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COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

May 5, 2021

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci
Director
National Institute of Allergy & Infectious Diseases
5601 Fishers Lane, MSC 9806
Bethesda, Maryland 20892-9806

Dear Dr. Fauci,

Over the past year, nearly 600,000 Americans and more than 3 million people worldwide have died from COVID-19. Across the globe, there have been more than 150 million confirmed cases of this disease, costing trillions in economic damage. Daily life has been upended and countless businesses destroyed. Understanding the cause of this pandemic—and ensuring that something like it never happens again—is the most important question facing the world today.

Given the stakes, we cannot afford to settle for a limited, blinkered, or politicized understanding of the origin of this terrible disease. While many in the scientific community were quick to dismiss the possibility that the COVID-19 outbreak originated with a laboratory leak in Wuhan, China, information initially released by the Trump State Department and later confirmed by the Biden administration suggests much closer examination is needed.¹ The State Department has detailed several concerning revelations, including that the U.S. government has reason to believe several researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) became sick in autumn 2019 with symptoms consistent with COVID-19, before the first public cases emerged in that community. Viruses have frequently leaked from labs over the years in China and elsewhere, including from accidentally infected researchers.

In fact, after World Health Organization (WHO) investigators were stymied as part of their joint report alongside Chinese officials, WHO Chief Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called for further investigation of the lab leak theory, stating that it “requires further investigation,

¹ “Fact Sheet: Activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology,” Office of the Spokesperson, Department of State, last modified January 15, 2021, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/fact-sheet-activity-at-the-wuhan-institute-of-virology/index.html>;

Rogin, Josh, “The Biden administration confirms some but not all of Trump’s Wuhan lab claims.” *Washington Post*, March 9, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/03/09/biden-administration-confirms-some-trump-wuhan-lab-claims/>.

potentially with additional missions involving specialist experts” and, “as far as WHO is concerned all hypotheses remain on the table.”²

Through National Institutes of Health grants to the New York-based organization EcoHealth Alliance, the U.S. government helped fund research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV).³ While this funding was no doubt well-intentioned, taxpayers deserve a detailed understanding of whether federal resources supported dangerous “gain-of-function” research, and whether this might have played a role in the outbreak of the pandemic. As the world seeks to recover from this pandemic, Americans deserve to understand not only how this catastrophe came about, but that their government is learning and internalizing lessons to ensure it does not happen again.

With that in mind, I respectfully ask for answers to the following questions:

1. Do you agree with Dr. Tedros that that the lab leak possibility "requires further investigation, potentially with additional missions involving specialist experts?" Should any further investigations include the case of the sick researchers inside the WIV in autumn 2019? Why or why not?
2. Have you scrutinized all that the U.S. government knows about the sick researchers at the WIV, including the facts released by the State Department in January and any additional underlying intelligence or other information? If so, how so? If not, why not?
3. How much U.S. government funding has gone to the WIV over time, and how much of that supported gain-of-function research? Did U.S. government funding go to the WIV even during the 2014-2017 U.S. moratorium on funding gain-of-function research?
4. In light of the Chinese Communist Party’s extensive coverup and lack of transparency, surrounding the origins of the pandemic, even to this day, how should the U.S. government modify or reconsider scientific exchanges with Chinese entities?
5. You have argued over the years that gain-of-function research is a risk worth taking, given the potential benefits for the creation of vaccines and therapeutics.⁴ Does the COVID-19 pandemic and the possibility of a leak from the WIV raise questions about the future prudence of gain-of-function research? How can we quantify the risks associated with this type of research in the future, particularly when it comes to non-transparent countries like China, and at what point does this research simply become too risky?

² “WHO Director-General’s remarks at the Member State Briefing on the report of the international team studying the origins of SARS-CoV-2,” Director-General Speeches, World Health Organization, last modified March 30, 2021, <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-remarks-at-the-member-state-briefing-on-the-report-of-the-international-team-studying-the-origins-of-sars-cov-2>.

³ Aizenman, Nurith, “Why The U.S. Government Stopped Funding A Research Project On Bats And Coronaviruses,” *National Public Radio*, April 29, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/04/29/847948272/why-the-u-s-government-stopped-funding-a-research-project-on-bats-and-coronaviru>.

⁴ Fauci, Anthony, Nabel, Gary and Collins, Francis, “A flu virus risk worth taking,” *Washington Post*, December 30, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-flu-virus-risk-worth-taking/2011/12/30/gIQAM9sNRP_story.html.

Thank you for your consideration in this important matter. I look forward to your response and to working with you to help ensure the health and safety of the American public, now and in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "MG", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Mike Gallagher
Member of Congress