

INVESTIGATING THE ORIGINS OF COVID
PART 2:
CHINA AND THE AVAILABLE INTELLIGENCE

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS
PANDEMIC
OF THE

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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INVESTIGATING THE ORIGINS OF COVID PART 2: CHINA AND THE AVAILABLE INTELLIGENCE

Tuesday, April 18, 2023
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC
Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:34 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Brad Wenstrup (Chairman of the Subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Wenstrup, Malliotakis, Miller-Meeks, Lesko, Cloud, Joyce, Greene, Jackson, McCormick, Ruiz, Dingell, Mfume, Garcia, Bera, and Tokuda.

Also present: Representatives Comer, Jordan, and Moskowitz.

Dr. WENSTRUP. The Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic will come to order. I want to welcome everyone.

Without objection, the Chair may declare a recess at any time.

Pursuant to Rule 7(d) of the Committee on Oversight and Accountability, at the discretion of Chairman Comer, Mr. Jordan, a Member of the full Committee, may participate in today's hearing for the purposes of questions.

Further, without objection, I ask unanimous consent for Mr. Moskowitz of the full committee to join today for the purposes of questions.

I now recognize myself for the purpose of making an opening statement.

Today marks the Select Subcommittee's second hearing in our series investigating the origins of COVID-19. At our first hearing, we heard what we presume for years that in addition to this being a scientific question, it is also one of intelligence and national security. Former director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Robert Redfield, who himself is a virologist, while discussing the origins testified, "I do not think that the answer is going to come from the scientific community. I think the answer is going to come from the intelligence community."

As Dr. Redfield stated, and we agree, the intelligence community plays an important role in this investigation. We are not here to analyze the intelligence ourselves. We are here to listen to the experts and follow the facts, and that is exactly what we are here to

do today: ask those that were actually involved in the intelligence process in the earliest days of the pandemic about what they saw and how we as Congress should proceed. We appreciate each of the witnesses here today.

I do want to highlight that according to the congressional Research Service, this is the first time current or former director of national intelligence has testified before the Oversight Committee. Welcome. I think it truly shows the importance of this issue for Director Ratcliffe to be here today, and we thank him.

We will discuss and examine many aspects of the available unclassified intelligence, and it is my sincere hope that this hearing moves the ball forward and we can ultimately agree on both sides of the aisle that the origins of COVID-19 cannot be solved by science alone. Starting in early 2020, there were rumblings about the possibility COVID-19 came from a lab likely in Wuhan. Every month since then, more and more circumstantial evidence has come to light suggesting this is the case.

On January 15, 2021, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, released a fact sheet regarding some intelligence gathered surrounding the origins of COVID-19. The fact sheet stated three things. First, there were numerous researchers inside the Wuhan Institute of Virology that were sick in the fall of 2019. While this does not prove COVID-19 came from the lab, it is a data point suggesting so. Just two weeks ago, an expert in emerging disease outbreaks testified before this Subcommittee that researchers in the lab becoming sick would be consistent with a research-related lab outbreak.

Second, the Wuhan Institute of Virology has a published record of gain-of-function research, including at low biosafety levels, and, again, we know that much of this work was done with U.S.-based, EcoHealth Alliance. And we know that EcoHealth Alliance has failed to publish all its work and has, in fact, refused to share its work with the U.S. Government. In other words, U.S.-taxpayer-funded risky research that may have sparked a pandemic is being hidden by a U.S. entity in China.

Third, the Wuhan Institute of Virology has cooperated with the Chinese military since at least 2017, including on animal laboratory experiments. The Biden Administration did not and still has not disagreed with these facts. A senior Biden State Department official said, "No one is disputing the information, the fact that those data points exist, the fact that they are accurate." Ironically enough, the Biden Administration takes issue with the fact that the Trump Administration released these facts. The same official said, "The Trump Administration put spin on the ball." I think the fact sheet is pretty clear and non-biased. It even stated that the U.S. Government does not know exactly where, when, or how the COVID-19 virus was initially transmitted to humans. That is true. The rest are simply statements of fact derived from available intelligence.

Next, on October 29, 2021, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released its first declassified assessment on COVID-19 origins. This stated unequivocally that both a laboratory and natural origin are plausible. Since then, more reporting has emerged. FBI Director Christopher Wray confirmed publicly that the FBI assessed COVID-19 most likely originated from a lab incident in

Wuhan. And the *Wall Street Journal* reported the Department of Energy now also believes a lab leak is the most likely origin.

The fact that it is these two agencies is important. The FBI uses experts in biological threats and was reportedly supported by the National Bioforensic Analysis Center, and the Department of Energy used its own Z Division experts in investigating biological threats. These are both scientific and intelligence experts.

While the specific origin of COVID-19 may not be 100 percent clear, there is mounting evidence suggesting a research or lab-related incident. What is clear, though, is that China does not want the globe to know the origins. They dodge and duck every legitimate attempt to investigate this question. According to the fact sheet, China has systematically prevented a transparent and thorough investigation of the COVID-19 pandemic's origin. According to the ODNI report, China has hindered global investigations, resisted sharing information, and reported to blaming other countries, including the United States. This became even more clear when we received this email from the Chinese Embassy last week.

Without objection, I would ask unanimous consent to enter this email into the record.

Dr. WENSTRUP. In it, the Chinese Embassy expresses grave concern regarding this hearing and states they firmly oppose it. Well, we have some news for Beijing: these intimidation tactics will not work. We will not slow down our work, and we will not cease. After the hearing, I will be sending a letter to the Chinese Ambassador to the U.S. requesting China cease intimidation tactics and cooperate with this investigation. I extend the invitation to any Member of this Subcommittee to join me on that letter. Thank you.

I would now like to recognize Ranking Member Ruiz for the purpose of making an opening statement.

Dr. RUIZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Understanding the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic is important to America's public health and our ability to respond to future public health threats. In fact, since the first outbreak of COVID-19, researchers in the scientific community have worked tirelessly to get to the bottom of this very issue with dozens of studies that have been conducted or currently under way, and agents in the intelligence community have continued their sweeping assessment of COVID-19's origins. Thanks to President Biden's direction and leadership, we are learning more every day.

In May 2021, he directed the intelligence community to evaluate whether the novel coronavirus could have emerged from a laboratory in China, urging our Nation's intelligence agencies to do "everything we can" to trace the roots of this outbreak. Since then, two government agencies have assessed with low and moderate confidence that the virus originated in a lab, while four government agencies assessed with low confidence that the virus came about through natural transmission. As it stands, there is no consensus. The reports are inconclusive, and more research is needed.

While our scientist and intelligence communities continue their investigations, it is crucial that we empower them to do so without extreme partisan rhetoric or political biases that cherry pick evidence to push a partisan political narrative that vilify public health leaders. Our focus as lawmakers should be on developing policies

based on current and evolving evidence to prevent and prepare for future pandemics and save lives. To do right by the American people and our public health, we must let our expert communities do their job. And in turn, we must develop policies based on evidence, as inconclusive as it may be at the moment, that will help us prevent the next pandemic no matter which COVID origin theory you believe in.

We must also take a deep dive into the barriers to our Nation's ability to research the origins of COVID and respond to it. This includes examining how the Chinese Communist Party's refusal to cooperate with international investigations in December 2019 set us back in our pandemic response, and how the Chinese Communist Party's continued spread of misinformation and obfuscation of evidence has hindered our ability to understand both theories of how this virus came to be in the first place. In order to better be prepared for the future, it is crucial that we develop forward-looking domestic and foreign policies that advance American interests, protect our public health, and save lives. This means rejecting the isolationist approach President Trump took under the guise of "America first" that decimated the State Department, weakened our ability to engage, left a void that rendered America vulnerable to China's growing influence. It also abandoned state-to-state diplomacy, allowed tensions to intensify, and escalated a trade war that fell hardest on American workers. Under this approach, America's public health, economy, and security ultimately paid the price.

So now, we must take decisive action to protect our public health, economy, and security from the CCP's growing influence by investing in competition, deepening collaboration with our allies, and furthering the State Department's diplomatic work. That means building on the progress we have made with legislation like the CHIPS and Science Act to invest in innovation, so that we can outcompete China in sectors critical to our public health and national defense and strengthening our supply chain. And that means building on House Democrats' and the Biden Administration's work to bolster our pandemic preparedness, public health infrastructure, and international and domestic standards for pandemic surveillance to address possible animal transmissions, and biomedical research safety to address possible lab leaks.

There is certainly more work to do, and it is my sincere hope that we can pursue this work together on a bipartisan basis. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how global health security, pandemic preparedness, and national security are linked, and so as we seek to better understand the virus' origins, we must take a scientific and evidence-based approach. As a physician and Ranking Member of the Select Subcommittee, I take this charge seriously of putting people over politics to protect our public health. We should do this work without the politicization and extreme partisan rhetoric that get in the way of commonsense solutions to the public health challenges we face.

Let us get to work on forward-looking policies that will prevent and reduce the harm of future viruses and pandemics without vilifying our Nation's public health officials. The world is watching what we are doing here today, and it is my hope that we rise to

the occasion, and that we meet the moment with the integrity that our global health and national security demand.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you, Dr. Ruiz. Pursuant to Committee on Oversight and Accountability Rule 9(g), the witnesses will please stand and raise their right hands.

Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony that you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

[A chorus of ayes.]

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you, please be seated.

Let the record show that the witnesses all answered in the affirmative.

Our witnesses today are the Honorable John Ratcliffe. Director Ratcliffe was most recently the Director of National Intelligence, serving as the principal intelligence adviser to the President. Prior to that, he served in Congress and as a Member of the House Intelligence, Homeland Security, and Judiciary Committees. Mr. David Feith. Mr. Feith is currently an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security. He was previously the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. And Dr. Mark Lowenthal. Dr. Lowenthal previously served as the Assistant Director of Central Intelligence for Analysis and Production, and also as Vice Chairman for Evaluation on the National Intelligence Council. The Select Subcommittee certainly appreciates you all for being here today. We appreciate your service, and we look forward to your testimony.

Let me remind the witnesses that we have read your written statements, and they will appear in full in the hearing record. Please limit your oral statements to five minutes. As a reminder, please press the button on the microphone in front of you so that it is on and the Members can hear you. When you begin to speak, the light in front of you will turn green. After four minutes, the light will turn yellow. When the red light comes on, your five minutes have expired, and we would ask that you please wrap up.

I now recognize Director Ratcliffe to give an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN L. RATCLIFFE
FORMER DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE
FORMER U.S. REPRESENTATIVE**

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Ruiz, Members of the Committee, it is a pleasure for me to be back in the House of Representatives where I spent six years serving on the House Intelligence, Judiciary, and Homeland Security committees before leaving Congress when I was confirmed by the Senate to serve as the Director of National Intelligence in the Trump Administration.

My confirmation was actually the first in-person Senate hearing after the COVID-19 pandemic began. And during it, I promised to ensure that the intelligence community would be laser focused on getting answers to the virus' origins and spread. What follows is a brief unclassified overview of what the intelligence community learned and knows, a synopsis of the relevant challenges that I en-

countered during this effort and where I believe we must go from here.

First, let me state the bottom-line up front. My informed assessment as a person with as much access as anyone to our government's intelligence during the initial year of the pandemic has been and continues to be that a lab leak is the only explanation credibly supported by our intelligence, by science, and by commonsense. From a view inside the IC, if our intelligence and evidence supporting a lab leak theory was placed side-by-side with our intelligence and evidence pointing to a natural origins or spillover theory, the lab leak side of the ledger would be long, convincing, even overwhelming, while the spillover side would be nearly empty and tenuous.

Were this a trial, a preponderance of circumstantial evidence provided by our intelligence would compel a jury finding of guilt to an accusation that coronavirus research in Wuhan Labs was responsible for the pandemic. And likewise, the Chinese Communist Party would be guilty of going to great lengths to cover up the virus' origins, from destroying medical tests, samples, and data to intimidating and disappearing witnesses and journalists, to lying and coercing global health authorities, even spreading propaganda that the virus originated here in the United States by the U.S. military.

Their efforts continue to this day as the Chinese Embassy has formally objected to this hearing and this committee's efforts to ascertain the truth, and the Chinese Government has done all of this, while proving itself incapable of offering even a shred of exculpatory evidence. The intelligence community's sources on this issue are numerous, diverse, and unassailable, and I hope that the recent unanimous congressional support to require the declassification of our COVID origins material will make some of this available to you and the American people.

Right now, a few of the intelligence community's agencies are publicly assessing that COVID-19 virus originated from a lab leak in Wuhan. And as the shift continues, the day will come when every single agency in the IC will make the same assessment, which begs the question, why have they not to this point? It is a simple and obvious question that does not have a simple answer.

The challenges that I and other senior Trump Administration officials encountered while in office included legitimate concerns about our closely held sources and methods of intelligence as well as illegitimate roadblocks that related to professional conflicts of interest and partisan politics. These included the headwinds created when a lab leak assessment was initially labeled false and falsely reported with near unanimity as a conspiracy theory by conflicted scientists and by mainstream press while also being censored as disinformation by social media giants.

Internally, national and electoral politics were also influencing the analysis of our intelligence on China within the IC as reflected in the January 6, 2021 report by the intelligence community's analytic ombudsman. As a career nonpolitical official, the ombudsman found, "Analysts appeared reluctant to have their analysis on China brought forward because they tend to disagree with the

Trump Administration's policies, saying in effect, I do not want our intelligence use to support those policies."

To this day, the CIA, which I believe is unquestionably the world's premier spy agency with an unrivaled capacity to acquire information, has continued to state that it does not have enough information to make any formal assessment. To put it bluntly, I think this is unjustifiable and a reflection, not that the Agency cannot make an assessment with any confidence, but that it won't. Some 3 ½years later, the only plausible assessment the Agency could make with any level of confidence is that a virus, which killed over a million Americans, originated in a Chinese lab whose research included work for the Chinese military. And such an assessment would obviously have enormous geopolitical implications that I believe the current Administration does not want to face head on.

Let me close by saying that I think that the search for the truth should drive where we go from here. And everyone, from our intelligence agencies to members of the Administration, to Members of Congress, to public health officials should put politics aside and let our intelligence speak the truth about what happened. Speak the truth to the Americans who deserve that truth, deserve justice, and deserve accountability. And only by seeking truth, justice, and accountability for this pandemic can we achieve the other equally important goal of preventing the next pandemic.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you, Director. I now recognize Mr. Feith to give an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF DAVID FEITH, ADJUNCT SENIOR FELLOW
CENTER FOR A NEW AMERICAN SECURITY
FORMER DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR EAST ASIAN AND PACIFIC AFFAIRS**

Mr. FEITH. Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Ruiz, and Select Subcommittee Members, thanks for this opportunity.

My written testimony that I have submitted has three elements. First, it describes how the State Department's East Asia Bureau approached the COVID origin issue during the first year of the pandemic, from the outbreak to the publication in January 2021 of a fact sheet on activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Second, it describes the terribly damaging effects of our public health establishment's efforts to stigmatize the very notion that COVID may have emerged from a laboratory accident. This drove underground discussion of a set of risks, namely those involved in gain-of-function research, that deserves to be at the front and center of our policymaking. Third, it offers some oversight and policy suggestions on helping to find the origin of COVID, to fix policy and intelligence problems raised by these issues, and to tighten U.S. science and technology exchanges with China to protect national security and to help prevent a next pandemic.

In my short remarks here, I want to stress the stakes involved in whether COVID emerged from nature or from a lab, the stakes are almost unimaginably grave. COVID was not some immaculate infection. It was not spontaneously generated. It came from somewhere, and the details matter. If it emerged naturally, it implies

certain things about human interactions with nature where the risks are sizable enough. But if it emerged from a lab, particularly one conducting gain-of-function virology experiments with technologies invented only a few years ago, then this was akin to a Hiroshima event, revealing new and modern high-tech risks to human civilizations and even to our species.

This is what makes it such a scandal that many of the most influential U.S. Government and academic authorities on virology were coordinating to, as one said, disprove any type of lab theory. These officials and scientists knew that COVID may have come from a lab, they knew that a lab leak could have resulted from research in Wuhan funded by the U.S. Government, and they knew that if such research were, in fact, part of COVID's origin, they could face professional and personal embarrassment. So, these officials and scientists evidently collaborated to convince the government and the public not to investigate the origin of COVID, at least not in a fashion that followed the evidence down paths that could point to a lab origin.

The misdirection tactics worked. The lab leak theory became stigmatized, driven underground, and yet evidence continued to mount in its favor. By late 2020, colleagues at State flagged new U.S. Government information that underscored the plausibility of a lab leak. Most significant, there were sick researchers inside the Wuhan Institute of Virology just before the public outbreak in Wuhan. That same Wuhan lab had a long record of secrecy about its coronavirus research and undisclosed ties with China's military. Working with ODNI, we at State arranged to make this information public. Some of our colleagues warned us not to. They said not to highlight China's gain-of-function research lest we draw attention to the U.S. Government's own role in such research and open a Pandora's box. It wasn't clear exactly what these colleagues feared, but their seeming demand for non-transparency was unpersuasive.

On January 15, 2021, we published a fact sheet on activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. In the months that followed, the lab leak possibility began to force its way into the mainstream. By May 2021, President Biden himself recognized the significance of the lab leak possibility and ordered a 90-day review of U.S. intelligence. Unfortunately, progress since then has been limited. We now know that the FBI and the Department of Energy both assessed that a lab leak is most likely. That is important. But we do not need a running intelligence community straw poll as much as we need a transparent whole-of-government campaign to recognize the gravely high stakes of the lab leak possibility and pursue appropriate policy reforms. Gain-of-function technologies of the kind that emerged only in the last 10 to 15 years, where the deadliest viruses can conceivably be fused with the most infectious ones, appear to pose a species-level risk to human life.

It has been commonly said for 75 years that nuclear weapons could destroy the world or humanity, and so they might, but that would likely require many decisions in at least two capitals over some sustained period of time. The gain-of-function risk is that one mistake in one place, let alone one deliberate act by some actor, is all that it takes. Once a virus of sufficient infectiousness and dead-

liness escapes a lab, there may be nothing humanity can do to stop it.

This is the stunning tragedy of those experts who stigmatized even the notion of a lab leak. Faced with a possible dry run of the worst-case pandemic that gain-of-function science has made the world have to fear, the authorities who know the most about this threat did not speak up. Many even sought to silence others. This has caused a paralytic affect to this day, not only on public awareness, but on the policy reforms that we need to protect ourselves from lab risks in the future. Overcoming this handicap is a major obligation for lawmakers and policymakers going forward.

As we are trying still to confirm COVID's origin, I would quickly note three points. First, the immediate declassification test. Congress recently passed a law requiring the Biden Administration to declassify intelligence on COVID's origin within 90 days. This is a third test for the IC and the rest of the interagency after failures to disclose in 2020 and 2021. There is no doubt that the Administration has far more information than has been released publicly.

Second, the sick researchers still stand alone. The sick Wuhan lab researchers identified in the January 2021 fact sheet remain the best lead into who or what was patient zero. No animal anywhere has been identified as a comparably likely source of the outbreak. The Biden Administration, like the Trump Administration before it, has more information about the sick researchers than has been released. Third, and finally, what changed the Department of Energy's mind? The most significant fresh piece of intelligence we know about post-2020 is whatever reportedly motivated the Energy Department's recent change of assessment. Maximizing the release of this information would clearly shed additional light on the COVID mystery. Thank you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you, Mr. Feith. I now recognize Dr. Lowenthal to give an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF MARK LOWENTHAL
FORMER ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
FOR ANALYSIS AND PRODUCTION
FORMER VICE CHAIRMAN FOR EVALUATION FOR THE
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE COUNCIL
FORMER DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH**

Dr. LOWENTHAL. Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Ruiz, Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss intelligence and the origins of the COVID pandemic.

I have spent most of my adult life as an intelligence analyst or as a manager of intelligence analysts. I have also taught analytical skills to hundreds of new analysts. To be a good intelligence analyst, you have to have the ability to deal with ambiguity. Very often, analysts are asked to address issues for which there may not be a final definitive answer. Analysts live in a world where there may be several possibilities, each of which has its own degree of certainty and uncertainty. This can be very frustrating to policymakers who want an answer. Given the available intelligence and our own expertise, a specific answer cannot always be determined.

This seems to be the case at this point in terms of the origin of the coronavirus in China.

There has not been sufficient intelligence to date to make a firm judgment as to whether the virus occurred naturally or was the result of activity in the lab, whether witting or accidental. The ODNI's October 2021 declassified assessment on COVID-19 origins, which you both cited, reflects this uncertainty. Four intelligence agencies assessed that the virus originated naturally with low confidence. One intelligence agency believes the virus originated in a lab with moderate confidence. Three intelligence agencies are unable to make a determination either way. Again, this can be frustrating to policymakers, but that is the nature of intelligence.

One of the points that I stress to new analysts is that you want your reader, the policymaker, to understand and appreciate your uncertainty as well as your certainty because they will be making decisions based on your analysis, and you do not want to portray a confidence and a certainty that misrepresents your intelligence. Absent greater cooperation and transparency from China, which seem highly unlikely, we may never resolve this issue with certainty.

It is important that we look back at the intelligence and policy experience from the pandemic and ask ourselves, what can we do better next time. I have a few recommendations.

We should consider creating a national intelligence officer for health issues, who, with his or her office, would serve as the focal point for U.S. intelligence collection and analysis, not only on health issues that threaten the United States, but also looking at health issues worldwide, that can be destabilizing regionally. The intelligence community likely needs to hire analysts with backgrounds in medicine, epidemiology, and other areas. There is a section of the Centers for Disease Control that has TS/SCI cleared analysts, but I think the larger intelligence community needs more in-house expertise in these issues. Finally, it is important to avoid politicizing intelligence efforts on issues like the COVID pandemic. The intelligence community prides itself on being nonpartisan and objective, and I believe we meet these standards on a high consistent basis.

Intelligence may sometimes be discomfoting and may run counter to preferred policy preferences, but that does not mean that it is partisan or subjective. It becomes increasingly difficult for intelligence officers to do their best work when they are put under constant partisan pressure or when they are consistently accused of being partisan.

Some people refer to the role of the intelligence community as telling truth to power. I find that phrase objectionable as it is arrogant, and, more to the point, we do not have truth in many cases, but well-sourced, well-thought-out analytic conclusions. These will sometimes run counter to the preferred views or outcomes of policymakers. That does not mean the intelligence has been politicized. It means that intelligence is being honest when talking to power. That is a great responsibility, and the intelligence community takes it very seriously.

Thank you very much. I look forward to your questions.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you all very much. I now recognize myself for a series of questions.

If you have had the chance to follow the initial workings of this Subcommittee to date, you would know that the drive of this committee is to perform an after-action review, have lessons learned, create a path forward for any future pandemic so that we may be able to predict, prepare for, protect ourselves, and hopefully prevent any future pandemic. This, I believe, would be consistent with the suggestion made by Dr. Lowenthal. Hopefully, we may produce a product that will allow us to certainly be better next time out of this committee.

It is a fair question, why decisions may have been made. Were they based on data, hypothesis? Were there motives to the decisions such as personal gain or political game? All fair questions.

Dr. Lowenthal recommended having a national intelligence officer for health. In many ways I believe we have this with the National Center for Medical Intelligence, but we may need to expand their role. It was also suggested that the intelligence community hire experts with backgrounds in medicine and epidemiology and other specialties. And I agree with that, and that is why I have been requesting from ODNI information concerning those experts that they have consulted during their review of the origins question. I am interested in knowing which actual specialists weighed in for each component of the IC. If one agency has 20 virologists and another has none, that can make a huge difference in analyst outcomes. So, I am curious as to why so many agencies have different opinions on this. The expertise of those that have contributed to each agency matters and makes a difference.

For this committee, I have stated that honesty is non-negotiable, and that requires truth. And I understand that 100 percent certainty in an analysis is difficult to come by, but what can be truthful is the level of confidence in an analytic summary. Unfortunately, during my time on the Intelligence Committee, I have seen cases of what seems to be political partisanship. I have seen a situation where analysts came forward as whistleblowers, charging that their analyses were changed or ignored for political purposes. In other words, their analysis stated that things were going badly and yet after going up the chain, a politician stated that everything was going well.

Mr. Ratcliffe, as DNI, did you ever feel that information was being withheld from you or altered in any way, or did you have that concern?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Mr. Chairman, I would say that, fortunately, that did not happen very often, but it did happen on occasion, and I didn't just feel it. As I referenced in my opening remarks, the analytic ombudsman referenced the fact that there were times when intelligence was suppressed.

Dr. WENSTRUP. So, why and what kind of information was that, if you can share it?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, as it has already been publicly available, the ombudsman made specific reference to intelligence on China.

Dr. WENSTRUP. So, did this, in your opinion, hamstring your ability to conduct your job?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. I think it made it more difficult, but, you know, through persistence and some of the things that Mr. Feith talked about, we were able to, in looking at the intelligence, particularly as it related to COVID origins, to still get to a point where we could protect sources and methods and yet make some of that intelligence available by declassifying it. And he referenced the process whereby we did that through a State Department fact sheet.

Dr. WENSTRUP. One of the aspects of this investigation that is most important is learning who the IC consulted with during the review. They said we want to know what kinds of experts each component worked with. I am going to ask each of you, to each witness, do you think this question is an important one when it comes to origins of COVID?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. I will begin just by saying, it is because sometimes, in this case, particularly when we are talking about COVID-19, our analytic judgments are framed in part by science. And so, who the scientists are and how they are motivated certainly is important.

Mr. FEITH. Yes, sir. I would agree and just add the element that conflict of interest in general, and with respect to the enormous amount of scientific exchange with China are especially important as China is central to our national security analytical work going forward.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Doctor?

Dr. LOWENTHAL. I think it is fair to ask the intelligence committee who they consulted with, yes.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. Mr. Feith, you were heavily involved in this investigation from the side of the State Department. While you were gathering information, did you struggle to find experts that did not have conflicts of interest?

Mr. FEITH. In short, yes, and that problem became clear in retrospect also.

Dr. WENSTRUP. And do you believe these same conflicted scientists may be briefing the IC today?

Mr. FEITH. I can't speculate about today, but based on the experience a few years ago, yes.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. Quickly to Director Ratcliffe and Dr. Lowenthal. In your opinion, is it acceptable or practical to avoid or ignore the truth from Congress of trying not to divulge or to shield a covert operation?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. I don't think it is ever appropriate to ignore the truth. I think, from the intelligence community standpoint, there is an ability to protect sources and methods but still meet our obligations to keep Members of Congress informed through its proper oversight role.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Doctor?

Dr. LOWENTHAL. There is a provision of law that requires that Congress be fully and currently informed of all current and significant anticipated activities. I am probably the only person in this room who was in the Senate chamber when the Senate Intelligence Committee was created, so I am an advocate for congressional oversight, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Yes, I have read that statute myself, but I have had to bring it up and still get fought a few times in the Intel-

ligence Committee. So, the next question for the two of you, is it important for the IC to try to know all they can about the weapons systems of our adversaries, including biological weapons?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Absolutely, and in the case of China, the intelligence community has publicly addressed China as our top national security threat from a nation-state perspective, so particularly, that is important with respect to the country of China.

Dr. LOWENTHAL. Mr. Chairman, yes, this has always been a high priority for U.S. intelligence since the committee was created in 1947.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. Should a virus that killed more than one million Americans be an intelligence priority for the IC and specifically the CIA and DIA?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Absolutely.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Doctor?

Dr. LOWENTHAL. That depends on the policymakers. We don't make our priorities. The President and the National Security Council determine the priorities for the intelligence community, so if they determined it is a priority, then yes, it is. If they decide there are higher priorities, then, no, it isn't. But this is not a call for the intelligence community. This is something that is not understood. We don't set our priorities. We were there to respond to the policymakers. I helped create the current priority system, and its one we derived from the President and his National Security Council where are the areas you wanted the most emphasis, knowing that inevitably there are going to be areas where we spend less attention because we have finite resources.

Dr. WENSTRUP. That is a fair assessment. I would have to say as a policymaker that I think it should be a very high intelligence priority. That is well taken. Finally, Director Ratcliffe, we sent a document request letter to Director Haines on February 13. To date we have yet to receive any documents from ODNI. Understanding all the appropriate restrictions on classified material, as a former director, do you believe it is important for ODNI to fully cooperate with our investigation and produce the requested documents?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Yes.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I would now like to yield to Ranking Member Ruiz.

Dr. RUIZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Look, understanding how COVID-19 came to be as critical to America's public health, I want to point out and make clear that we wouldn't even be having this hearing in the first place if it wasn't for President Biden taking early and decisive action in May 2021 to investigate whether the novel coronavirus originated in a lab or nature.

President Biden directed the intelligence community to conduct this review to "do everything we can to trace the roots of this outbreak that has caused so much pain and death around the world so that we can take every necessary precaution to prevent it from happening again." In fact, the very intelligence that Democrats and Republicans voted to declassify last month was collected because of President Biden's directive for the intelligence community to use every tool at its disposal to investigate COVID-19's origins.

Dr. Lowenthal, can I get a quick “yes” or “no?” Was President Biden’s directive a critical step in advancing our understanding of the pandemic’s origins?

Dr. LOWENTHAL. Yes.

Dr. RUIZ. I agree, and thanks to this action, we are making progress every day in advancing our understanding of the pandemic’s origins despite continued obstruction from the Chinese Communist Party. And while we know more now than we ever did before, the fact of the matter is that the intelligence community’s assessment remains inconclusive on whether the virus emerged from either human contact with an animal or from a laboratory accident. Various elements of the intelligence community have made different assessments, all but one of which were made with low confidence, meaning without certainty.

Dr. Lowenthal, you have explained that the function of intelligence is to reduce uncertainty. When intelligence on a particular issue is divided between two conclusions, what is the best course of action for policymakers? Should we prepare in the event of both scenarios?

Dr. LOWENTHAL. Probably, but policymakers can make their own decisions, regardless of the intelligence you give them. We are not speaking ex cathedra. We are giving our best intelligence and then they are making decisions. But if you had two strong possibilities, and I were a policymaker, which I have only done once or twice in my career, I would say, yes, you should try to protect against both of them.

Dr. RUIZ. I agree with this, too, and this is exactly the approach that President Biden and Democrats have taken, an approach that puts people over politics. While our intelligence community continues to collect and analyze information that will bring us closer to a definitive conclusion, we have worked to prevent and better prepare for the next deadly pandemic, so that we can keep the American people safe, no matter if this threat originates from an animal or a lab.

In fact, last Congress, Democrats included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 significant reforms to address pandemic preparedness. This includes provisions to enhance safety standards for biomedical research, involving pathogens of pandemic potential and to recruit more public health workers with epidemiological backgrounds. It also includes reforms to prevent undue foreign influence in our Nation’s biomedical research, such as the requirement that participation in foreign talent programs be disclosed to receive NIH grants, and a provision directing the Secretary of Health and Human Services and national security officials to identify and develop strategies that address threats to sensitive biomedical research. There are a whole host of other commonsense reforms that we passed last Congress as part of this package that are outlined on this factsheet.

Mr. Chairman, permission to enter it into the record.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Without objection.

Dr. RUIZ. Thank you. And, you know, I find it interesting that despite how much my colleagues on the other side of this dais have focused their efforts to push a lab leak narrative, they voted against these reforms that help prevent lab leaks in the future. I

also want to point out the good work the Administration is doing by partnering with our allies to press for strong international standards for biosafety and security as part of its national security strategy. And while these are all good steps forward, I do think that there is more we should do and can do.

Dr. Lowenthal, what additional steps should we be taking from an intelligence and policy perspective to build on this work and to better prepare us for future pandemics?

Dr. LOWENTHAL. Well, I outlined those in my opening statement, Mr. Ruiz, but one of the things you have to remember about the intelligence community is we are a volunteer organization. I cannot draft doctors any more than the military can draft individuals, and so when we go out looking for people, looking for experts, we have to hope they want to come work for us, but we obviously have gaps. The National Military Intelligence Center is there, but they have mostly been devoted to supporting the defense establishment, which is fine. I am suggesting we need a broader expertise than that.

But you have to remember, we can only recruit the people who come to the recruiting table. This was one of the great frustrations in my life, in my last three years at CIA, but we have to look at our expertise across the community and we have a system for doing that and ask ourselves, where are the gaps, and then how do I go hire the people to fill in those gaps?

Dr. RUIZ. Dr. Lowenthal, I received my medical doctorate at Harvard Medical School. I received my master's in public policy from Harvard's Kennedy School. And I realized that when I was at the Kennedy School, the CIA was there recruiting students to join their firm. Yet there was no recruitment happening in the public health school, which I later received a master's in public health from Harvard School of Public Health or from the Harvard Medical School. So, perhaps one of the suggestions would be to entertain the career options for public health and physicians and medical scientists to join the intelligence communities in doing their research as well.

Dr. LOWENTHAL. I think that would be a good idea. There were also no CIA recruiters when I got my degree from the Harvard history department. We have to rethink how we recruit, so going to medical schools, public health policy schools would be a very good idea.

Dr. RUIZ. Thank you. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize the Chairman of the full committee, Mr. Comer from Kentucky, for five minutes of questions.

Chairman COMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank each of the witnesses for being here today.

As I have said from the beginning, discovering the origins of COVID-19 is vital to both the public health and national security of the United States. Former CDC Director Redfield testified last month that this is not simply a scientific question but also one of intelligence, and I agree with that. And we need to ensure the intelligence is accurate and truthful.

On March 17, 2020, one of the most influential papers of all time was published in the scientific journal *Nature Medicine*, entitled "The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2." It was prompted by Dr. Fauci and written to suppress the lab leak hypothesis. This paper

stated that no type of lab-based scenario is possible. Director Ratcliffe, is that factual?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. It is not.

Chairman COMER. Mr. Feith, to you, is that statement factual?

Mr. FEITH. Based on my understanding, no.

Chairman COMER. Ten days later, on March 26, the State Department produced a memo that stated, "U.S. scientists assess the virus emerged naturally." It continued to say, "A lab leak was improbable and not supported by the available evidence." Director Ratcliffe, are those statements factual?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. They are not.

Chairman COMER. Mr. Feith, to you, are those statements factual?

Mr. FEITH. No, they were, at best, overstated.

Chairman COMER. Mr. Feith, you were involved in the briefing that produced that memo?

Mr. FEITH. I was a recipient of the briefing that the memo is an account of.

Chairman COMER. So, while serving at the State Department and investigating the origins of COVID-19, were you ever briefed by an author of the proximal origin paper?

Mr. FEITH. Yes, sir.

Chairman COMER. During the preparation of that memo, which I referenced above, do you believe the unnamed scientists had apparent conflicts of interest?

Mr. FEITH. In short, yes, especially based on what we know since then about them.

Chairman COMER. Were the authors, were they the ones that were briefing the intelligence community, the authors of that?

Mr. FEITH. So, that document is a write-up of a so-called analytic exchange that had been hosted by the State Department's Intelligence and Research Bureau that day or the day before, including a number of U.S. scientists who were briefing a range of policy-makers from across the interagency.

Chairman COMER. So, the authors were on the conference call with Dr. Fauci on February 1, 2020, where they almost universally said COVID-19 may have come from a lab.

Mr. FEITH. That actually I am not sure of, and there is a little bit of a difficulty in identifying exactly who was part of that State Department briefing just because of the rules that we were subject to.

Chairman COMER. OK. Director Ratcliffe, once you became director, did Dr. Fauci relay any of these concerns to you that they have come from a lab?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. He did not.

Chairman COMER. And why do you think he did not?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, I would obviously have to speculate, but I would point you to Dr. Fauci being perhaps the best person to answer that. And there is publicly available information that has been obtained through open sources and freedom of information where Dr. Fauci and other virologists and scientists talk about the fact that it would bring unwanted attention to funding sources and the research that was taking place using domestic funding sources from the United States, and the relationship of certain Western sci-

entists with scientists at the Wuhan Institute of Virology where unsafe coronavirus research was taking place in labs that did not have appropriate biosafety levels and precautions as had been reported.

Chairman COMER. This is so bad. It just gets worse every day. These scientists flipped 180 degrees with no new evidence, produced a paper not based on facts, and then may have used that paper to brief the intelligence community and suppress the lab leak hypothesis. This is a how-to manual in orchestrating a cover up by using some of the most powerful and influential institutions in our country. If you ask me, this was set in motion by Dr. Fauci to hide U.S. funding of gain-of-function research and dodge accountability for a virus that has killed more than 1 million Americans. This must be investigated. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mr. Mfume from Maryland for five minutes of questions.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you very much, Chair Wenstrup, and my thanks also to Ranking Member Ruiz and all others who collaborated to make sure that we could have this hearing today. I want to thank the witnesses for their participation. Mr. Ratcliffe, welcome back.

