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ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927

Minority (202) 225-3641

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.”² 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

² Smriti Mallapaty, *Where did COVID come from? WHO investigation begins but faces challenges*, NATURE (Nov. 11, 2020), available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-03165-9>.

³ The White House, Statement of National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan (Feb. 13, 2021), available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/13/statement-by-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan/>.

⁴ Betsy McKay, Drew Hinshaw and Jeremy Page, *WHO Investigators to Scrap Plans for Interim Report on Probe of Covid-19 Origins*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (Mar. 4, 2021), available at https://www.wsj.com/articles/who-investigators-to-scrap-interim-report-on-probe-of-covid-19-origins-11614865067?mod=latest_headlines

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](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.”)

⁶ Washington Post Editorial Board, *We’re still missing the origin story of this pandemic. China is sitting on the answers*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Feb. 5, 2021), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/02/05/coronavirus-origins-mystery-china/?arc404=true>.

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

⁷ NIH RePORTER, *Research Portfolio Online Reporting Tools* (queried Mar. 4, 2021), available at <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/qlYUeI9DIk2JfWUdCcWxcA/projects/charts>.

⁸ Mark Moore, *NIH investigating Wuhan lab at center of coronavirus pandemic*, NEW YORK POST (Apr. 28, 2020), available at <https://nypost.com/2020/04/28/nih-investigating-wuhan-lab-at-center-of-coronavirus-pandemic/>.

⁹ 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>.

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.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.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.¹⁵ The WIV has engaged in classified research, including laboratory animal experiments, on behalf of the Chinese military since at least 2017.¹⁶
- 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.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.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.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.²⁰ That, along with what is known of the WIV’s work in past few years, raised reasonable suspicion that the

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

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>

¹⁹ Fred Guterl, Naveed Jamali and Tom O’Connor, *The Controversial Experiments at Wuhan Lab Suspected of Starting the Coronavirus Pandemic*, NEWSWEEK (Apr. 27, 2020), available at <https://www.newsweek.com/controversial-wuhan-lab-experiments-that-may-have-started-coronavirus-pandemic-1500503>.

²⁰ *Id.*

pandemic may have been caused by a lab error, not a wet market.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.”²² What information does the NIH have on the earliest COVID-19 cases?

2. According to an editorial on February 23, 2021, in *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.”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 *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.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.

State Department Cables

²¹ *Id.*

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, *THE CONVERSATION* (Feb. 21, 2021), *available at* <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, *China Refuses to Give WHO Raw Data on Early Covid-19 Cases*, *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL* (Feb. 12, 2021), *available at* [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](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.). (“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.”)

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Mike Pompeo and Miles Yu, *NIH Presses U.S. Nonprofit for Information on Wuhan Virology Lab*, *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL* (Feb. 23, 2021), *available at* <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-reckless-labs-put-the-world-at-risk-11614102828>.

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"?"²⁵
 - 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?²⁶
 - 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."²⁷ Please specify the work that was done by the EcoHealth Alliance that did

²⁵ Meredith Wadman, *NIH imposes 'outrageous' conditions on resuming coronavirus grant targeted by Trump*, SCIENCEMAG (Aug. 19, 2020), available at <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/08/nih-imposes-outrageous-conditions-resuming-coronavirus-grant-targeted-trump>.

²⁶ National Institutes of Health, *Notice Announcing the Removal of the Funding Pause for Gain-of-Function Research Project* (Dec. 19, 2017), available at <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-17-071.html>.

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."²⁸ 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?²⁹
- 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?³⁰
- 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.³¹

²⁸ Betsy McKay, *NIH Presses U.S. Nonprofit for Information on Wuhan Virology Lab*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (Aug. 19, 2020), available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/nih-presses-u-s-nonprofit-for-information-on-wuhan-virology-lab-11597829400>.

²⁹ Meredith Wadman, *NIH imposes 'outrageous' conditions on resuming coronavirus grant targeted by Trump*, SCIENCEMAG (Aug. 19, 2020), available at <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/08/nih-imposes-outrageous-conditions-resuming-coronavirus-grant-targeted-trump>.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ Betsy McKay, *NIH Presses U.S. Nonprofit for Information on Wuhan Virology Lab*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (Aug. 19, 2020), available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/nih-presses-u-s-nonprofit-for-information-on-wuhan-virology-lab-11597829400>.

- 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."³² 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?³³
 - 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."³⁴ 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.*

³⁴ Meredith Wadman and Jon Cohen, *NIH's axing of bat coronavirus grant a 'horrible precedent' and might break rules, critics say*, SCIENCEMAG (Apr. 30, 2020), available at <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/04/nih-s-axing-bat-coronavirus-grant-horrible-precedent-and-might-break-rules-critics-say>.

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.³⁵
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?³⁶
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, 2018.³⁷ 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.

³⁵ Betsy McKay, *NIH Presses U.S. Nonprofit for Information on Wuhan Virology Lab*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (Aug. 19, 2020), available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/nih-presses-u-s-nonprofit-for-information-on-wuhan-virology-lab-11597829400>.

³⁶ National Institutes of Health, Research Portfolio online Reporting Tools, NIH RePorter available at <https://report.nih.gov/> (last accessed March 6, 2020).

³⁷ Josh Rogin, *Opinion: State Department cables warned of safety issues at Wuhan lab studying bat coronaviruses*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Apr. 14, 2020), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/04/14/state-department-cables-warned-safety-issues-wuhan-lab-studying-bat-coronaviruses/>.

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

³⁸ Mike Pompeo and Miles Yu, *NIH Presses U.S. Nonprofit for Information on Wuhan Virology Lab*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (Feb. 23, 2021), available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-reckless-labs-put-the-world-at-risk-11614102828>.

³⁹ Washington Post Editorial Board, *We're still missing the origin story of this pandemic. China is sitting on the answers*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Feb. 5, 2021), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/02/05/coronavirus-origins-mystery-china/?arc404=true>.

⁴⁰ Latinne, A., Hu, B., Olival, K.J. et al., *Origin and cross-species transmission of bat coronaviruses in China*, *Nature* (Aug. 25, 2020), available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-020-17687-3#Ack1>.

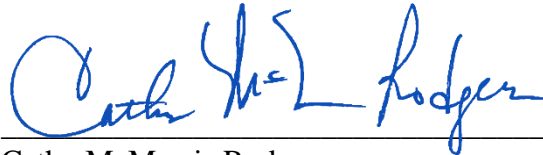
Letter to the Honorable Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D.

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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.

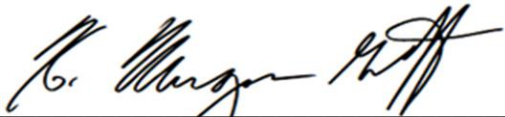
Sincerely,



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

2018 Cables from Embassy Beijing and Consulate General Wuhan to State Department Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

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MRN: 18 BEIJING 138
Date/DTG: Jan 19, 2018 / 190739Z JAN 18
From: AMEMBASSY BEIJING
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE ROUTINE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: SHLH, ETRD, ECON, PGOV, CN
Captions: SENSITIVE
Reference: 17 WUHAN 48
Subject: China Opens First Bio Safety Level 4 Laboratory

1. (SBU) **Summary and Comment:** The Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) has recently established what is reportedly China's first Biosafety Level 4 (BSL-4) laboratory in Wuhan. This state-of-the-art facility is designed for prevention and control research on diseases that require the highest level of biosafety and biosecurity containment. Ultimately, scientists hope the lab will contribute to the development of new antiviral drugs and vaccines, but its current productivity is limited by a shortage of the highly trained technicians and investigators required to safely operate a BSL-4 laboratory and a lack of clarity in related Chinese government policies and guidelines. (b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5) **End Summary and Comment.**

China Investing in Infectious Disease Control

2. (U) Between November 2002 and July 2003, China faced an outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which, according to the World Health Organization, resulting in 8,098 cases and leading to 774 deaths reported in 37 countries. A majority of cases occurred in China, where the fatality rate was 9.6%. This incident convinced China to prioritize international cooperation for infectious disease control. An aspect of this prioritization was China's work with the Jean Merieux BSL-4 Laboratory in Lyon, France, to build China's first high containment laboratory at Wuhan's Institute of Virology (WIV), an institute under the auspices of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS). Construction took 11 years and \$44 million USD, and construction on the facility was completed on January 31, 2015. Following

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two years of effort, which is not unusual for such facilities, the WIV lab was accredited in February 2017 by the China National Accreditation Service for Conformity Assessment. It occupies four floors and consists of over 32,000 square feet. WIV leadership now considers the lab operational and ready for research on class-four pathogens (P4), among which are the most virulent viruses that pose a high risk of aerosolized person-to-person transmission.

Unclear Guidelines on Virus Access and a Lack of Trained Talent Impede Research

3. (SBU) In addition to accreditation, the lab must also receive permission from the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPCC) to initiate research on specific highly contagious pathogens. According to some WIV scientists, it is unclear how NHFPCC determines what viruses can or cannot be studied in the new laboratory. To date, WIV has obtained permission for research on three viruses: Ebola virus, Nipah virus, and Xinjiang hemorrhagic fever virus (a strain of Crimean Congo hemorrhagic fever found in China's Xinjiang Province). Despite this permission, however, the Chinese government has not allowed the WIV to import Ebola viruses for study in the BSL-4 lab. Therefore, WIV scientists are frustrated and have pointed out that they won't be able to conduct research project with Ebola viruses at the new BSL-4 lab despite of the permission.

