

April 28, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20050

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

We write to request information about the Administration's response to reports of safety and management concerns at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV). Such information is critical to Congress's responsibility to enact legislation to respond to the current pandemic and prevent the next outbreak.

We understand that as early as January 2018 Department officials issued warnings about the WIV, including the serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians needed to safely manage research on potentially deadly zoonotic coronaviruses. While the exact origin of the 2019 novel coronavirus has not yet been determined and there is no evidence linking the virus to the WIV, it is important to understand how the administration responded to these warnings. This is not academic: unless we fully understand what happened we will be unable to effectively act and lead the world to prevent the next global pandemic.

We understand that in the first months of 2018, senior officials from the U.S. Embassy in Beijing and the U.S. Consulate in Wuhan led multiple delegations to the WIV. In a series of reporting cables sent to the Secretary of State, the delegation warned about severe safety and management weaknesses at the lab. They explained that the lab's work on bat coronaviruses with potential for human transmission was made even more dangerous by these shortcomings. The cable reportedly provided recommendations for increased U.S. engagement and technical assistance.

It would be irresponsible for such dire warnings not to be taken seriously. Unfortunately, there is no publicly available evidence that the administration gave these warnings the attention they merited. Instead, throughout 2018 and 2019 the Administration dramatically rolled back public health engagement in China. This included a two-thirds staff reduction at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) office in Beijing and the elimination of a U.S. advisor position embedded in China's CDC, among other changes.

Understanding what happened at the WIV is critical to keeping Americans safe. We urgently need to fully understand the origins of this pandemic because the next pandemic will not wait. Indeed, if COVID-19 did accidentally escape from this lab, we need to understand what happened and how this could have been prevented, and work with the World Health Organization to ensure the security and safe management of sensitive bioresearch laboratories. Even if the COVID-19 pandemic originated naturally through animal-to-human transmission, as

many scientists believe, the State Department cables suggest the risk of a new virus emerging from a laboratory due to lax safety procedures or other accidental release remains high.

Therefore, we respectfully request that you transmit any cables concerning the WIV to Congress and provide an immediate and complete accounting of the administration's response to these cables, including:

- What specific concerns and recommendations were provided in these cables?
- What follow up and monitoring was done to investigate the assertions made in these cables, assess the scope of the problem, and understand what actions could be taken to address these concerns?
- Were the cables shared with any other agencies or White House staff members?
- What specific diplomatic actions did the State Department take to engage China's national or regional governments regarding WIV safety and management?
- Which staff were responsible for following up on these claims? Were they provided sufficient resources to do so?
- What additional programmatic or technical assistance was either offered or provided by the U.S. government to the lab or regional Wuhan government?
- In the context of these alarming reports, why were key CDC staff positions, including the resident CDC advisor position in Beijing, eliminated in 2018 and 2019?

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator