

# Testimony of Former Director of National Intelligence John L. Ratcliffe Before the U.S. House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic

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Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Ruiz, and Members of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic:

It is my great pleasure to be back in the House of Representatives where I had the honor of representing the Fourth Congressional District of Texas for six years, while serving on the House Committees on Intelligence, Homeland Security, and the Judiciary.

As this Committee is aware, I left Congress after being confirmed by the Senate to serve as the 6th U.S. Director of National Intelligence during the Trump Administration. My confirmation hearing in May of 2020 was actually the first in-person Senate hearing after the COVID-19 pandemic began. Across the country – and indeed, the world – government officials and citizens alike were calling for answers to questions about the virus’s origins and spread.

During my confirmation hearing, I promised to ensure the intelligence community (“IC”) would be “laser focused” on getting answers to these questions. Once in office, I worked with partners across the IC to make this issue a priority.

What follows is a brief unclassified overview of what the intelligence community learned and knows, a synopsis of the relevant challenges I encountered during this effort, and where I believe we must go from here.

First, as to what the intelligence community learned and knows about the virus’s origins and its initial spread, let me state the bottom line up front:

My informed assessment, as a person with as much or more access than anyone to our government’s intelligence during the initial year of the virus outbreak and pandemic onset, has been and continues to be that a lab leak is the only explanation credibly supported by our intelligence, by science and by common sense.

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 naturally occurring “spillover” theory, the lab leak side of the ledger would be long and overwhelming while the “spillover” side would be nearly empty.

In fact, were this a trial, the preponderance of circumstantial evidence provided by our intelligence would compel a jury finding of guilt to an accusation that the coronavirus research in the Wuhan labs was responsible for spawning a global pandemic. And likewise, the Chinese

Communist Party would be convicted of going to great lengths to cover up the virus's origins – from destroying medical tests, samples and data, to intimidating and "disappearing" witnesses and journalists asking questions, to lying and coercing global health authorities, to spreading propaganda that the virus originated in the United States.

Their efforts continue even to this day as the Chinese Embassy in the United States 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 a single shred of exculpatory evidence.

The intelligence community's sources for this information are numerous, diverse and unassailable. And I hope that the recent unanimous congressional support to require the declassification of our COVID origins material will soon make at least some of this intelligence available to the American people. Our intelligence has led to a demonstrable shift whereby a few of the intelligence community's 18 agencies are now publicly assessing that 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 IC will make this same assessment.

Which begs the question, why have they not to this point?

This is a simple and obvious question that does not, however, have a simple answer. 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.

These included the headwinds created when a lab leak assessment was initially labeled and falsely reported with near unanimity as a "conspiracy theory" by conflicted scientists and mainstream press, while also being censored as "disinformation" by social media giants. Internally, national and electoral politics were also influencing 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, non-political official tasked with refereeing internal disputes over intelligence assessments, the ombudsman found that "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 don't want our intelligence used to support those policies.'"

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 can't make an assessment with any confidence, only that it won't.

The intelligence community makes thousands of assessments every year with a fraction of the intelligence – circumstantial or otherwise – that it possesses related to COVID origins. The real problem is, now three-and-a-half years later, the only plausible assessment the agency could make is that a virus which killed over a million Americans originated in a Chinese Communist Party-controlled lab whose research included work for the Chinese military. Such an assessment would have enormous geopolitical implications that the Biden administration seemingly does not want to face head-on.

So where should we go from here?

Famously etched into the marble wall in the lobby of the CIA's headquarters are the words of John 8:32: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

The sincere, uninhibited, unafraid search for truth should be at the heart of our collective efforts related to the origins and spread of COVID-19. From intelligence agencies, to members of the Administration and Congress, to public health officials – every individual and institution should put politics aside and follow the facts. The American people – particularly the millions of Americans who lost a loved one to this entirely preventable pandemic – deserve the truth. They deserve justice. They deserve accountability.

And only by seeking the truth, justice and accountability for this pandemic can we achieve another equally important goal—the prevention of yet another pandemic disaster from ever happening again.

Thank you and I look forward to answering your questions.