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May 19, 2020

The Honorable James E. Clyburn
Chairman
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Clyburn:

Republicans in the House of Representatives have repeatedly attempted to work with our Democrat colleagues to hold China accountable for causing this pandemic as well as hold the World Health Organization (WHO) accountable for condoning China's actions.¹ We will continue to do both. On April 17, 2020, Joe Biden acknowledged China's disinformation efforts and the need to crack down on their tactics.² On May 9, 2020, seventeen state attorneys general called on Congress to hold the Chinese government accountable for its role in the COVID-19 pandemic.³ We urge you to immediately join our investigation and hold hearings to determine why the Chinese government denied and downplayed the severity of the COVID-19 outbreak, and how China is now attempting to exploit the pandemic it caused. As President Trump stated in his May 18, 2020, letter to the Director-General of the WHO, "We do not have time to waste."⁴ Congress must work to understand the origins of COVID-19 and reform the WHO.

Specifically, the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis should investigate: (1) China's obfuscation of the origin of COVID-19; (2) China's manipulation of the WHO to cover up the severity of the outbreak; and (3) recent reports that the Chinese government is stealing American medical research and disrupting the medical supply chain, among other tactics intended to exploit the pandemic. Focusing the Subcommittee's resources on these imperative

¹ Letter from Jim D. Jordan et. al., Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight & Reform, to his Excellency Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization (Apr. 9, 2020); *see also* Letter from Michael T. McCaul, et. al., Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Foreign Affairs, to Hon. Donald J. Trump, President (Apr. 16, 2020).

² Michael Martina & Trevor Hunnicutt, *Biden says Trump failed to hold China Accountable on Coronavirus*, REUTERS (Apr. 17, 2020), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-china/biden-says-trump-failed-to-hold-china-accountable-on-coronavirus-idUSKBN21Z3DZ>.

³ Letter from Steve Marshall, et. al., Attorney General, Alabama, to Eliot Engel, et. al., Chairman, H. comm. on Foreign Affairs (May 9, 2020), <http://2hsvz0174ah31vgcm16peuy12tz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/02276140.pdf>.

⁴ Letter from the Hon. Donald J. Trump, President, to his Excellency Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization (May 18, 2020) *available at* <https://mobile.twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1262577580718395393/photo/1>.

questions will assist the U.S. government effort to limit ongoing and future harm from Chinese malfeasance.

The Chinese government obfuscated the origin and severity of COVID-19 and withheld information from the international community while stockpiling medical supplies.

On December 30, 2019, Li Wenliang, an ophthalmologist at Wuhan Central Hospital, sent a message to a group of fellow doctors to warn about a possible outbreak of an illness that resembled severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).⁵ Dr. Li—who observed seven patients at his hospital with SARS-like symptoms being quarantined—was summoned in the middle of the night and detained by the Chinese government and made to admit making false statements that disturbed the public order.⁶

Dr. Li, of course, had correctly recognized the signs of a novel coronavirus. The Chinese government, however, suppressed the efforts of Dr. Li and seven others who tried to raise public awareness about the deadly outbreak in Wuhan. In fact, by the time Dr. Li issued a warning to his colleagues on December 30, 2019, it had been more than six weeks since COVID-19 was first identified in a 55-year-old from Hubei province, according to Chinese government data.⁷

The next day—December 31, 2019—Chinese officials finally reported the outbreak of a “pneumonia of unknown etiology” to the WHO.⁸ But the Chinese provided false and misleading information, including that most of the patients had been to a seafood market in Wuhan; that there was “no clear evidence” of human-to-human transmission; and that the earliest case had shown symptoms only as recently as December 12, 2019.⁹

On January 10, 2020, COVID-19 claimed its first fatality, according to the Wuhan Health Commission.¹⁰ The 61-year-old man, who shopped regularly at the Wuhan seafood market, “had checked into Wuhan Puren Hospital with a raging fever and difficulty breathing.”¹¹ When Chinese officials finally reported the man’s death two days later, they omitted a crucial detail—his wife had developed symptoms five days after he did.¹² She had never visited the Wuhan market.¹³

⁵ Andrew Green, *Obituary: Li Wenliang*, THE LANCET, Vol. 395, Issue 10225, Feb. 29, 2020, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30382-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30382-2/fulltext).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Josephine Ma, *Coronavirus: China’s first confirmed Covid-19 case traced back to Nov. 17*, S. CHINA MORNING POST, Mar. 13, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3074991/coronavirus-chinas-first-confirmed-covid-19-case-traced-back>.

