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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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February 14, 2022

Dr. Francis Collins  
National Human Genome Research Institute  
National Institutes of Health  
31 Center Drive MSC 2152  
9000 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20892-2152

Dr. Collins,

Recently disclosed emails revealed that in January 2020, virology experts told you and Dr. Anthony Fauci that they believed COVID-19 had lab-made features and that the virus may have escaped from a lab.<sup>1</sup> However, those same email communications, particularly when viewed in light of other publicly available information, demonstrate an apparent effort by you and Dr. Fauci not only to cover-up the concerns those virologists raised, but to suppress scientific debate about the origins of COVID-19. It appears you and Dr. Fauci may have done so to protect China and avoid criticism about incredibly risky research that the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) was funding at the Wuhan lab.

According to emails released by House Oversight and Reform Republicans, there was significant concern among virology experts that COVID-19 may have originated from a lab.<sup>2</sup> One scientist told you he was “bothered by the furin site” and had a “hard time explain[ing] that as an event outside the lab,” which led him to opine it was “70:30” that the virus came from a lab; another scientist told you he “can’t think of a plausible natural scenario”; a different scientist claimed that “some of the features (potentially) look engineered”; and yet another said the “furin cleavage site” struck him as unusual as it related to natural evolution and that “if evolutionary origins...were to be discussed...only people with sufficient information or access to samples to address it would be the teams working in Wuhan.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Correspondence posted by House Oversight and Government Reform Republicans (Jan. 11, 2022) *available at* <https://republicans-oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Letter-Re.-Feb-1-Emails-011122.pdf>

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

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

Rather than allow for scientific review and robust debate, communications in these emails show that you and Dr. Fauci appeared more concerned about protecting certain relationships and institutional interests in collaborations in China. In fact, the NIAID has had a full-time official, Dr. Ping Chen, stationed at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing for several years to oversee and promote NIAID's interests in China and the emails show that your immediate concern was how discussion of the lab leak theory would do "great potential harm to science and international harmony." Specifically, you were responding to an email chain that included this statement from Dr. Ron Fouchier: "However, further debate about such accusations would unnecessarily distract top researchers from their active duties and do unnecessary harm to science in general and science in China in particular." You even went a step further and asked how NIH could work to "help put down this very destructive conspiracy." In contrast, there is no evidence from the available emails nor has NIH provided any information to us that indicates Dr. Fauci or you took action to investigate further the possible lab origins of the pandemic.

Instead of alerting national security experts to the potential threat that scientists were questioning the origin of the SARS2 virus, you shut down debate about the COVID-19 origin.<sup>4</sup> We are deeply concerned about your decision to suppress highly relevant information when you received the early alert that the SARS2 virus could be a potential threat. As the then Director of the NIH that includes NIAID's multibillion dollar biodefense program and the NIAID as an advocate for global sampling and surveillance to detect *potential* pandemics, when the alert was in your hands, you remained silent and worse, propagated a counter narrative that may have hurt our government's response in the early days of the pandemic.

We oversee public health and are seeking the truth about how this pandemic started so we can better prepare and hopefully prevent future pandemics. We have significant concerns that your conduct, which appears to have been designed to protect China and, in furtherance of that, to suppress certain scientific information, occurred at a time when it was critical for government leaders and decisionmakers to be aware of all relevant information and may have hurt our COVID-19 response.

Accordingly, in light of these concerns, please provide written responses to the following questions by February 28, 2022:

1. Regarding your January 2020 communications with the virology experts referenced above:
  - a. How were the communications with the virology experts initiated?
    - i. Did you initiate the communications with the virology experts or did they?
    - ii. When were these communications initiated? Please identify all parties to these communications and the specific subject matters addressed in these communications.

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

- b. What was the purpose for your communications with these virology experts?
  - c. Please identify additional individuals you consulted with about the origins of COVID-19 in January and February 2020.
  - d. How did you select the virology experts to contact?
  - e. When did your communications with these virology experts about the origins of COVID-19 end and why?
2. Did you brief anyone at the White House, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), or anyone else involved in the COVID-19 response about the communications with the virology experts?
  - a. If you did, please identify who you notified, when you notified them, and what information you provided to them.
  - b. If you did not, why did you withhold such relevant information?
3. To what extent did preserving international harmony (especially with China) affect your advice to the White House, HHS, or anyone else involved in the COVID-19 response?
4. What is the purpose of having an NIAID official posted at the U.S. embassy in China?
5. Please identify any NIAID collaborations in China from January 1 to June 30, 2020.
6. During January 2020, were you in contact with Chinese scientists about SARS CoV-2?
  - a. If so, how have these contacts influenced you in the performance of your COVID-19 response duties?
7. Prior to the January 31, 2020, email, did you know about the pangolin coronavirus sequence with a receptor binding domain (RBD) similar to the one in SARS CoV-2?
8. Did the publication of pangolin virus RBD impact your assessment on the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, why?
9. Did the publication on February 3, 2020, of the RaTG-13 bat coronavirus sequence that was 96 percent similar to SARS CoV-2 impact your assessment on the origins of COVID-19 pandemic? If so, why?

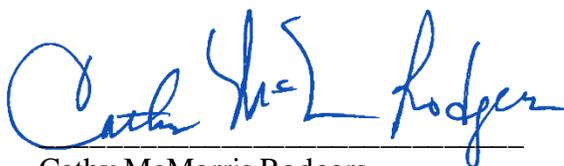
10. Were you involved with the February 4, 2020, emergency meeting at the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) convened at the request of the White House?
  - a. If so, did you attend, what was your role, and what was discussed?
  - b. Did the NASEM emergency meeting influence your assessment of the origins of COVID-19?
  - c. Did you and/or the virology experts discuss the NASEM emergency meeting in the communications?
11. Did you edit, make suggestions, or influence in any way the publication of the proximal origin paper?
12. In a February 2, 2022, letter to HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra and NIH Acting Director Lawrence Tabak, the House Committee on Oversight and Reform Republicans noted that NIH forced an NIH advisor to shred notes and other documents pertaining to the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) grants as early as 2014. That committee pointed to a November 5, 2021, email from a redacted source, which stated:

I signed a confidentiality agreement in which I agreed not to discuss any grant with anyone except with other members of the study section, and - once the meeting was over - that I would destroy any notes that I had taken during the meeting (we did this by tossing them in shred box in the meeting room).

This email suggests that this redacted source served on a peer review panel for the NIAID, and that the practice of shredding documents was not limited to grants related to EcoHealth Alliance or the WIV. It may have been systemic.

What are NIAID's document retention rules for peer review panels scoring grant proposals? Please provide the legal justification for any document shredding practices at NIAID, and specifically NIAID peer review panels.

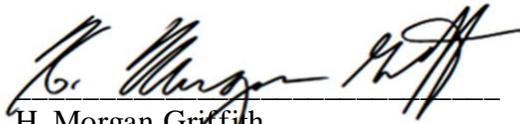
Sincerely,



Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Brett Guthrie  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Health

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. Morgan Griffith", written over a horizontal line.

H. Morgan Griffith  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations