



COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY**  
REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

## **Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas**

Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight Hearing – “Principles for  
Outbreak Investigation: COVID-19 and Future Infectious Diseases”

*July 14, 2021*

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Thank you, Chairman Foster for holding today’s hearing. And thank you to our witnesses for your participation.

While this Committee has held a handful of hearings over the last 18 months examining the role of the scientific community in combatting COVID-19, I would be remiss if I did not mention that today’s hearing is the first official effort in the U.S. House of Representatives to explore the origins of this pandemic. I hope we can use today’s hearing as an important first step towards a full Congressional inquiry into the origins of COVID-19.

For the last 18 months, the United States have been battling this pandemic, and over 600,000 American lives have been claimed by the virus. COVID-19 is unlike anything we’ve seen in the United States since the deadly 1918 Spanish Flu, but here we are 18 months later and only just now discussing the principles for investigating the origins of the virus. This conversation is long overdue.

Over the past several months, members of the House Democratic Leadership have made comments that this Committee is investigating the origins of COVID-19. This subcommittee hearing is a good start to determining how this outbreak started, but this is not an investigation. In order to get answers on COVID-19 origins, Congress needs to step up and get involved. Relevant committees of jurisdiction, including this Committee, need to come together in a bipartisan manner and take this inquiry seriously.

Understanding the origins of COVID-19 isn’t about scoring political points or detracting from ongoing efforts to fight the virus. It’s about preventing and mitigating future pandemics, and ensuring that we are responsibly funding public health research. We shouldn’t have a preferred outbreak origin theory because we prefer one narrative over another. And we shouldn’t bury our heads in the sand and refuse to investigate COVID’s origins because we’re concerned about what might happen if we get answers we don’t like.

The job of science isn't to prop up one argument or another. The job of science is to determine the facts. As policymakers, our job is to take those facts, weigh them alongside other information, and then make decisions. We can't do that without a better understanding of this outbreak. So I urge Congressional leadership to allow a transparent and thorough investigation of COVID's origins.

The Chinese Communist Party has not been forthcoming or trustworthy in sharing information about the origins of the virus, so U.S. federal agencies must work closely with the intelligence community to find answers. I hope we can work together on this committee to continue to support American scientists and researchers at federal agencies, national labs, and academia who have been working tirelessly since COVID-19 reached our shores to continue to learn more about where this virus came from and eradicate it for good.

We also need to work together to improve trust in science. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the way science has been communicated to the general public has not been handled well. Information has been presented in ways that are confusing, misleading, and occasionally polarizing. That has created tremendous problems.

The CDC reports that roughly 40 percent of adults over the age of 18 still remain unvaccinated against COVID-19. The only way COVID-19 will stop spreading in the United States and around the world is if vaccination rates increase and herd immunity is achieved. This message needs to be communicated urgently to the public. And we need to ensure the public has reason to trust that information.

For more than a year, people were told there was only one possible explanation for this pandemic and that any other theories were not only wrong but dangerous. But now there is an acknowledgement that we don't have conclusive evidence for or against any specific origin theory. That creates mistrust. Communicating science during a global pandemic can be a matter of life or death. We need to do so thoughtfully and accurately and we cannot treat the assumptions and opinions of scientists and officials as established fact if their claims are not supported by evidence.

In order to have a credible investigation moving forward, all available evidence and theories must be considered fairly, and the process must be transparent, free of conflicts of interest, and protected from political interference. While we may never know the true origins of the COVID-19 virus, we owe it to the American people, and the rest of the world to give it our best shot at investigating where it came from to better prepare for pandemics to come.

I would like to thank the witnesses again for their participation here today and I look forward to this discussion.

I yield back.