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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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June 28, 2021

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
Ronald Reagan Building
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Administrator Power,

As the Congressional committee with public health jurisdiction, we are investigating the origins of COVID-19, including examination of a possible laboratory accident in China. We write to request the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provide information we believe you have that will shed light on the possible origins of SARS-CoV-2. We also write with significant concerns that USAID may have funded risky research related to bat coronaviruses at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), in partnership with EcoHealth Alliance (EHA) and the University of California at Davis (UC Davis), while such research was not allowed in the United States.¹

USAID's Relevant Work to the origins of COVID-19

In 2009, USAID launched PREDICT, a \$220 million, ten-year project, as part of its Emerging Pandemic Threat Program to detect viruses of pandemic potential. By collecting data, such as bat coronavirus samples, USAID aimed to identify viruses that may spark a naturally-occurring global pandemic.² Through PREDICT, the USAID-funded project “collected more than 15,000 bat samples, which led to the identification of around 500 new coronaviruses”³ and

¹ Vineet Menachery, *et al*, *A SARS-like cluster of circulating bt coronaviruses shows potential for human emergence*, Nature (Nov. 9, 2015) available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/nm.3985#ack1>; National Institutes of Health, *Gain of Function Research*, Office of Science Policy (accessed June 14, 2021) available at <https://osp.od.nih.gov/biotechnology/gain-of-function-research/>.

² U.S. Agency for International Development, *PREDICT – Advancing Global Health Security at the Frontiers of Disease Emergence*, (Dec. 2020) available at https://ohi.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk5251/files/inline-files/PREDICT%20LEGACY%20-%20FINAL%20FOR%20WEB%20-compressed_0.pdf.

³ Julie Zaugg, *The virus hunters who search bat caves to predict the next pandemic* CNN Health (Apr. 26, 2020) available at <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/26/health/virus-hunters-bat-cave-coronavirus-hnk-intl/index.html>.

detected about 1,200 viruses that could spread from wild animals to humans with more than 160 of them being novel coronaviruses, much like SARS-CoV-2.⁴ The data was to be “analyzed to investigate the risks for *virus spillover and spread*” at markets and other high-risk animal-human interfaces, including human behaviors, types of animals present, value chains and networks (emphasis added).⁵ Notably, one sample collected by PREDICT in 2013 from a bat cave in China was a possible ancestor of SARS-CoV-2.⁶

Additionally, a key part of the PREDICT project was its direct partnerships with foreign laboratories to build laboratory capacity, train scientists, and collect research specimens in foreign countries, and one of PREDICT’s partner laboratories from 2009 to 2019 was the WIV.⁷ The PREDICT program trained WIV scientists to help them detect deadly new viruses on their own and received USAID funding for equipment before SARS-CoV-2. PREDICT was originally scheduled to sunset in 2019, but to complete its work, USAID extended the project by six months.⁸ In April 2020, USAID extended an existing PREDICT project an additional \$2.26 million in funding to provide technical assistance to its partner labs for the COVID-19 response, and assistance on COVID-19 origins.⁹ Specifically, the project was to review “the animal source or sources of SARS CoV-2 using data and samples collected over the past 10 years in Asia and Southeast Asia.”¹⁰

The USAID PREDICT -COVID-19 expansion project has provided data to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) “hinting that SARS-CoV-2 had pandemic potential, connected COVID-19 cases with the ‘wildlife-human interface’ in China and provided early testing protocols for COVID-19.”¹¹ This suggests that USAID has already identified potential sources of the virus. Further, the extension project investigation was funded to “conduct SARS CoV-2-specific testing on samples collected” and analyze existing project data.¹² Moreover, before the SARS-CoV-2 sequence and specific assays were available, the PREDICT-trained laboratories detected “the new SARS CoV-2 virus in some of the first patients that traveled outside China.”¹³

⁴ Emily Baumgaertner, James Rainey, *Trump administration ended pandemic early-warning program to detect coronaviruses*, Los Angeles Times (Apr. 2, 2020) available at <https://www.latimes.com/science/story/2020-04-02/coronavirus-trump-pandemic-program-viruses-detection>.

