.S. secretary of state calls for more thorough investigation of Covid origins in China, THE NEW YORK TIMES (Apr. 11, 2021) available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/11/world/blinken-covid-investigation-china-origins.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Betsy McKay and Drew Hinshaw, U.S. Aims to Shape New Phase of WHO-Led Probe Into Origin of Covid-19, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (Apr. 27, 2021), available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-aims-to-shape-new-phase-of-who-led-probe-into-origin-of-covid-19-11619547836>.

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including the laboratory leak hypothesis.<sup>8</sup> Further, *The Washington Post* Editorial Board recently noted that a group of scientists in an open letter “correctly called for a ‘full scientific and forensic investigation into all possible origins’ of the virus and provided a set of unanswered questions about the [WIV] laboratory and its work.”<sup>9</sup>

We hope your statement about getting to the bottom of the origins of this pandemic includes looking at all possible causes, including the possibility of an accidental leak from a laboratory. Further, the disclosure of unclassified documents and the declassification of any documents regarding connections between the Chinese military and the WIV would help advance a comprehensive investigation into the origins of COVID-19 by bringing transparency to this matter and advancing the public’s interest and understanding of the issue.

Please respond by May 20, 2021. If you have any questions, please contact Alan Slobodin or Diane Cutler of the Minority Committee staff.

Sincerely,



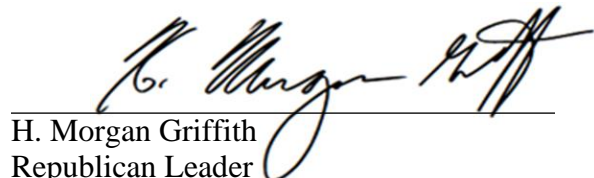
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Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Republican Leader  
Committee on Energy and Commerce



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Brett Guthrie  
Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Health



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H. Morgan Griffith  
Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

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

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<sup>8</sup> Emily Rauhala, *WHO chief, U.S. and other world leaders criticize China for limiting access of team researching coronavirus origins*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Mar. 30, 2021), available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/who-wuhan-tedros-lab/2021/03/30/896fe3f6-90d1-11eb-aadc-af78701a30ca\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/who-wuhan-tedros-lab/2021/03/30/896fe3f6-90d1-11eb-aadc-af78701a30ca_story.html).

<sup>9</sup> Washington Post Editorial Board, *Opinion: How did the pandemic begin? It’s time for a new WHO investigation*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Apr. 30, 2021), available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/how-did-the-pandemic-begin-its-time-for-a-new-who-investigation/2021/04/30/e1a2e702-a9dc-11eb-8c1a-56f0cb4ff3b5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/how-did-the-pandemic-begin-its-time-for-a-new-who-investigation/2021/04/30/e1a2e702-a9dc-11eb-8c1a-56f0cb4ff3b5_story.html).