Mr. Chairman, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored in many ways that the Chinese Communist Party's growing influence is absolutely contrary to America's interests and to America's values. If we as a Congress fail to meet this moment, I fear that we will undermine, for some time to come, our ability to respond to the next public health crisis and to protect American interests both at home and abroad. We have got a long road ahead of us. However, in the last two years, congressional Democrats as the majority party during that time, working with President Biden, did lay the groundwork to make sure that we take decisive action necessary to safeguard and to advance our health, our geopolitical, and our economic interests.

In October of last year, the Biden Administration announced its national security strategy, which includes, as most of us know, a three-part plan focused on outcompeting China. And, Mr. Chairman, I would ask unanimous consent that that national strategy be entered into today's record.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Without objection.

Mr. MFUME. The first step of the plan was to invest in strengthening American competition. President Biden delivered on that, rolling out initiatives guided by the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act to strengthen American manufacturing and American supply chains, all, mind you, while solidifying America's technological leadership on the global stage. The State Department also launched, as we know, the China House initiative, which brings together China experts from throughout the State Department and security officials to help the Administration responsibly manage competition between the U.S. and China.

The second step of the plan was to work with America's allies with common purpose and with a common sense. President Biden delivered, convening, as we know, the leaders of Egypt, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, the EU, Italy, the U.K., Mexico,

and Canada, to emphasize that combating China's global influence must be a team effort to which, by the way, they all concurred.

The third and final part of the plan was to put resources to defending America's interests abroad. The President delivered, including in his fiscal 2024 budget proposal to the Congress, comprehensive investments in the Indo-Pacific region's critical infrastructure as well as investments focusing on shoring up American defenses in that region.

Dr. Lowenthal, you are by all counts an expert in intelligence matters and have a robust understanding of China's influence in the global order. I appreciate the recommendation in your written testimony advocating for a national intelligence officer. I appreciate the Chair's comments that if, in fact, there is a similar position in place that we ought to look at expanding that role. Can you tell this committee, sir, and the American people what you think is the most important tactic that this Congress can use to counter the Chinese Communist Party?

Dr. LOWENTHAL. Excuse me. I am recovering from a cold. I don't have COVID, I promise you. It is less a tactic than a strategy. We need a strategy for dealing with China, and it is a difficult issue because we are entangled with them economically. They are a competitor. They are a rival. That doesn't mean that they are necessarily an enemy, but we have to figure out how do we outcompete them without resulting in overt hostility. And you have to also remember that anything that we do is going to have a reaction from the Chinese.

So, when President Biden tries to control the chip industry, for example, so that we are not supplying a rival with the technology that they need, which makes good sense to me—we did the same thing to the Soviet Union during the cold war very successfully—the Chinese interpret that as an act of hostility, which if we were all sitting in Beijing, we probably agree with.

It is important, certainly as an intelligence analyst, to understand how the other side is going to react, but I think we need a strategy, and I think we have elements of that strategy. I think the EU, the United States, British, Australian alliances, is part of that strategy. I think that that is being successful. I think our relationship with India as part of that is successful, but also, we have to be prepared just as we were during the cold war. This is a long struggle. This is not going to wrap up in this Administration or the next administration. This is a long-term struggle. But I think if you look at it objectively, would you rather be China or the United States, I would still rather be the United States.

Mr. MFUME. Every day.

Dr. LOWENTHAL. Every day.

Mr. MFUME. Every day. Dr. Lowenthal, my time has expired.

Dr. LOWENTHAL. I am sorry.

Mr. MFUME. Mr. Chairman, there is much to be done, obviously. I just want to invite colleagues on both sides of the aisle here and in the larger body to work together in a thoughtful manner to develop national security solutions based on putting the American people first. I yield back. Thank you, sir.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. I now recognize Ms. Malliotakis from New York for five minutes of questions.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the witnesses who are here today.

What is equally as important as the CCP's actions to cover up and conceal the origins of COVID is understanding what role our government may have played in the origins of this virus and to what level, if any, that the health officials and members of our media attempted to conceal or hide the truths from the American people. The question surrounding American tax dollars being used to potentially fund the origins of this virus and attempts to suppress them, that is what I am here to focus on today.

In November 2021, Dr. Fauci told Senator Rand Paul, under oath, that the NIH did not fund gain-of-function research at the Wuhan lab, despite having been explicitly told in an email in January 2021 that NIH had a monetary relationship with the Wuhan Institute through the EcoHealth Alliance. During the committee's initial origins hearing in March, I asked former CDC director, Dr. Redfield, whether the NIH was funding or had funded gain-of-function research at the Wuhan Institute, and he told me, "No doubt," NIH was funding this research in Wuhan, refuting Dr. Fauci's claims.

I will start with you, Mr. Ratcliffe. Do you agree with Dr. Redfield?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. I do.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Given what we know now, if you were in Dr. Fauci's position, would you have denied the NIH's role in gain-of-function research at the Wuhan lab?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. No.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Do you think that Dr. Fauci lied under oath?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. I think that some of Dr. Fauci's testimony is inconsistent with some of the intelligence that we have that remains classified, as well as inconsistent with some information that is publicly available.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Do you think that President Biden should declassify all information related to COVID origins, every single document, as was requested and passed by the legislature?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, with the caveat that we always have to be careful about protecting our sources and methods, particularly those sources and methods as it relates to what the intelligence community uniformly agrees is our No. 1 threat from a nation-state actor standpoint. But with that caveat, you know, providing as much information about our intelligence as possible while preserving those sources and methods should absolutely take place as soon as possible.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Actually, let me back up and fill you guys in. So, even more troubling, at the time, when my time was expiring at the last hearing, Dr. Redfield testified that not only did American tax dollars fund gain-of-function research through the NIH but also that the Wuhan lab received money from State Department, USAID, and the Department of Defense. Do you agree with Dr. Redfield's testimony that this funding, which very likely played a role in the virus, came from these government agencies?

Mr. FEITH. My understanding is consistent with what you have read back in terms of the many funding sources that ran, you know, from Washington to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. And

certainly if the COVID origin is indeed a lab leak from there, it was from, you know, bat coronavirus research programs, some of which were funded by the U.S. Government.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. OK, because we had previously heard about the NIH funding, but up until that hearing, I had not heard that it was potentially the State Department, USAID, and the Department of Defense that had also funded Wuhan lab activities. So, the U.S. Government determined that the Wuhan lab collaborated on publications and special projects, top secret projects, with the CCP military since at least 2017. Knowing this, for what purpose would U.S. Department of Defense funding be provided to the Wuhan lab?

Mr. FEITH. Well, I think for a full answer, I defer to folks from DOD and from the DOD, you know, biodefense relevant components. But in principle, the kind of broad theme of the funding, as I always understood it, across different parts of our government, NIH and USAID and State and otherwise, was based on a certain theory of pandemic prevention by scooping up these viruses, playing with them in the lab, and then trying to design vaccines in therapies. But there were always warnings that this was extremely dangerous work and that the work courted exactly the kind of danger that appears to have happened in Wuhan.

And from our perspective, parts of the State Department that don't specialize in this, part of what was most troubling is that when COVID broke out in Wuhan practically on the doorsteps of that lab, we did not have folks from other parts of the government raising their hand to educate the non-experts across the government in how plausible this was and how it needed to be taken seriously. In fact, the folks from the other parts of the government that work these issues generally were deflecting attention, and that cost us a lot of time and understanding that was really damaging.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Well, I have run out of time. Mr. Ratcliffe, do you have anything to add to that because I saw you nodding your head. If not, I will defer back to the Chairman. Thank you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Now I will recognize Dr. Bera from California for five minutes of question.

Dr. BERA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A lot happened in the last three years. Millions of Americans died. We can go back and re-litigate the past. I can go back and look at the prior administration that we set up an Office of Pandemic Preparedness that was there solely to advise the NSC that was disbanded. That was a mistake. We raised alarms at that time. We raised preparations. You know, I held the first hearing on the novel coronavirus at that time in February 2020. We pushed the Trump Administration to do everything they could to get our scientists to the hot zone, et cetera.

So, I can very well argue the lab-leak theory because, you know, China did not cooperate. They did not let folks get in there, et cetera. You know, I can also make a case for why initially folks thought it jumped from an animal to human. At this point, I think, you know, as Dr. Lowenthal said, I don't think we are ever going to get an answer because I don't think China will ever let us get to the hot zone, will ever let us interview folks. I don't even think those scientists probably are around. I don't think the data that we would have to look at is there. So, I think we have to take both

theories seriously. I think the intelligence community should continue to try to get an answer with high confidence.

But, Mr. Feith, as you accurately pointed out, you know, any bad actor out there in the world just saw what a virus did to the entire planet. You know, what keeps me awake at night are these biothreats, are the fact that a lot of this equipment is readily available. I think it is legitimate for this committee to discuss and educate ourselves on gain-of-function research.

There is a legitimate reason to do this, to help us develop counter tools, et cetera. But we should debate what kind of lab should do this, what are lab standards, et cetera. How do you make sure labs like Wuhan, which clearly did not have the precautions in place, are not doing research that might potentially allow something like that. Those are all legitimate areas, Mr. Chairman, that we should be thinking about policy on, we should be putting protocols in place, et cetera. We should be working with the IC to assess these threats.

You know, Mr. Feith, let me ask you a question. We have to work with the international community. There is a reason why the U.S. Government partners with labs around the world because we do want to have these early warning systems. We do want to go to where these novel viruses are emerging, whether manmade or naturally jumping from animals to humans, because we would rather discover it over there. We would rather have early warning systems abroad. Would you agree with that assessment?

Mr. FEITH. I think, broadly, biosurveillance is extremely important. You know, as you have said, I think that there are, though, especially in light of COVID, clearly very important consequential questions about how broadly that kind of pandemic preparedness work should apply in terms of creating in laboratory environments certain viruses of a sufficient lethality and infectiousness that might be completely unlikely ever to emerge in nature. But having created them in a lab, we have delivered the world the risks that wouldn't have otherwise existed except with an infinitesimally small unlikelyhood.

Dr. BERA. So, I think that is accurate. Should we be doing that type of work? We can certainly have that debate. And if that type of research is taking place, what are the exact highest safe standards that have to exist if that research is taking place? That said, there is nothing that is going to prevent bad actors in other countries and other, you know, individuals from doing this type of research. Director Ratcliffe, would you agree that we ought to be really concerned about biothreats going into the future within Congress?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Absolutely.

Dr. BERA. And what types of steps would you take? We have got to work with the international community to develop those standards. We have got to work with the international community to try to detect these risks and bad actors early on, and what are some recommendations you might have?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, to that point, I would agree with that. But the facts that are not in dispute here and have been acknowledged by those international organizations, including the World Health Organization, was that they were lied to initially by Chinese offi-

cials and that they were coerced into making or not taking certain actions that they later regretted. And so, some of those world organizations, like the World Health Organization, have corrected and have now tried to bring about China's participation.

I think, you know, from a commonsense standpoint, Congressman, to this question about the origins, if China had exculpatory evidence that showed that this was of natural origins or that there was not a lab leak, you would expect that they would share that information with international organizations, which they have not. They have not shared it with anyone.

Dr. BERA. A hundred percent, and, again, China has acted irresponsibly here. You know, they put the entire world at risk. I would not trust them as a legitimate partner at this point. That said, we would hope that at some point, if they looked back at the damage that happened to their own country, that they would be forthright working with us and working with the rest of the world to get to the bottom of this and prevent the next pandemic. So, I am out of time, but, again, this isn't about trusting China. It is about actually preparing and preventing the next pandemic.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Dr. Miller-Meeks from Iowa for five minutes of questions.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. Thank you, Doctor, and Chair Wenstrup. I will be signing on to the letter just as an aside, so thank you for that. And I want to thank my colleague on the other side of the aisle, Dr. Bera, for his comments as well.

Almost two years ago this committee had a hearing into the origins of COVID-19. Unfortunately, it was only attended by Republicans, but at the press conference following that hearing, I could tell that people were thinking of this as a partisan issue. And why it is critically important that we understand COVID-19 origins is to prevent future outbreaks and global pandemics, precisely that, and why. One is that we know that there was a lack of disclosure. We know that International Health Regulations require 24 hours' notice, and certainly we were not notified of this until late January, even though I think the evidence points to the virus circulating in the fall of 2019.

We need to know, as previously mentioned, because of biosafety laboratory research, is there research being conducted. We understand even in the best laboratories there can be leaks, but biosafety lab 4 work was occurring in a biosafety lab 2. And the international community has a vested interest in both disclosure and that the proper type of research is occurring in the proper biosafety lab.

And then four, as previously mentioned, again, and I think needs to be underscored, the ethics of the type of research that is being performed. This is not a Republican issue, it is not a Democrat issue, it is not a United States issue. It is an international issue, and the international health organizations have a vested interest in disclosure immediately in biosafety lab and in the ethics of research.

And, Mr. Ratcliffe, I want to thank you for testifying before the Subcommittee this morning and supporting our investigation into the origins of COVID-19. When the former CDC Director, Dr. Redfield, testified before this committee last month, he stated that

when you look at the two departments, the FBI and the Energy Department, they have the strongest scientific footprint of any of our intelligence agencies. And I think the way they got to the answers of low probability and moderate probability is their internal scientists did the science. And there are some in the media especially who insinuate that a low probability or moderate probability means no probability.

With your background and experience as the director of National Intelligence, can you elaborate on the scientific expertise within the Department of Energy and the FBI and why their conclusions on COVID-19 origins would be noteworthy, and it doesn't mean not probable?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Thank you for the question, Congresswoman. So, from initial starting standpoint, as has been talked about, some agencies haven't made any assessment at any confidence level. When assessments are made, they can be made at a low confidence level, they can be made at a moderate confidence level, or they can be made at a high confidence level. And in this case, you referenced the moderate and low confidence levels that the FBI and the Department of Energy respectively have made. Those are based on scientific information, and none of this is political. None of this is disputed.

There is currently no environmental source identified for COVID-19. There is no intermediate host that has ever been identified. There is no reservoir species that has ever been identified, and COVID-19 was never known to exist in any animal or species before the pandemic began. Those are scientific facts that are not disputed, and there is nothing political about that that factored into the determinations that have been made.

And I talked about before about this shift taking place, the things that I just related early on. The intelligence community was briefed by various scientists who said those answers will come. They referenced to SARS 1 and MERS outbreaks and saying, look, it may take several months, even a year, sometimes even longer to identify an intermediate host or a species. We are now 3 1/2 years, and every day that passes makes it less likely that there is anything that will ever tie this to nature, whereas on the other side of the ledger, it is overwhelming when you look at China's actions and the circumstances surrounding what was going on from a bio-safety standpoint at Wuhan, the massive number of coronaviruses, the massive numbers of bats carrying coronaviruses that were brought into Wuhan. All of that weighs heavily into making assessments at some confidence level that a lab leak was the origin for this pandemic.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. So, it sounds like that you would consider the opinions of these components to be taken seriously. And I would say that, in reference to the letter from the Chinese Embassy, that at minimal, the WHO now recognizing its earlier mistakes would diminish the influence of the Chinese Communist Party within the WHO. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Ms. Tokuda from Hawaii for five minutes of questions.

Ms. TOKUDA. Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, as we develop policies to better prepare us in the future, it is crucial that we do

so without fanning the flames of anti-AAPI extremism that festered during the pandemic. Anti-Asian rhetoric espoused by those at the very top of the Republican Party in the pandemic's earliest days have had very real-world consequences on our AAPI community here in the United States.

In an effort to deflect from his Administration's botched pandemic response, President Trump looked for a scapegoat and a way to score points with his base. And in doing so he recklessly villainized AAPI people for his political gain, making our community human shields and red herrings to distract from his inability to deal on all levels with the public health crisis, including understanding in the very earliest days the origins of COVID.

For example, within a matter of days, President Trump using the phrase, "Chinese virus" on Twitter. Anti-Asian rhetoric on the platform grew exponentially, according to a study conducted by the University of California, San Francisco. And in the summer of 2020, President Trump began referring to COVID-19 as "kung flu" at campaign rallies across the country, ratcheting up vitriol among his right-wing base. This hateful rhetoric online has had deadly consequences. According to the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, hate crimes targeting members of our AAPI community increased by 339 percent from 2020 to 2021. Words, my friend, matter.

We know that the CCP did not cooperate with international efforts to understand the origins of COVID-19, but President Trump made it worse. His words helped perpetuate the CCP's misinformation campaign and assign blame for the COVID-19 pandemic on Asian American communities, and, in doing so, further hindered our Nation's ability to implement an effective evidence-based public health response. We must recognize the consequences of our words, the impact they have on the communities we serve, and how it shapes the national conversation on issues of critical importance to our health and our security.

Dr. Lowenthal, you have warned about the dangers of politicizing intelligence and national security. As we seek to engage in a thorough fact-based analysis, what are the real-world consequences of distracting rhetoric and politicizing intelligence regarding the virus' origins?

Dr. LOWENTHAL. Well, as I said, it makes it very difficult for analysts to do their work because if they know that what they are writing, or what their briefing is going to go into is going to be questioned, not because somebody disagrees with the substance but disagrees with why they are being told something, it makes it increasingly difficult for analysts to do good work because they are worried about the consequences. Nobody wants to be vilified, either as an ethnic group or professionally, and so that becomes a problem.

Ms. TOKUDA. Thank you, Dr. Lowenthal. There are clearly troubling consequences, as you noted, of this rhetoric, both for the value and ability for us to do the work, as well as for our AAPI community here in the United States, as well as, we have all talked about today, our intelligence community's efforts. How can we make sure we course correct what has been happening to both and ensure the safety of our communities and preserve the integ-

rity of our intelligence work as we seek to fully understand the origins of COVID?

Dr. LOWENTHAL. Well, the issue of vilifying communities is beyond the scope of the intelligence community. That is not our responsibility. That is a leadership issue. That is a political leadership issue. In terms of the partisanship, I mean, you have to hope that people on both sides of the aisle recognize that analysts are not out there trying to grind an axe. They are trying to present the best intelligence they have at the time with caveats and with uncertainties and that they are doing this not because they are being pusillanimous but because they really don't know the answer.

And again, I have had to deal with senior officials many times and I know this is frustrating that, you know, you want an answer, and sometimes we just can't give you an answer. And that creates a tension between these two communities, between the policy community and intelligence committee, but that is the reality of a lot of the issues on which we work.

Ms. TOKUDA. Thank you, Dr. Lowenthal. You know, it is my definite hope through these discussions that we are having that we can put the harmful rhetoric aside that we have seen and focus on the work that matters: protecting our Nation's public health, and preparing for future public health crises. We can be tough on the CCP and their lack of transparency and cooperation with pandemic-related investigations, but we must do so without putting at risk the safety and well-being of Asian Americans and our communities. If we fail to do this, we are only strengthening the CCP's efforts to distract and to mislead, and gets us no closer to fully understanding the origins of COVID and allowing us to do the good work of preventing future crises and being able to respond to save lives. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize, Mrs. Lesko from Arizona for five minutes.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Over 1 million Americans died. Millions more got sick, some with long-term effects from COVID-19. It is absolutely vital that we determine what happened, what did China do. Did people within our own government cover up information because they had professional conflicts of interest or for political reasons? The Ranking Member says COVID-19 should not be a political issue. I agree. But with all due respect, sir, I contend that it is you that is making this a political issue. You said that the only reason we are having this hearing today is because of President Biden wanting to get to the bottom of it. With all due respect, are you kidding me? You have been in the majority. The Democrats have been in the majority for the last two years, and there have been no hearings on the origins of COVID while you were in the majority.

My first question is for Mr. Ratcliffe. Mr. Ratcliffe, in your testimony you wrote, "The challenges that I and other senior Trump Administration officials encountered while in office include legitimate concerns about the closely held sources of our intelligence and the sensitive methods used to obtain it, as well as illegitimate roadblocks related to professional conflicts of interest and partisan politics." Can you please elaborate on the conflicts of interest you encountered?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Thank you, Congresswoman. Good to see you again. I referenced in my opening a report from the analytic ombudsman. That person, by the way, is a career individual, is not a political appointment. That person is charged with refereeing disputes about assessments. And it was based on his investigation that when it comes to the issue of China, some of our intelligence was being suppressed because there were analysts within the community that felt like that some of that intelligence may be used by the Trump Administration in ways that they disagreed with, and that is clearly inappropriate under analytic judgment standards. And again, that is not my opinion. That is the independent opinion of the analytic ombudsman.

Mrs. LESKO. My next question for you, Mr. Ratcliffe, is you mentioned in your written testimony that CIA analysts on China were reluctant to bring forth the information. Do you think you ever got all of the information that they uncovered from China related to COVID-19?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, I think that, you know, intelligence is such that we are constantly gaining new information even where we have limited sources and methods. You know, I do think that there were headwinds to get information. I endeavored to be made aware of as much as possible. And ultimately, that is what led to the process where I worked with Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, on the State Department fact sheet, to put out the information about the coronaviruses, their similarity to what became COVID-19, researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology becoming sick, and the other information that was included in that fact sheet so that that information would hopefully drive further declassification of intelligence, the American people and would drive congressional hearings going forward. Unfortunately, that hasn't happened the way that we anticipated.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you. Mr. Feith, in the January 2021 fact sheet on activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, which you helped to write, it mentions, "WIV researchers who got sick in 2019 with COVID-19-like symptoms," which we have talked about. Can you tell us more about these sick researchers?

Mr. FEITH. I can share the view that I think that the sick researchers are probably still today the most potentially probative part of the story that we are yet aware of. You know, it has been suggested already that the passage of time doesn't help in finding a confirmed answer here. And that is certainly true, and that is probably true also with respect to some of what we would want to know about these sick researchers, and, you know, what tests were taken and what material and evidence would have been available from the autumn of 2019.

But still, what we know is that there is additional information that the U.S. Government has that was not able to be specified at the time in the fact sheet that was released in January 2021. But part of the hope in doing the fact sheet, as Director Ratcliffe just noted, was that it would bring interest and, frankly, pressure and help make the case for additional disclosure, including by the Biden Administration once they came in, interest by, you know, those with subpoena power elsewhere in Washington because it certainly, well, bowled us over, frankly, to find in the autumn of

2020 that there was, after all, U.S. Government information about a cluster of illnesses in that lab, which is exactly what you would expect to happen if the origin of COVID came from a laboratory accident where a worker became ill, knowingly or not, and then took the virus out into the community and had it emerge in Wuhan, a place where it is really hard to imagine any explanation for a bat coronavirus emerging for the first time on Earth unless it walked out the door of the lab.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you very much for all of your testimonies, and I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Dr. Joyce from Pennsylvania.

Dr. JOYCE. Thank you, Chairman Wenstrup, and thank you to our witnesses for appearing here today.

Let me be clear. The work that this Subcommittee is conducting is critical to ensure that the destruction that was caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and our subsequent response is never again repeated. To quote from the Lancet COVID-19 Commission, "Identifying COVID-19 origins would provide greater clarity into not only the causes of the current pandemic but also the vulnerabilities to future outbreaks and strategies to prevent them."

Beginning with my service on the House China Task Force and throughout our investigation on this Subcommittee, I have had consistent concerns with the NIH biomedical research security and how the NIH interacts with other elements of our government on research that could raise national security concerns. For this reason, last Congress I introduced the SAFE Biomedical Research Act, which did become law, that required both the NIH and HHS at large to consult with the director of the Office of National Security within the Department of HHS, and the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, the director of National Intelligence, the director of the FBI, and the heads of other appropriate agencies on a regular basis regarding biomedical research conducted or supported by the NIH that may affect or be affecting other matters of national security.

Director Ratcliffe, since this was not law when you served, do you feel that these requirements would have been beneficial to ensure research being conducted by the NIH was being properly vetted for national security risks?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Yes.

Dr. JOYCE. Overall, what was your experience with the NIH, and were they cooperative during the initial outbreak on matters such as lab-leak theory?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. To be candid, some of the information that came from officials there was inconsistent with what later became intelligence and later became publicly known through open-source intelligence. As has been discussed here, there are questions about relationships, including scientists from the NIH, and whether or not they had an interest in one theory over another and how that would have been or should have been disclosed.

Dr. JOYCE. In December 2022, then chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Adam Schiff, released an unclassified report on the origins of COVID-19, where he wrote, "At the onset, it is important to note that the first warning signs of an emerging novel virus will almost always come from public

health authorities and their unclassified reporting.” Director Ratcliffe, to your knowledge, what mechanisms and processes exist between the intelligence community and public health authorities, such as the CDC, to coordinate the aforementioned dissemination of knowledge about the identification of novel diseases, particularly in countries like China?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, with respect to China, particularly, it is not unusual for local officials to actually suppress intelligence from national leaders until the problem can be arrested or remediated. Sometimes lives depend on that. It is one of the interesting things about the events that took place and the fact that, as Mr. Feith testified, researchers became sick within the Wuhan Institute of Virology with symptoms that were consistent with COVID-19.