⁵ Kristin Burns, *PREDICT Receives Extension for COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Response*, UC Davis (Mar. 31, 2020) available at <https://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/news/predict-receives-extension-covid-19-pandemic-emergency-response..>

⁶ Julie Zaugg, *The virus hunters who search bat caves to predict the next pandemic* CNN Health (Apr. 26, 2020) available at <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/26/health/virus-hunters-bat-cave-coronavirus-hnk-intl/index.html>.

⁷ U.S. Agency for International Development, *PREDICT – Advancing Global Health Security at the Frontiers of Disease Emergence*, (Dec. 2020) available at https://ohi.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk5251/files/inline-files/PREDICT%20LEGACY%20-%20FINAL%20FOR%20WEB%20-compressed_0.pdf.

⁸ Emily Baumgaertner, James Rainey, *Trump administration ended pandemic early-warning program to detect coronaviruses*, Los Angeles Times (Apr. 2, 2020) available at <https://www.latimes.com/science/story/2020-04-02/coronavirus-trump-pandemic-program-viruses-detection>.

⁹ Kristin Burns, *PREDICT Receives Extension for COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Response*, UC Davis (Mar. 31, 2020) available at <https://www.ucdavis.edu/coronavirus/news/predict-receives-extension-covid-19-pandemic-emergency-response>.

¹⁰ Kristin Burns, *PREDICT Receives Extension for COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Response*, UC Davis News (Apr. 3, 2020) available at <https://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/news/predict-receives-extension-covid-19-pandemic-emergency-response>.

¹¹ Joelle Tahta, *PREDICT project, providing support to countries in detecting COVID-19, receives six-month extension*, The California Aggie (May 4, 2021) available at <https://theaggie.org/2020/05/04/predict-project-providing-support-to-countries-in-detecting-covid-19-receives-six-month-extension/>.

¹² Kristin Burns, *PREDICT Receives Extension for COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Response*, UC Davis News (Apr. 3, 2020) available at <https://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/news/predict-receives-extension-covid-19-pandemic-emergency-response>.

¹³ *Id.*

To be clear, this suggests, and we believe, that USAID has information with analytical value to the COVID-19 origins investigation.

USAID Risky Research During the United States Gain-of-Function Moratorium

The PREDICT consortium was in its formal ten-year partnership with the WIV from 2009 to 2019, during the U.S. gain-of-function research moratorium from 2014 to 2017.¹⁴ Gain-of-function research manipulates microorganisms to enhance the pathogenicity or transmissibility of potential pandemic pathogens (PPPs).¹⁵ This research can be misused to pose significant threats, thus having “dual use” risks and is a subset of Dual Use of Reach Concern (DURC) categories of studies that have safeguards in place.¹⁶ A significant exception in oversight policy is noted in that research associated with developing and producing vaccines is not considered enhanced PPPs.¹⁷ It is critical to understand that this exception creates oversight loopholes and if research is declared to create vaccines, the research can bypass important risk assessment analysis.¹⁸ USAID may have been funding gain-of-function studies at the WIV and, importantly, while bat coronavirus research studies were ongoing.¹⁹

U.S. federal grant-making rules and laws require grant recipients to preserve research records and give record access to grant-making agencies.²⁰ Published reports about PREDICT research experiments describe the information in records that USAID keeps or can access in accordance with applicable laws and policies. Through its PREDICT grant recipients, such as EHA and UC Davis, USAID likely possesses detailed documentation and extensive knowledge about bat coronavirus research and experiments performed at the WIV and at other laboratories in China.²¹ Considering its long-term WIV partnership and the extent of the research conducted there by USAID grantees, we expect USAID has records pertinent to our COVID-19 origins investigation.²² As such, we request USAID produce all information and related documents to the following items:

Scientific Research Data

1. All research records from the PREDICT COVID-19 extension project.

¹⁴ National Institutes of Health, *Gain of Function Research*, Office of Science Policy (accessed June 14, 2021) available at <https://osp.od.nih.gov/biotechnology/gain-of-function-research/>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ National Institutes of Health, *Dual Use of Research Concern*, Office of Scientific Policy (accessed June 18, 2021) available at <https://osp.od.nih.gov/biotechnology/dual-use-research-of-concern/>.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Framework for Guiding Funding Decisions about Proposed Research Involving Enhanced Potential Pandemic Pathogens*, Science Safety Security (Dec. 2017) available at <https://www.phe.gov/s3/dualuse/Pages/p3co.aspx>.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ National Institutes of Health, *Gain of Function Research*, Office of Science Policy (accessed June 14, 2021) available at <https://osp.od.nih.gov/biotechnology/gain-of-function-research/>.

²⁰ 2 CFR 200 (Dec. 26, 2014) available at https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr200_main_02.tpl.

²¹ USAID, *PREDICT-China*, (2014) available at

https://web.archive.org/web/20180927024933/https://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/ohi/local_resources/pdfs/predict-china.pdf.

²² 2 CFR 200 (Dec. 26, 2014) available at https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr200_main_02.tpl.

2. Any bat coronavirus sequences from its supported research that are more genetically similar to SARS-CoV-2 virus than any other sequences already publicly known.
3. WIV bat coronavirus data, including unpublished partial and full bat coronavirus sequences collected in China from over 3,061 bats, 737 rodents and shrews, and 146 other animals sampled in animal markets, farms, and rural areas in China.
4. Human blood samples collected from more than 1,300 individuals in high-risk human populations and the 4,483 samples that tested positive for coronaviruses.²³
5. Documentation about the full characterization of the whole genomes of two novel bat SARS-like coronaviruses discovered by the research team.²⁴

WIV Safety Protocols

6. Reports of any WIV laboratory accidents or other safety concerns about the WIV facilities, including the WIV infectious disease diagnostics labs used by USAID or WIV researchers, described as having “state-of-the-art molecular virology and serology capacity.”²⁵
7. Reports regarding capabilities of WIV scientists to detect, risk assess, and predict infectious disease outbreaks of bat coronaviruses.²⁶
8. Reports of observations about inadequate staffing of properly trained technicians to support the WIV, and any requests for additional staff.
9. Documentation about the WIV sample storage procedures and safety protocols for storing the SARS-like coronavirus isolates from bats sampled in China.
10. WIV storage of the bat SARS-like coronavirus that the research team discovered that has 99.98 percent sequence homology to the SARS coronavirus, capable of binding to the human ACE-2 receptor.²⁷
11. WIV laboratory biosafety protocols, including the use of personal protection equipment (PPE).²⁸

²³ USAID, *PREDICT-China*, (2014) available at https://web.archive.org/web/20180927024933/https://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/ohi/local_resources/pdfs/predict-china.pdf, USAID PREDICT, *USAID Briefing, March 17, 2020*, Pandemic Preparedness for Global Security (Mar. 17, 2020) available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c7d60a711f7845f734d4a73/t/5e95fb725309184f8a1e76b2/1586887590640/PREDICT+M+arch+18+Data+Discussion.pdf>.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ USAID PREDICT-1 CONSORTIUM, *Reducing Pandemic Risk, Promoting Global Health*, Final Report (Dec. 2014) available at <https://ohi.sf.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk5251/files/files/page/predict-final-report-lo.pdf>.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ USAID, *PREDICT-China*, Wayback Machine (2014) available at https://web.archive.org/web/20180927024933/https://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/ohi/local_resources/pdfs/predict-china.pdf.

Outbreak Predictive Models of Naturally Occurring Viruses in China

12. The PREDICT project's predictive models and risk assessments to chart infectious disease outbreaks from animal markets in China.²⁹
13. The PREDICT project's predictive models and risk assessment that the PREDICT consortium created to chart the infectious disease outbreaks from the Chinese wet animal markets of the Hubei province animal market.³⁰
14. The next-generation, fine-scale outbreak hotspot maps identifying those at risk for outbreak and where viruses from animals (zoonosis) would spillover and amplify in China.³¹
15. Surveillance and ecological data with Geographical Information System (GIS) information in China used to assess the risk of emerging diseases and evaluate mitigation strategies for decreasing risk of pathogen spillover from animals into people.³²

WIV Capacity Building Records

16. Financial accounting records of all equipment, technology, personnel and financial support provided to the WIV to include all names, titles and dates of research participants.
17. All records of USAID training of WIV field and laboratory scientific teams in how to:
 - investigate disease outbreaks, and collect, process, preserve, and analyze samples;³³
 - use surveillance and ecological data, with GGIS, to assess emerging disease risks in China,³⁴ use consensus polymerase chain reaction (cPCR) and high-throughput sequencing (HTS) tools to detect and characterize DNA and RNA viruses present in wildlife samples;³⁵

²⁹ USAID PREDICT-1 CONSORTIUM, *Reducing Pandemic Risk, Promoting Global Health*, Final Report (Dec. 2014) available at <https://ohi.sf.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk5251/files/files/page/predict-final-report-lo.pdf>, USAID, *PREDICT-China*, (2014) available at https://web.archive.org/web/20180927024933/https://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/ohi/local_resources/pdfs/predict-china.pdf.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ USAID PREDICT-1 CONSORTIUM, *Reducing Pandemic Risk, Promoting Global Health*, Final Report (Dec. 2014) available at <https://ohi.sf.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk5251/files/files/page/predict-final-report-lo.pdf>.

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Id.*, USAID, *PREDICT-China*, (2014) available at https://web.archive.org/web/20180927024933/https://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/ohi/local_resources/pdfs/predict-china.pdf.

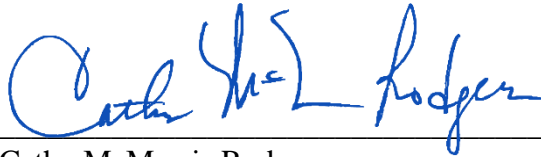
³⁵ Kirsten V.K. Gilardi, Jonna A.K. Mazet, *The United States Agency for International Development Emerging Pandemic Threat PREDICT Project – Global Detection of Emerging Wildlife Viral Zoonoses*, *Fowler's Zoo and Wild Animal Medicine Current Therapy*, Volume 9, Pages 110-116 (Sep. 28, 2018) available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7152072/>.

- clone and sequence Polymerase chain reaction-identified samples to detect new viruses and compare them with existing viruses;³⁶ improve sequencing and expand divergent strain detection;³⁷ and
- perform predictive analytics.³⁸

We respectfully request that the USAID meet with Minority Committee staff by July 12, 2021, to discuss what documents and information can be provided. After the requested documents and information have been provided, we ask that the USAID provide a briefing to the Minority Committee staff to discuss the documents and information that the USAID, including its prime and sub-award recipients, have related to the origins of SARS-CoV-2.

If you have any questions, please contact Alan Slobodin or Diane Cutler of the Minority Committee staff.

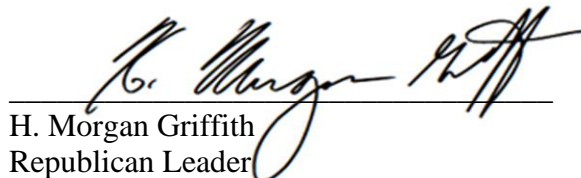
Sincerely,



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

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

³⁶ USAID PREDICT-1 CONSORTIUM, *Reducing Pandemic Risk, Promoting Global Health*, Final Report (Dec. 2014) available at <https://ohi.sf.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk5251/files/files/page/predict-final-report-lo.pdf>.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*