

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

Majority (202) 225-5074  
Minority (202) 225-5051

June 8, 2023

The Honorable Brad Wenstrup  
Chairman  
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic  
2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Wenstrup:

As we emerge from the coronavirus crisis, efforts to promote our understanding of the novel coronavirus's origins are a crucial component of our work to prevent and prepare for future pandemics. An objective analysis of the virus's origins that is free from political interference and that follows the facts will help us to advance this objective and save lives.

Since we initiated our work for the 118th Congress, the Select Subcommittee has not pursued objective oversight of the pandemic's origins. Instead, the Select Subcommittee has used its far-reaching platform to advance a predetermined narrative that Dr. Anthony Fauci and Dr. Francis Collins were part of a lab-created and leaked SARS-CoV-2 virus and then nefariously worked to suppress information and cover up how the pandemic began. The Select Subcommittee's aggressive narrative attempts to vilify public health officials and inserts strong bias that undermines ongoing, fact-based efforts led by experts in the scientific and intelligence communities to promote our understanding of how the virus could have emerged naturally or from a research-related incident. In doing so, the Select Subcommittee has prioritized a partisan narrative over meaningful efforts to prevent and prepare for future pandemics in order to save American lives.

The Select Subcommittee's remaining time is limited, and with each day spent on the partisan narrative, we are needlessly politicizing an issue of paramount public health importance and wasting an opportunity to advance the health and safety of the American people. Rather than leveraging the question of the pandemic's origins to advance a politically-driven narrative, we should—to the best of our ability—comprehensively, rigorously, and objectively consider all potential possibilities of how the virus emerged so that our findings can inform good policies to prevent and better prepare us for the next pandemic.

***Select Subcommittee Republicans' Hearing Witnesses Have Lacked Credibility and Demonstrated Bias***

The witnesses the Select Subcommittee invites to testify at hearings are a crucial component of our methodology and set the tone for our examination of the pandemic's origins. To date, the Select Subcommittee has held two hearings examining the origins of the novel coronavirus.<sup>1</sup> Each of these hearings could have been an objective, balanced conversation between experts with a range of perspectives on the pandemic's origins. Instead, the Select Subcommittee used these hearings to elevate witnesses who lack credibility and have demonstrated bias by advancing the narrative that the lab leak theory is the only plausible origin of the virus and that there were intentional and nefarious actions by Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins to mislead the public. As you know, to date, the National Intelligence Council and four government agencies assess with "low confidence" that the virus originated through natural transmission, while the Federal Bureau of Investigations and the Department of Energy assess with low to moderate confidence that the virus originated in a lab.

Ahead of the first hearing, Select Subcommittee Republicans requested the testimony of Nicholas Wade—a journalist and author who staunchly advocates for the lab leak hypothesis, despite lacking the qualifications necessary for an expert perspective on the scientific question of the pandemic's origins. In addition, Mr. Wade has a history of perpetuating racist theories regarding genetics and human behavior that have been hailed by former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke and overwhelmingly rejected by the mainstream scientific, medical, and research communities.<sup>2</sup>

At the second hearing, Select Subcommittee Republicans featured the testimony of former Trump Administration Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe. I was optimistic that Director Ratcliffe would offer a balanced perspective on the pandemic's origins—one consistent with the nuanced, fact-based approach that defines the work of America's Intelligence Community (IC). However, I was troubled to hear him jump to conclusions that directly contradict the IC's October 2021 declassified assessment of the pandemic's origins. For example, in his written testimony, Director Ratcliffe articulated his belief that "the only plausible assessment" the Central Intelligence Agency could make is that the novel coronavirus originated in a Chinese Communist Party-controlled lab. He also speculated that eventually, every single agency comprising the IC will assess that the novel coronavirus originated from a Wuhan lab leak.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, *Hearing on Investigating the Origins of COVID-19*, 118th Cong. (Mar. 8, 2023); Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, *Hearing on Investigating the Origins of COVID-19, Part 2: China and the Available Intelligence*, 118th Cong. (Apr. 18, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> *Who Is Nicholas Wade? 'Troublesome Inheritance' Author Praised by KKK Head*, Newsweek (Mar. 8, 2023) (online at [www.newsweek.com/nicholas-wade-troublesome-inheritance-author-praised-kkk-head-1786436](http://www.newsweek.com/nicholas-wade-troublesome-inheritance-author-praised-kkk-head-1786436)); *Letters: "A Troublesome Inheritance"*, New York Times (Aug. 8, 2014) (online at <https://nytimes.com/2014/08/10/books/review/letters-a-troublesome-inheritance.html>).

<sup>3</sup> Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, Testimony of Former Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe, *Hearing on Investigating the Origins of COVID-19, Part 2: China and the Available Intelligence*, 118th Cong. (Apr. 18, 2023) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Ratcliffe-Prepared-Testimony.pdf>).

While Director Ratcliffe is entitled to his point of view, there is no evidence at this point to suggest that the intelligence underlying the IC's October 2021 inconclusive declassified assessment is erroneous or faulty.<sup>4</sup>

***Transcribed Interviewees Have Contradicted Select Subcommittee Republicans' Misleading Narratives***

These biases have also affected the Select Subcommittee's transcribed interviews, where interviewees have contradicted the Republican Members' misleading narratives. For example, Select Subcommittee Republicans released a Staff Memorandum on March 5, 2023, touting "New Evidence" in the Select Subcommittee's origins investigation. The memo quoted an email written by Dr. Kristian Andersen, a coauthor of the "Proximal Origin Paper,"<sup>5</sup> wherein Dr. Andersen described his work as "trying to disprove any type of lab theory." Select Subcommittee Republicans relied on this quote to accuse Dr. Andersen of seeking to "formulate a paper, regardless of available evidence, that would disprove a lab leak."<sup>6</sup>

However, as our staffs learned in a transcribed interview of Dr. W. Ian Lipkin, another coauthor of the "Proximal Origin" paper, scientists often try to disprove particular theories with the goal of finding a theory that cannot be disproved. Seeking to disprove a theory is, in Dr. Lipkin's words, "an appropriate thing to do" and in fact "gets to the philosophy of science."<sup>7</sup> Select Subcommittee Republicans have not corrected their misleading Staff Memorandum or otherwise accounted for this contradiction.

In addition, witnesses in both Select Subcommittee interviews to date have been asked misleading and incomplete questions about the significance of illnesses that may have befallen researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in autumn 2019.<sup>8</sup> In both cases, Democratic staff were forced to introduce into the interview record the IC's October 2021 declassified assessment, which explains that these reports, even if confirmed, "are not diagnostic" of the pandemic's origins.<sup>9</sup> Had my staff not introduced that report, both witnesses would have lacked important context regarding the questions being posed to them. This appears to be another example of

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<sup>4</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Updated Assessment on COVID-19 Origins* (Oct. 29, 2021) (online at [www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Declassified-Assessment-on-COVID-19-Origins.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Declassified-Assessment-on-COVID-19-Origins.pdf)).

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Kristian Andersen et al., *The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2*, *Nature Medicine* (Mar. 17, 2020) (online at [www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0820-9](http://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0820-9)).

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum from Majority Staff to Members of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, *New Evidence Resulting from the Select Subcommittee's Investigation into the Origins of COVID-19 – "The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2"* (Mar. 5, 2023) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2023.03.05-SSCP-Memo-Re.-New-Evidence.Proximal-Origin.pdf>).

<sup>7</sup> Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, Interview of Dr. W. Ian Lipkin (Apr. 6, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, Interview of Dr. W. Ian Lipkin (Apr. 6, 2023); Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, Interview of Dr. Michael Farzan (Apr. 21, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Updated Assessment on COVID-19 Origins* (Oct. 29, 2021) (online at [www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Declassified-Assessment-on-COVID-19-Origins.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Declassified-Assessment-on-COVID-19-Origins.pdf)).

Select Subcommittee Republicans seeking to elicit answers that fit a preconceived narrative of the origins of the pandemic.

***The Select Subcommittee Should Conduct Its Evaluation of the Virus's Origins with Objectivity, Consider All the Possibilities, and Prioritize Forward-Looking Policy Solutions to Prevent Future Pandemics***

To date, the Select Subcommittee has not meaningfully met Congress's obligation to prevent and prepare our nation for future pandemics. As Ranking Member, I urge you to take the following steps so that we can correct course and work constructively to advance the interests of the American people.

First, to promote Congress's objective understanding of the novel coronavirus's origins and the ways in which future viruses may come to be, the Select Subcommittee must hear from a host of nonpartisan experts with deep expertise in the various potential avenues for the pandemic's emergence—including zoonotic transfers and research-related incidents. These individuals should include scientists and researchers from diverse backgrounds and expertise with a wide array of perspectives on the pandemic's origins. In addition, the experts who come before the Select Subcommittee should be committed to objective, open dialogue and have a proven track record of following the science without regard to political convenience or affiliation. Our job as Members of the Select Subcommittee should not be to advance a predetermined, partisan narrative. Instead, we should learn from the experts so that we can form thoughtful, nuanced views based on what science and evidence indicates about the various possible origin pathways and empower our researchers, without politicization or aggressive bias, to reach the truth.

Second, the attacks against America's public health officials must cease. Select Subcommittee Republicans have repeatedly and unfairly attacked Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins—alleging that during their tenures at NIH, they suppressed information about a lab-created and leaked SARS-CoV-2 virus to cover up how the pandemic began. That kind of rhetoric manufactures distrust in America's public health institutions. In fact, according to Pew Research Center, fewer than three in ten adults in the United States have a great deal of confidence in medical scientists to act in the public's interest.<sup>10</sup>

Third, we must consider at every step of the way the actions that Congress can take to build on the progress made during the 117th Congress through the American Rescue Plan and the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 to prevent and prepare for future pandemics—regardless of their origins.<sup>11</sup> We must evaluate and pursue measures to mitigate the risk of zoonotic diseases and rapidly respond to their emergence, such as measures to promote detection and surveillance of potential viruses arising from interactions between people and their environment around the globe—including at wildlife markets, which we know are a likely source

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<sup>10</sup> Pew Research Center, *Americans' Trust in Scientists, Other Groups Declines* (Feb. 15, 2022) (online at [www.pewresearch.org/science/2022/02/15/americans-trust-in-scientists-other-groups-declines/](http://www.pewresearch.org/science/2022/02/15/americans-trust-in-scientists-other-groups-declines/)).

<sup>11</sup> American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub. L. No. 117-2; Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-328.

of zoonotic diseases that can spill over into humans. We must also prioritize identifying policies and areas for international collaboration to bolster lab safety standards domestically and abroad so that we can mitigate the risk of dangerous pathogens emerging from research-related incidents. These are just a subset of the commonsense policy solutions that we must pursue—regardless of how the novel coronavirus emerged.

The fact of the matter is that we may never have a definitive answer on the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for as long as the Chinese Communist Party maintains its obstruction and obfuscation. That notwithstanding, as the Select Subcommittee continues its examination of the pandemic's origins, we must do so by focusing on science and following the facts. As Ranking Member, I remain hopeful that the Select Subcommittee can lead with objectivity and lay the groundwork for policies to prevent future pandemics. There is still time to change course—to recommit to scientific integrity, to put the needs of the American people above political theater, and to work together to save lives.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raul Ruiz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Rep. Raul Ruiz, M.D.  
Ranking Member  
Select Subcommittee on the  
Coronavirus Pandemic