There has been public reporting about intelligence that those researchers became patients and were hospitalized. So, without confirming the accuracy of that, what I would submit to you is, if that is, in fact, the case and those hospitalizations took place, the lab results and tests from those patients, if submitted for genetic sequencing, would be dispositive of the issue of whether or not those initial or patient zeros worked at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. I would submit to you that in China, there are not HIPAA considerations that prevent the Chinese government from accessing that. I would submit to you that if this took place, they have the answers to that. And I would submit to you that if the answers were exculpatory in nature, that information would have been shared by the Chinese government, which it has not.

Dr. JOYCE. Had that information been shared early, could this have been a regional, a local endemic, as opposed to unleashing this pandemic onto the world?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Absolutely. That is just one of many factors, and unfortunately, actions that the Chinese government took or did not take, they misled. I referenced their conversations with the World Health Organization. They urged that a public health epidemic not be declared earlier. They misled international scientists about human-to-human transmissibility and what they knew about the COVID-19 virus. All of those things could have minimized and prevented the spread of this disease and surely would have saved millions of lives globally.

Dr. JOYCE. Had China cooperated and not suppressed actions by the World Health Organization, could this have pandemic have not spread worldwide?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Yes.

Dr. JOYCE. Again, I thank you for appearing today, and, Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Ms. Greene from Georgia for five minutes.

Ms. GREENE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like for the record to address something that one of our colleagues across the aisle was talking about, which was Asian hate in reference to President Trump. President Trump never spoke any language of racism or hate. He did, however, call, and many of us have called the COVID-19 virus the Wuhan flu, the China virus, because we feel it originated from China. I would like to also state for the record that many viruses and diseases are named after the area

that they come from, like the West Nile Virus from West Nile, Uganda, Rocky Mountain spotted fever from the Rocky Mountains, Marburg virus for Marburg, Germany, Zika fevers from the Zika forests of Uganda, Japanese encephalitis, German measles, and I could go on and on and on.

We are really tired of the racism and name calling, and it needs to end, but we are really talking about the origins of COVID-19 here today, which is shocking to me, because honestly, we have been talking about the origins of COVID-19 for 3 1/2 years. And every commonsense American that I know pretty much understands where it came from, came from the Wuhan Institute of Virology and doesn't really care if the intelligence community says it did or didn't.

I would like to point out that here we are, the intelligence community is able to figure out immediately who was leaking classified information in a Discord chat, but yet still doesn't want to say whether it came from the lab or didn't come from the lab. The intelligence communities seem to release or not release information based on how the information will affect the government that it seems to protect. Yet, unfortunately, so many times it doesn't release or not release the information the people that it serves, and, I will remind everyone, is paid for by the taxpayers of America.

I would like to point out that the State Department fact sheet on January 15, 2021 knew a lot of information about the Wuhan Institute of Virology, so that means our intelligence community knew a whole lot more before that. They knew the U.S. Government believes that there were several research researchers inside the Wuhan Institute of Virology became sick in the autumn of 2019 before the CCP first reported cases of COVID-19. They also knew that the CCP was preventing journalists, investigators, and global health authorities from accessing the Wuhan Institute of Virology. They also knew that starting in 2016, well before this, the Wuhan Institute of Virology was researching the bat coronavirus with the closest relationship to SARS-CoV-2, 96.2 percent similar. The Wuhan Institute of Virology has published record of dangerous gain-of-function research, and the State Department memo also said that the U.S. Government determined the Wuhan Institute of Virology collaborated on publications and secret projects with the CCP military since at least 2017.

And you know what else we know? We know that Dr. Fauci and the NIH funded through grants EcoAlliance with the gain-of-function research. We know that for a fact our government paid for it. Our taxpayers, unfortunately, unknowingly paid for it. So, we know all this to be true, and we know it was going on at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Mr. Lowenthal, with your dedication to being an analyst of information, why is it so hard to determine whether COVID-19 came from the Wuhan Institute of Virology or not?

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Because the Chinese will not give us access to the information that we need. If they gave us the kind of access that Mr. Feith was talking about, if they gave us samples, if they gave us access to the records. And you will never be sure with the Chinese whether they are giving you the access that you want. We are never going to be able to say with a high degree of certainty.

May I respond to something else that you said in your comments, Ms. Greene? There was a vast, vast difference between tracking a leak on a social media site and determining the origins of this disease, and to compare the two is entirely fallacious, ma'am.

Ms. GREENE. Dr. Lowenthal, you have said that you keep your intelligence claims and information nonpartisan. In 2018, Mr. Lowenthal, you were quoted in the *New York Times* saying that, "President Trump is the best President that Russia ever had." That sounds pretty political to me.

Mr. LOWENTHAL. But I was no longer an intelligence officer at the time, ma'am. I am a private citizen.

Ms. GREENE. Well, I think you have a difficult time keeping your political opinions out of your political analyst. Mr. Ratcliffe, you are quoted as saying, "To this day, the CIA, unquestionably the world's premier spy agency, with an unrivaled capacity to acquire information and near limitless resources to do so, has continued to state that it does not have enough information to make any formal assessment. To put it bluntly, this is unjustifiable and a reflection, not that the Agency cannot make an assessment with any confidence, but that it won't." Could you elaborate, please, Mr. Ratcliffe?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, I have talked about the overwhelming evidence on intelligence on one side of the ledger that supports that the lab leak is the only plausible assessment at this point in time, and that, conversely, that there really at this point isn't anything that ties COVID-19 to nature. I talked about the fact that no environmental source, no intermediate host, no reservoir species, nothing has ever been published that COVID-19 existed in any animal or species before the pandemic began. We make assessments all the time in the intelligence community with a fraction of the intelligence that we have available to us here.

Again, I think this is a matter of won't, not can't. And I think that, you know, that is unjustifiable when we are talking about a million Americans dead and as many as 10 or 15 million worldwide. And this contradiction that the current Administration is taking through the intelligence community and that you have heard here today that we will never know the answer to this unless the Chinese cooperate is a contradiction with those that say our goal here is also to prevent a future pandemic. We will never be able to prevent it if we don't get the answers that we need with respect to how this happened in the first place.

Ms. GREENE. Thank you, Mr. Ratcliffe. I think it is an issue of won't, not can't as well. And perhaps we need to look deeper into whether was China trying to sway possibly an election, a Presidential election, or was it some type of bio weapon? I yield back. Thank you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mrs. Dingell from Michigan for five minutes of questions.

Mrs. DINGELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to both you and Ranking Member Ruiz for holding this hearing because I do think this hearing matters more than anyone does. Unfortunately, discussions, debates, and investigations in this country have become highly politicized in every arena. OK, in the Congress, we expect it, but I hope we can minimize it on this committee because

I am worried about the next virus that is already out there. We are reading about them popping up everywhere right now, and I think we all want to be prepared.

What worries me the most is what is happening in the scientific community, where the exchanging of ideas, research, and shared data has found clues, discovered cures, reached consensus. And this arena is becoming so highly politicized between virologists and researchers, public health officials, national security experts, and oh, yes, the politicians, that I think we are in trouble. To quote the *Wall Street Journal* this morning, “These divisions and a lack of transparency from Beijing have hobbled efforts to determine how the virus first infected humans.” I hope our committee can work together to address that.

So, today I want to focus on a couple things I think we can all agree on and raise a couple of other issues. First, China has not been forthcoming. I think all three witnesses would agree to that, and I think everybody on this panel would agree to that. I strongly echo my colleagues’ calls from both sides of the aisle that we need greater transparency from the Chinese Communist Party regarding the Wuhan Institute of Virology, especially if we want to prevent further pandemics, and the further we get away, the more complicated it becomes.

Second, here is the reality. With respect to our witnesses, I do not believe that we have certainty in either direction as to how this virus started. Lots of us have opinions. Lord knows how many papers have been written, intelligence investigations undertaken, studies abound. And as we have heard today, some are firmly in the camp that it was a lab leak. Some say it appears to be a zoonotic transmission from an animal. I have been up endless nights. I am not a scientist but tried to study it, talk to people. But I think here is a fact: no one definitely knows.

A report by the Senate Republicans that was released yesterday on the pandemic’s origins said, “After 18 months of research, the team that worked on the Senate report acknowledged it was unable to definitely pinpoint the source of the pandemic, which has killed”—everybody here has talked about the million Americans, but it has killed 6.9 million people worldwide. We should all be worried about this and want to stop the next one.

I think there are areas of agreement. While the intelligence community has not reached a conclusion on the exact origins of the pandemic, there appears to be a scientific consensus that this specific virus does not appear to have been developed as part of biological warfare. Now, let me be really clear. This doesn’t mean we don’t have to worry about other forms of biological warfare, but in this instance, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence’s declassified statement states, “We judge the virus was not developed as a biological weapon,” and other scientists, there seems to be in consensus on that.

Next, some of my colleagues have pointed to the fact that the bat coronavirus, known as coronavirus RaTG13, shares 96—percent sequence similarity to the SARS-CoV-2, which is the virus that was responsible for COVID-19. To be clear, there is scientific consensus that this four, while everybody would say, oh well, that is where it should be, that four-percent difference represents decades of evo-

lutionary distance from the virus that caused the COVID-19 pandemic. To put it in perspective, the National Human Genome Research Institute has found that fruit flies are nearly 60 percent genetically similar to us as humans. We are different than fruit flies.

And third, while my Republican colleagues have attempted to draw conclusions based on reports of the Wuhan Institute of Virology researchers falling ill with symptoms consistent with COVID-19, the Office of Director of National Intelligence Declassified Assessment clearly indicates this is not diagnostic of the pandemic's origins. In fact, for the record, in November 2019, I had a 103 fever for three weeks. I ended up at infectious disease doctors at the University of Michigan and here, and no one knows what it was, and all the [inaudible] are located in Wuhan, but that is anecdotal. That is not a fact. We don't have facts. And I also want to say that, you know, in 2018, we were getting warnings from the State Department of the lack of safety at the Wuhan lab and what were people doing. So, I am going to ask one question quickly.

Dr. Lowenthal, is there any reason to doubt the validity of the intelligence community's determination on anything I just described?

Dr. LOWENTHAL. No.

Mrs. DINGELL. So, I guess I am going to have to conclude because I am out of time. I could keep going. But I would like to submit both the declassified Office of the Director of National Intelligence Assessment and the peer review paper published by more than 20 leading virology researchers titled, "The Origins of the SARS-CoV-2: a Critical Review," into the record. And last, I would like to ask the Chairman if he might ask his Republican colleagues on the Senate side if they would share their study for the Members to read.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Without objection, and the other is public.

Mrs. DINGELL. So, I think it would be good for all of us to circulate it. With that, I want us all to work together. I take this virus very seriously. I don't want to see it again. So, we are not going to solve it partisanly. We are going to solve it working together. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Dr. Jackson from Texas for five minutes of questions.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it. Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

For over two years many Americans, just like myself, have been demanding an investigation into China's role in the development of this virus and their efforts to cover up the virus after the fact, that it was released leading to this global pandemic that have killed millions and destroyed billions of lives. We have been demanding that for a while. I am glad we are doing this now. I think we are way behind the power curve on this.

But I just want to start off by saying, other than the Chinese government, the entities most aggressively trying to actively spread misinformation about the origins of COVID, trying to actually create and spread what they would have you believe, was scientific evidence or scientific opinion, and I am referring, in particular, to things like the Proximal Origins document, a document that was intended to provide fodder to harass, label, threaten, cancel, de-

stroy anyone with any other opinion, specifically an opinion that this came from a lab, from the Wuhan lab in particular, an opinion that we know now was accurate. The people that were most interested in doing just this, were people like Anthony Fauci, Francis Collins, and others at NIH. It was Peter Daszak in EcoHealth Alliance. It was Dr. Tedros at the WHO, and, of course, it was our unbiased and purely factual cable news networks like CNN and MSNBC.

Director Ratcliffe, do you know if there were any instances of the U.S. intelligence agencies, did they share information, did they collaborate with any of the entities that I have mentioned or the individuals that I have mentioned, to either suppress or get out information that was contrary to what we are talking about today that we know to be the facts?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. As I understand your question, Congressman, were any of the scientists or individuals associated with any of those groups, did they have—

Dr. JACKSON. Were there interactions with the intelligence agencies?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. They did have interactions. I don't know the answer to all of them, but some of the individuals that I know, for instance, Dr. Peter Daszak, Dr. Farrar, Dr. Garry, I believe were all at some point in time briefing various entities or agencies within the intelligence community about this virus.

Dr. JACKSON. One of the things I am wondering is, I am wondering like, you know, if we are looking back now, we are realizing that some of these intelligence agencies probably had information, enough information to make a solid determination that this most likely came from the lab in Wuhan as far back as a year or more ago. My question is, were they sharing this information with these people that were putting out contrary information that were being propped up as the experts, that were giving us things like Proximal Origin, using it as evidence to completely undermine what I think the intelligence agencies knew to be the truth a long time ago.

And I ask that because you may have realized, you know, after the fact, because I think you had mentioned at one point that even within the intelligence agencies, you as the Director of National Intelligence were being kept in the dark on some things, are not being fully briefed or maybe not being read into everything that was going on because people that were subordinate to you were doing things maybe politically motivated, or they were saying that they thought they didn't want to draw politics into it. But I think, in my opinion, they were politically motivated themselves.

Was there any effort on the intelligence on the side of the intelligence agencies to correct what was misinformation, what they knew to be misinformation at the time?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, I can only speak, you know, to the personal knowledge that I have. And, you know, the efforts that I engaged in was, as we found information and intelligence that was inconsistent with things that were some of the individuals that had consulted with the intelligence community had stated. We went through a process to declassify as much of that so that you would be aware, or the State Department fact sheet that has been referenced a number of times about researchers being sick at the

Wuhan Institute of Virology, coronaviruses, including the one most similar in nature to what became COVID-19 and the Chinese military's involvement. Those were all pieces of intelligence that I worked to get out publicly with Secretary of State Pompeo through a declassification process.

So, from my standpoint, my personal knowledge was where we became aware of inconsistencies like that, we did our best to make that information available publicly.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you. I mean, I guess what I am a little bit worried about is, I am just worried that there was a process here where the intelligence agencies were purposely not sharing information or not coming, you know, coming forth with the information that they knew to be true because they were being influenced politically by what was going on in the White House or elsewhere.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Yes, and I think that, you know, as again, there were instances that were documented by the analytic ombudsman that reflect the fact that when it came specifically to China, the country of China, that some of our intelligence and our analytic judgments were impacted by partisan politics and the desire for intelligence not to be used by one party as opposed to another.

Dr. JACKSON. Right. And I bring this up because I think it happens in this Administration for the last two years. It has happened in the military. I think it happens in our intelligence agencies. These are people that we pay to be nonpartisan, to protect us. We pay them because of their expertise so that they can make sure that our national security is intact. And I think that if there is any of that going on behind the scenes, we need to get to that. People do not have to be making decisions based on their political beliefs or their political alignments if it is going to impact, you know, something like, you know, our response to COVID.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. I agree completely.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you. I yield back, sir.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mr. Garcia from California for five minutes.

Mr. GARCIA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to our witnesses. I do want to start, Mr. Chairman, by just responding to one of the Committee Members who just made some comments trying to link the origins of COVID to some of the national security leaks that are very concerning that we have been discussing recently. It is important to note that this committee itself cannot have credibility to discuss sensitive intelligence information if Members of the Majority are going to publicly defend people who continue to leak top secret information, which is in violation of their oaths of office.

These Members of the Committee have defended Jack Teixeira, who has been arrested for leaking classified information. It is very clear just to clarify that he was no whistleblower. He wasn't telling the truth, trying to serve the public. And all the evidence shows that he has recklessly shared classified information to impress friends in a private chat of which there were also racist memes and jokes. If he is found guilty, should be held fully accountable under law, and anyone who defended him should be ashamed. And so, again, we want to ensure that if we are going to actually talk about important information, origins of COVID, we should actually focus

on COVID, on the pandemic, and not trying to link this to someone who betrayed our country. I yield back the remainder of my time. Thank you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mr. Cloud from Texas for five minutes of question.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you all for being here today. Thank you, Chair, for continuing this investigation. It is so important to where we need to go in the future.

You know, Director Ratchliffe, you mentioned some of the stuff coming up with that China did to cover up a lot of what happened. We know they hoarded PPP, they silenced the centers, they blocked investigations into the Wuhan Lab. They have, as you mentioned, blamed service members. They have destroyed data. And so, where we don't have maybe definitive evidence of the origin, it certainly seems like we have evidence of a cover up.

Now, you know, I am not aggrieved by that. I am not surprised that godless communist countries do bad things. What has been extremely concerning and surprising, I think, to a lot of Americans is to see how certain aspects of our government has in a way misled them through the last few years. And you have mentioned that you have pretty high confidence that this did not have natural origins. Now we have the Department of Energy and the FBI now say that the lab leak is the most likely scenario as well, which, you know, you mentioned all the apparatuses at our intelligence, world class, world leading tools that our intelligence community has. And it boggles the mind of the American people to see that three years later, the intelligence community is finally coming around to where the American people were, you know, about three years ago.

Can you elaborate on how you developed your degree of confidence to the extent that you can? I realize there is information you cannot share, but—

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, I have talked a little bit about it today, but I think, you know, this highlights one of the, you know, the comments that the Congresswoman from Michigan was making earlier about, no one can know with certainty. I actually agree with that at this point in time, but we don't have to, in making intelligence community assessments. We have to have some level of confidence. It can be low, it can be moderate, or it can be high.

So, I have been very clear that when we look at all of our intelligence, much of it is circumstantial, and with circumstantial evidence, you can never know with certainty, but that doesn't mean that you cannot make an assessment with some level of confidence. And the more I have learned about this and the more I have seen, and again, as the person who had more access to our intelligence for the first year as much as anyone in our government, my level of confidence became higher. The things that others were supporting for a natural origins approach have fallen away. And some of the people that were promoting that had been revealed to have had conflicts of interest in perhaps promoting that as a theory. But again, I go back to the fact that at this point in time, 3 1/2 years later, no scientist in the world can point to anything from an environmental standpoint that ties COVID-19 to nature.

On the other side of the equation, you have all of the things that we have talked about, China's obfuscation and the fact that they

have the best access to the intelligence that would be diagnostic and dispositive, and yet they have shared none of that with us. And if they had any that was indicative or diagnostic that this was naturally occurring, why wouldn't they share that? If there was no one to blame for this pandemic, why wouldn't they share that information? I think the answer is that they don't know the answer or they don't want to know the answer because, like me, they know that the intelligence certainly points to lab leak as the most plausible assessment, the only one supported by intelligence, science, and common sense at this point.

Mr. CLOUD. Now, you developed this high degree of confidence. Could you speak about when? Was it earlier or later in the process?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. You know, when I became the Director of National Intelligence, I had seen the prior assessments. I had been a Member of Congress on the Intelligence Committee. I said show me all of the intelligence that we have, and I was frankly surprised how little we had supporting natural origins, how much we had, circumstantial or otherwise, that supported the lab leak. And over time, again, some of the explanations for natural origins became less and less likely. Again, I was told that some of this would appear over a course of months, we have now been 3 1/2 years and we haven't identified an intermediate host, a reservoir source or species, any of those things.

So, pretty rapidly, which is why I talked about the process that Mike Pompeo, Secretary Pompeo, when I went through to declassify some of this, with the hope that the next administration would declassify more information while protecting our sources and methods and that this body would hold hearings. Unfortunately, two years went by without any hearings in this body into the origins of COVID. So, you know, I am grateful that we are getting there, but these are things that should have taken place a long time ago.

Mr. CLOUD. Now, you have alluded that even as the DNI, you had trouble sometimes getting information from the intelligence community, and could you speak to that?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, I think there was, at times, reluctance. And, you know, as I have commented, that, you know, the independent analytic ombudsman found that there were instances where, particular to China, some intelligence was being suppressed so that it could not be used to support policies that the administration in which I was serving, the Trump Administration, could use that. And that was improper, you know, and I think I have addressed that.

Mr. CLOUD. Yes. I mean, to me, that is one of our major concerns from an oversight perspective, is looking into, you know, an intelligence agency that seems to have gone wayward in some of these aspects. And, Dr. Lowenthal, while I certainly appreciate some of your comments, I think the intelligence committee may have drifted since then, you know, and so it is important that we look into this. I am sorry, my time is up. Thank you, Chair.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Dr. McCormick from Georgia for five minutes.

Dr. MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Honorable Ratcliffe, thank you for your service in Congress. Also, thank you for your service as former Director of National Intelligence during

a tumultuous time during the origins of this disease process. Recently, Director Wray confirmed the FBI report stated that COVID-19 pandemic was likely the result of a lab incident in Wuhan. Based on your knowledge, do you agree with the report from the Department of Energy as well?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. I agree with both the FBI and the Department of Energy.

Dr. MCCORMICK. Thank you. In your testimony you stated, "Our intelligence has led to a demonstrable shift whereby a few of the intelligence community's 18 agencies are now publicly accessing the COVID-19 virus originated from a lab leak in Wuhan. And as this shift continues, the day will come when every single agency in the intelligence community will make the same assessment." Do you think there is another Federal agency close to following on the side of the Wuhan lab leak theory in the near future, and if so which one?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, you know, again, I am not in the intelligence community now but of course have friends that are career individuals still serving in agencies. You know, my understanding is that in most of the agencies there is a shift. More and more analysts believe that lab leak is the most plausible, if not the only plausible, assessment to make, and that it is a minority in most agencies that are holding on to the idea that this is naturally occurring.

You know, I would hope as I talked about the fact that the CIA would make an assessment at some confidence level, and based upon my personal knowledge of conversations about analysts within that agency, I believe that a great majority of those analysts do support the Department of Energy and the FBI analysis, and it is a minority opinion that is currently holding back the CIA from making that assessment that a lab leak is the most plausible.

Dr. MCCORMICK. And certainly in your estimate in the last year, is there some new information that occurred, or do you think the CIA could have come to that conclusion probably about a year ago or so?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, I think all agencies within the United States intelligence community could have made an assessment at some confidence level a year ago on this in favor of a lab leak. My understanding, specifically from the Department of Energy, that there was new intelligence that persuaded them to make their assessment of a lab leak. So, new intelligence is always being gained. But again, from my standpoint, the more time that passes, the further we get without anything tying COVID-19 to nature, as I talked about—no environmental source, no intermediate host, no reservoir species, none of that—it makes it less and less likely that this was a natural origin.

Dr. MCCORMICK. I think as a physician of emergency medicine and as a scientist, I think I thoroughly agree with that assessment, and, in fact, I think it could have been reached a long time ago in my opinion. I think the fact that we are even having this conversation is absurd. It is very easy to identify whether there are animals in the wild that have or have not this disease. The fact that the Chinese have had literally spent years, and incredible efforts trying to obtain that information and have received zero information sup-

porting one theory, whereas we know there is an incredible amount of evidence on the other side of that, points to one thing, and that is a CCP cover-up. This, unfortunately, leads me to the conclusion that the efforts of this Administration, Dr. Fauci, the WHO and multiple bureaucracies are willfully or ignorantly colluding with the CCP. That is what bothers me.

Director Ratcliffe, as you know, this committee was formed on the basis that we would seek the truth to create recommendations to face the future pandemics. With that being said, I have one last question for you. In your opinion, what reason could the Administration public officials in many of our Federal agencies have for hiding the truth from the American people? And if you can't speak to that, what effect do you think this has on the American people's trust of their public health officials and the government?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, I would say that, you know, China has been identified as our No. 1 nation-state adversary. They have been described by the current Administration as a strategic competitor, but our intelligence clearly tells us they are an adversary. Their public actions very clearly dictate that they are an adversary. And I think that the current Administration, for whatever reason, has been reluctant to confront China on any number of issues or transgressions that have taken place publicly from spying: a spy balloon that flew over the country, threats against legislators in this body from landing in Taiwan. The list is long. And there hasn't been an effort by the current Administration other than to say we are not seeking conflict with China, and I think that that has continued with respect to this issue into COVID origins.

Dr. MCCORMICK. I agree with you. I don't think we can learn from this if we are not being honest. We can't prepare for the next pandemic if we are not being honest. We have obvious answers that we want to ignore. I think we have been biased. I think we have to really acknowledge this if we are going to prepare for the next virus. Mr. Chair, I think we cannot disallow that we have already had multiple viruses from animals in the past, but we are not doing what we need to prepare for with Wuhan leaks and disallowing gain-of-function. With that I yield.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mr. Moskowitz from Florida for five minutes of questions.

Mr. MOSKOWITZ. Mr. Chairman, thank you. The American people deserve to know the origins of the COVID-19 virus. I happen to believe, based on the evidence that is available, that it is most likely that it came out of the lab than not. But for the families who lost loved ones to COVID, they don't have an answer. For the businesses that were shut down, they don't have an answer. For the folks in nursing homes who couldn't have their loved ones visit them, they don't have an answer.