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(b)(6) Thus, while the BSL-4 lab is ostensibly fully accredited, its utilization is limited by lack of access to specific organisms and by opaque government review and approval processes. As long as this situation continues, Beijing's commitment to prioritizing infectious disease control - on the regional and international level, especially in relation to highly pathogenic viruses, remains in doubt.

(b)(6) noted that the new lab has a serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians and investigators needed to safely operate this high-containment laboratory. University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston (UTMB), which has one of several well-established BSL-4 labs in the United States (supported by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID of NIH)), has scientific collaborations with WIV, which may help alleviate this talent gap over time. Reportedly, researchers from GTMB are helping train technicians who work in the WIV BSL-4 lab. Despite this, (b)(6) they would welcome more help from U.S. and international organizations as they establish "gold standard" operating procedures and training courses for the first time in China. As China is building more BSL-4 labs, including one in Harbin Veterinary Research Institute subordinated to the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) for veterinary research use (b)(6) the training for technicians and investigators working on dangerous pathogens will certainly be in demand.

Despite Limitations, WIV Researchers Produce SARS Discoveries

6. (SBU) The ability of WIV scientists to undertake productive research despite limitations on the use of the new BSL-4 facility is demonstrated by a recent publication on the origins of SARS. Over a five-year study, (b)(6) (and their research team) widely sampled bats in Yunnan province with funding support from NIAID/NIH, USAID, and several Chinese funding agencies. The study results were published in PLoS Pathogens online on Nov. 30, 2017 (1), and it demonstrated that a SARS-like coronavirus isolated from horseshoe bats in a single cave contain all the building blocks of the pandemic SARS-coronavirus genome that caused the human outbreak. These results strongly suggest that the highly pathogenic SARS-coronavirus originated in this bat population. Most importantly, the researchers also showed that various SARS-like coronaviruses can interact with ACE2, the human receptor identified for SARS-coronavirus. This finding strongly suggests that SARS-like coronaviruses from bats can be transmitted to humans to cause SARS-like disease. From a public health perspective, this makes the continued surveillance of SARS-like coronaviruses in bats and study of the animal-human interface critical to future emerging coronavirus outbreak prediction and prevention. (b)(6) (b)(5) WIV scientists are allowed to study the SARS-like coronaviruses isolated from bats while they are precluded from studying human-disease causing SARS coronavirus in their new BSL-4 lab until permission for such work is granted by the NHFCP.

1. Hu B, Zeng L-P, Yang X-L, Ge X-Y, Zhang W, Li B, et al. (2017) Discovery of a rich gene pool of bat SARS-related coronaviruses provides new insights into the origin of SARS coronavirus. PLoS Pathog 13(11): e1006698. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.ppat.1006698>

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Subject: China Virus Institute Welcomes More U.S. Cooperation on Global Health Security

1. (SBU) **Summary with Comment:** China's Wuhan Institute of Virology, a global leader in virus research, is a key partner for the United States in protecting global health security. Its role as operator of the just-launched Biosafety Level 4 (or "P4") lab -- the first such lab in China -- opens up even more opportunities for expert exchange, especially in light of the lab's shortage of trained staff (Ref A). (b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5) **End Summary with Comment.**

2. (U) Wuhan Institute of Virology researchers and staff gave an overview of the lab and current cooperation with the United States to visiting Environment, Science, Technology and Health Counsellor Rick Switzer and Consulate Wuhan Consul General Jamie Fouss in late March. In the last year, the institute has also hosted visits from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation, and experts from the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. The institute reports to the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing.

P4 Lab is Open and Transparent, Officials Emphasize

3. (SBU) The Wuhan P4 lab, referring to labs with the highest level of safety precautions, became fully operational and began working with live viruses early this year. Institute officials said they believed it is the only operational P4 lab in Asia aside from a U.S. Centers for Disease

Control (CDC)-supported facility in Pune, India (Ref C). China plans to stand up a second P4 lab in Harbin. Institute officials said Japan's biosafety labs are "old" and lack cutting-edge equipment, so they consider Japan's labs to be "P3 Plus" (Note: the Japanese government says it has one P4-level lab in the Tokyo suburbs, though its activities are limited, and Japan is building a new P4 lab in Nagasaki, see Ref D. Taiwan operates at least one P4 lab. South Korea was close to opening a P4 lab as of last year, see Ref E. End Note.) Wuhan's lab is located about 20 miles from the city center in Zhengdian district, and the institute plans to gradually consolidate its other training, classroom and lab facilities at that location.