And I know all of this because I am the only one in Congress who ran a COVID-19 response operation as the Director of Emergency Management for the state of Florida. I am the only one who had to go to China to buy masks and buy nasal cannula oxygen, and buy ventilators, and having to buy viral media and universal media, and having to get all of that stuff from around the world, competing with everybody but Antarctica, because this country was not prepared to take on a pandemic. Those families deserve to

know. My dad, like some others, was diagnosed with cancer during COVID-19. We couldn't be with him in the hospital during treatment. Those families have a right to know. Students who weren't in school have a right to know. But also, I think the American people have a right to know why so much misinformation was spread about COVID-19 in this country by President Trump.

Let me just read some of the greatest hits from President Trump. "China has been working very hard to contain the coronavirus. The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and transparency. It would all work out well. In particular, on behalf of the American people, I want to thank President Xi." OK. "I just spoke to President Xi last night, and you know, we are working on the problem, the virus. It is a very tough situation. I think he is going to handle it. I think it is handled very well. We are helping wherever we can."

"Just had a long conversation with the President of China. He is strong, sharp, powerful, focused on leading the counter-attack to the coronavirus. He feels they are doing very well, even building hospitals in a matter of days. Great discipline, and taking place in China." "President leads strongly in a very successful operation. We are working closely with China to help."

"I think China was very, you know, professionally run in a sense. They have got everything under control. I really believe they are going to have it under control very soon." "You know, in April, supposedly it is going to die with the hotter weather, and that is a beautiful date to look forward to. But China, I can tell you, is working very hard." "We have very few people in this country with COVID, and, you know what? They are getting better. They are all getting better. I think the whole situation will work out well."

"We pretty much shut it down coming from China. You know, we only have 15 people with COVID, and you know, 15, within a couple of days, it is going to go down to zero. That is a pretty good job we have done. It is going to go away, hopefully at the end of the month, and if not, hopefully soon after that."

I could keep going. This goes on and on. And every day it goes on, there were more and more cases in this country, and so we have to find out why the President was spreading that information. We heard about this paper, Proximal Origins paper, in the committee, and we heard from Members that this paper specifically said that they didn't want to investigate the lab leak at all. That is not true. Here is the quote from the paper, "We must, therefore, examine the possibility of an inadvertent laboratory release of SARS-CoV-2." So, I don't know why we continue to spread this misinformation. I also think one of the things we should learn, because the document that Mr. Ratcliffe has been reading from as part of his testimony suggests analysts appeared reluctant to have their analysis on China brought forward because they tend to disagree with Trump Administration policies. One of the things I also think we should investigate is, did the professionals not share the information they had with the President because they didn't trust the President because every single day he was going out saying this stuff, or better, going out and telling people they can drink bleach, or they should just go out and put light in the body and

we will get rid of COVID. I mean, this went on for a long period of time.

So yes, we need to investigate. We need to investigate the origins of COVID. We need to know what we knew when, and we need to share that with the American people. And we need to know why President Trump, who was in charge when COVID happened, he was in charge when COVID got out of control, why he didn't tell the American people the truth. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mr. Jordan from Ohio for five minutes.

Mr. JORDAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Ratcliffe, I think Dr. McCormick was on to the right question. Seems to me the fundamental question is why. Why did they lie to us? You point this out in your testimony. Why is it taking so long for every government agency to admit what we all know. Because belief in a lab leak as the origin at the start of this is not a conspiracy theory, is it, Mr. Ratcliffe?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. No.

Mr. JORDAN. Why has it taken so long then? I mean, you knew that early on, right? You were confirmed, I think, May 2020, and you knew that within weeks that this thing came from a lab. In fact, I think in your testimony, you say a lab leak is the only explanation, the only credible explanation. If this were a trial, the preponderance of the evidence is all on the side of the lab leak. You knew that within weeks. So, why did the government not tell us the truth?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, I think, you know, when you look at the intelligence community report that the Biden Administration put out in October 2021, they acknowledged that China's refusal to cooperate. But the report in a way ignores what I think is the inescapable fact and reality that if the CCP had anything exculpatory, anything at all, anything that would be helpful to showing that no one was to blame for this—

Mr. JORDAN. Right.

Mr. RATCLIFFE [continuing]. That this occurred naturally, that they would share that. And, you know, why not share data samples, research? Everything that tends to show that they had access to that would tend to show that this was naturally occurring and tend to show that lab leak theory really was a conspiracy theory, but they didn't do that because they couldn't do that. And to me, that is why making an assessment with some level of confidence is something that should have been done a long time ago by the intelligence community. Yes, we need to protect sources and methods. It is why Mike Pompeo and I labored over how much of this can we put out, hoping that it would drive the next administration coming in to declassify more information, which they haven't, and would drive congressional hearings into the origins of this, which it didn't.

Mr. JORDAN. Here is what gets me. So, the Director of National Intelligence knew this thing came from a lab, the Secretary of State knew this thing came from a lab, common sense tells you this thing came from a lab, and, frankly, even the guys who called us names knew it came from a lab because we have their emails. We have their emails from the start. Mr. Garry says, "I don't know

how this happens in nature. It would be easy to do in a lab.” Mr. Anderson says, “This is not consistent with evolutionary.” Everyone knew at the get-go, you knew at the get-go, and yet, they tell us just the opposite. Why?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, you left out the top public health official, a virologist, Dr. Redfield, who testified.

Mr. JORDAN. Dr. Redfield knew. He has testified, yes.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Also testified. So, you had the top diplomat, the top of the intelligence community, the top public health official all telling you with some confidence level that the most likely origin of this was a lab leak, and I think that, you know, unfortunately, for political reasons and political narratives, it was difficult.

Mr. JORDAN. So, did you talk with Dr. Fauci during this time-frame? When you get in, in May and over the next several months, did you talk to Dr. Fauci anytime?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. No.

Mr. JORDAN. Never spoke with Dr. Fauci?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. No.

Mr. JORDAN. Do you find that strange when he is out saying something directly contrary to the Secretary of State, to the Director of National Intelligence, and to the top virologist, Dr. Redfield, that Dr. Fauci wouldn’t talk with you?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Yes. To be clear, there were folks within the Coronavirus Task Force that were communicating, you know, medical and scientific information to the intelligence community, not me directly. But none of that information was frankly consistent with what we have talked about what the intelligence showed. Again, some of those individuals, to include Dr. Fauci, were promoting the idea that this was natural origins. And notwithstanding, you know, the language that was read, they were referring to it publicly as a conspiracy theory in certain conversations and interviews.

Mr. JORDAN. Dr. Collins called us conspiracy theorists if you believed in the lab as the origin. Tell me, why do you think Fauci and Collins took that? I got my theory, and I think I am right, but I would like to hear from the Director of National Intelligence what he thinks Fauci and Collins’ motivation for sharing false information with the American people.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Well, I think the best evidence of that is their own conversations, which say that they didn’t want unwarranted or unwanted, or I think the term was unwanted attention, to the relationships that were taking place between Western virologists and those working within the Wuhan Institute of Virology and funding sources for some of that research into——

Mr. JORDAN. Yes, our money to a lab in China that wasn’t up to code, that was doing gain-of-function research, and that is where this thing came from. That is what they didn’t want us to know. Do you agree with that, Mr. Ratcliffe?

Mr. RATCLIFFE. I do agree with that.

Mr. JORDAN. That is important. Thank you. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now like to yield to Ranking Member Ruiz for a closing statement if he would like one.

Dr. RUIZ. Thank you. As I have said since the Select Subcommittee’s first hearing, our efforts to understand the origins of the

COVID-19 pandemic should remain evidence based and free from politicization, partisan rhetoric, and conspiratorial accusations without proof that seek to vilify our Nation's public health officials. We should not politicize intelligence and turn the origins questions into a partisan blame game. Instead, we must let our Nation's scientists and intelligence professionals do the work necessary to promote our understanding of the pandemic origins without political interference.

And while the experts were to determine how the coronavirus came to be, we should focus on putting people over politics. We should develop forward-looking evidence-based policies that will keep the American people safe from future pandemics. And we should take an intelligent strategic approach to competition with China and the challenges posed by the Chinese Communist Party. Instead of fanning the flames of extreme rhetoric, we should build on the progress we made over the past two years under President Biden to ensure America's interests flourished domestically and abroad.

Now, more than ever, we must double down on our commitment to scientific integrity and put the needs of the American people above political theater. Let's reject extreme partisan rhetoric and work together to save lives. The American people deserve nothing less. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. You know, I have served on the Intelligence Committee, and as a physician, when the pandemic began, no doubt I took an extreme interest into what was going on. Mostly what I was interested in was what was going on physiologically, causing so many people to die, interested in finding out ways that we could maybe find treatments for people that actually worked and started doing research. Lockdown came, nothing else to do. Just sitting at home. Sitting at home going back and forth with another doctor from Ohio who actually got on the phone with infectious disease doctors in China.

We began our COVID-19 origins investigation in February 2020, and we found an article during that time that I had never seen before, medical article, research article, published by Ralph Baric from North Carolina and Dr. Zhengli Shi from China, an article that showed that they were able to create a chimera, which is gain-of-function research, where you take one virus, parts of it, put it on another virus and make it more infectious. I will never forget. I am not the one who found it first. The other doctor did, and he called me and said, you won't believe this and sent it to me. And I thought, oh my gosh, this is extremely alarming.

Fast forward, after a FOIA request was able to reveal some emails from Dr. Fauci, Kristian Andersen, and others, going to the end of February 2020, Kristian Andersen said, "This thing looks engineered." Immediately, Dr. Fauci reacts. He contacts his deputy, "BE READY." I am paraphrasing. And I can't remember exactly what the email said, but I do know the email had an attachment to it, and it had the attachment of that very article about the creation of a chimera.

Oh, my goodness, I would hope that when Dr. Fauci saw that or became aware of it, maybe he just became aware of it, I don't think so, but maybe he did, that he was as alarmed as I was. So, you

take that article. The statement from Kristian Andersen saying, "This thing looks engineered." And what does this very group do within weeks? Come out and say it came from nature. It came from nature. Dr. Andersen, we found, had said that he was focused, he was going to focus to disprove the lab leak theory. Why? Why? What is the motive for that? That is very reasonable to ask that question.

Mr. Moskowitz I guess wasn't here for the other hearings. He is not on this Subcommittee regularly, so he doesn't understand that that is actually what Kristian Andersen said, that I am going to focus to disprove the lab leak theory. And they wrote Proximal Origins, got it published. How can we not question this motive? And if we are going to do all that we say we want to do with this committee to move forward, we have to consider these types of things, the motives, whether they are political or personal, so that we don't let someone else do that again in the future.

As I mentioned, I am on the Intelligence Committee, so I am able to get intelligence that others weren't able to get, and under Chairman Schiff, there was an unwillingness to investigate this altogether. The good news is, in the Intelligence Committee, that rift is now gone and we work together very well. But at that time, since there was two separate reports coming out of the Intelligence Committee in the House, Democrats in their report they concluded there was no need to search any further for the origins. What good would that do? Well, that has changed, fortunately, in this committee and across the entire Congress, and apparently with the President of United States as well.

And I am glad he ordered the 90-Day commission, but to date, I have seen less from the commission than I have seen on my own work on the Intelligence Committee. And when I ask questions of some of the people from the IC, they tell me it is their policy not to answer my question.

Dr. Lowenthal, you referenced it before, you know what the statute is. They cannot have that type of policy, and that is why we want to know more. And fortunately, I have been able to work through some of that to some degree with Director Haines, and I give her credit for being open. But overall, let me just say this. I am grateful for this opportunity that we now have in the House. It is long overdue, and I am grateful to Speaker McCarthy for putting this Select Subcommittee together. And I am grateful for Dr. Ruiz. He has been a friend for a long time. We have worked on a lot of health issues together as physicians, and I believe that if we continue to work together, we can produce a product.

You know, the pain of this pandemic in one way or another has understandably evoked emotions from everyone on this committee and everyone in Congress and everyone across America. But at the end of the day, I do believe we can and we must produce a product of truth and accountability. And I will keep repeating what I am after: I want us to be able to predict a pandemic, prepare for a pandemic, protect ourselves from a pandemic, and prevent a pandemic if we can. And with that, I yield back.

I want to thank all of you for being here today and for being witnesses for us. I greatly appreciate what you have done and what

you have said and participating, and with that, this meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