4. (U) Officials described the lab as a "regional node" in the global biosafety system and said it would play an emergency response role in an epidemic or pandemic. The lab's English brochure highlighted a national security role, saying that it "is an effective measure to improve China's availability in safeguarding national bio-safety if [a] possible biological warfare or terrorist attack happens."

5. (SBU) Institute officials said there would be "limited availability" for international and domestic scientists who had gone through the necessary approval process to do research at the lab. They stressed that the lab aimed to be a "worldwide, open platform" for virology. They said they welcomed U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) experts, noting that the Chinese Academy of Sciences was not strong on human disease expertise, having only focused on it in the last 15 years, after the SARS outbreak. A Wuhan-based French consulate official who works on science and technology cooperation with China also emphasized that the lab, which was initiated in 2004 as a France-China joint project, was meant to be "open and transparent" to the global scientific community. "The intent was to set up a lab to international standards, and open to international research," he said. French experts have provided guidance and biosafety training to the lab, which will continue, the French official said. Institute officials said that France provided the lab's design and much of its technology, but that it is entirely China-funded and has been completely China-run since a "handover" ceremony in 2016.

6. (U) In addition to French assistance, experts from the NIH-supported P4 lab at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston have trained Wuhan lab technicians in lab management and maintenance, institute officials said. The Wuhan institute plans to invite scientists from the Galveston lab to do research in Wuhan's lab. One Wuhan Institute of Virology researcher trained for two years at the Galveston lab, and the institute also sent one scientist to U.S. CDC headquarters in Atlanta for six months' work on influenza.

NIH-Supported Research Revises SARS Origin Story

7. (U) NIH was a major funder, along with the Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC), of SARS research by the Wuhan Institute of Virology's (b)(6) (b)(6) (b)(6) (b)(6) This lends weight to the theory that SARS originated in bat populations before jumping first to civet cats (likely via bat feces) and then to humans. (b)(6) (b)(6) (b)(6) (b)(6)

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(b)(6) team has provided support in statistical modeling to assess the risk of more coronaviruses like SARS crossing over to human populations.

Ready to Help with the Global Virome Project

8. (U) Institute officials expressed strong interest in the Global Virome Project (GVP), and said Chinese funding for the project would likely come from Chinese Academy of Sciences funding already earmarked for One Belt, One Road-related initiatives. The GVP aims to launch this year as an international collaborative effort to identify within ten years virtually all of the planet's viruses that have pandemic or epidemic potential and the ability to jump to humans. "We hope China will be one of the leading countries to initiate the Global Virome Project," one Wuhan Institute of Virology official said. China attended a GVP unveiling meeting in January in Thailand and is waiting for more details on the initiative. The officials said that the Chinese government funds projects similar to GVP to investigate the background of viruses and bacteria. This essentially constituted China's own Virome Project, officials said, but they noted the program currently has no official name.

9. (SBU) The Wuhan Institute of Virology's (b)(6) is the (b)(6) (b)(6) (b)(6) which is designed to show "proof of concept" and be a forerunner to the Global Virome Project. (b)(6) with the EcoHealth Alliance (a New York City-based NGO that is working with the University of California, Davis to manage the (b)(6) recently planned to visit Wuhan to meet with (b)(6) (b)(6) noted that China has expressed interest in building the GVP database, which would put China in a leadership position. Other countries have confidence in China's ability to build such a database, but are skeptical on whether China could remain transparent as a "gatekeeper" for this information (b)(6) said (b)(6) expressed frustration with the slow progress so far in launching GVP, noting that the effort lacked funding sources, needed to hire a CEO, and would have to boost its profile at G7, G20 and other high-level international meetings.

U.S.-China Workshop Explores Research Partnerships

10. (U) The Institute also has ongoing collaboration with the U.S. National Science Foundation, including a just-concluded workshop in Shenzhen, involving about 40 scientists from the United States and China, on the topic of the "Ecology and Evolution of Infectious Diseases." Co-sponsored by the Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC), (b)(6) (b)(6) The workshop explored opportunities for U.S.-China research cooperation in areas like using "big data" to predict emerging infectious diseases, climate change's effect on vector-borne diseases, and pathogen transmission between wildlife, domestic animals and humans.

11. (SBU) Some workshop participants also expressed skepticism about the Global Virome Project's (GVP) approach, saying that gaining a predictive understanding of viruses with pandemic potential would require going beyond the GVP's strategy of sample collection, to take an "ecological" approach that considers the virome beyond vertebrate systems to identify

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mechanisms driving pathogen evolution. A follow-on workshop will be held in June at the University of Berkeley. NSF and NSFC hope to jointly announce a funding call for collaborative projects later this year.

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