⁸ Disease Outbreak News, World Health Organization, *Pneumonia of unknown cause - China* (Jan. 5, 2020), <https://www.who.int/csr/don/05-january-2020-pneumonia-of-unknown-cause-china/en/>.

⁹ Julia Belluz, *Did China downplay the coronavirus outbreak early on?*, VOX, Jan. 27, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/2020/1/27/21082354/coronavirus-outbreak-wuhan-china-early-on-lancet>.

¹⁰ Chris Buckley & Steven Lee Myers, *As New Coronavirus Spread, China’s Old Habits Delayed Fight*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/01/world/asia/china-coronavirus.html>

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

As the severity of the outbreak in Wuhan further became clear to the Chinese government in January 2020, it continued to downplay its potential for widespread damage while stockpiling medical supplies. On May 1, 2020, the Department of Homeland Security issued a non-classified intelligence report that found the Chinese government “intentionally concealed the severity” of the pandemic from the world in early January and did not inform the WHO that COVID-19 “was a contagion” for several weeks in January so it could order “face masks, surgical gowns, and gloves” from abroad.¹⁴ Indeed, records show Chinese imports of face masks and surgical gowns and gloves increased sharply during the period in question.¹⁵

Consistent with its initial strategy to withhold information from the international community, China moved in January to contain the COVID-19 outbreak domestically but allowed the virus to spread abroad. While Chinese authorities limited domestic flights from Wuhan to other Chinese cities like Beijing and Shanghai, China’s Civil Aviation Administration urged international carriers to maintain their flying schedules.¹⁶ The Chinese government’s obfuscation may have cost hundreds of thousands of lives around the globe.

The Chinese government manipulated the World Health Organization to cover up its malfeasance.

The WHO received warnings of human-to-human transmission of the novel coronavirus from the Taiwanese government in late December 2019, but failed to act on that information. On December 31, 2019—the same day China officially acknowledged the potential new virus for the first time—the Taiwan Centers for Disease Control sent an email to the WHO regarding rumors of at least “seven cases of atypical pneumonia”—the very cases Dr. Li identified.¹⁷ According to the Taiwanese, the term “atypical pneumonia” is commonly used in communications with China and understood “to refer to SARS, a disease transmitted between humans caused by coronavirus.”¹⁸

Despite warnings from the Taiwanese, the WHO continued to rely on Chinese disinformation and downplay the severity of the outbreak. For more than two weeks in January, the WHO made a series of public proclamations that human-to-human transmission was not occurring, despite mounting evidence to the contrary:

¹⁴ Will Weissert, *DHS report: China hid virus’ severity to hoard supplies*, ASSOC. PRESS, (May 4, 2020), <https://apnews.com/bf685dcf52125be54e030834ab7062a8>; See also Abigail Williams & Dan De Luce, *DHS report: China hid coronavirus’ severity in order to hoard medical supplies*, NBC NEWS, May 4, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/dhs-report-china-hid-coronavirus-severity-order-hoard-medical-supplies-n1199221>

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Sandip Sen, *How China locked down internally for COVID-19, but pushed foreign travel*, INDIA TIMES, Apr. 30, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/blogs/Whathappensif/how-china-locked-down-internally-for-covid-19-but-pushed-foreign-travel/>

¹⁷ Press Release, Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, The facts regarding Taiwan’s email to alert WHO to possible danger of COVID-19 (Apr. 11, 2020), https://www.cdc.gov.tw/Category/ListContent/sOn2_m9QgxKqhZ7omgiz1A?uaid=PAD-lbwDHeN_bLa-viBOuw

¹⁸ *Id.*

- On January 9, 2020, the WHO issued a statement: “According to Chinese authorities, the virus in question can cause severe illness in some patients and does not transmit readily between people.”¹⁹
- On January 12, WHO stated there is “no clear evidence of human to human transmission.”²⁰
- On January 13, in response to the first reported case of COVID-19 in Thailand, the WHO stated, “To date, there has been no suggestion of human to human transmission of this new coronavirus.”²¹
- On January 14, the WHO again stated, “Based on the available information there is no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission.”²²
- The same day, the WHO tweeted, “Preliminary investigations conducted by the Chinese authorities have found no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of the novel #coronavirus (2019-nCoV) identified in #Wuhan, #China.”²³

It was not until January 19, 2020—three weeks after the Taiwanese warned the WHO about the outbreak in Wuhan—that the WHO finally acknowledged there was “some limited human-to-human transmission occurring between close contacts.”²⁴ The first case of COVID-19 was identified in the United States two days later.²⁵ The patient, a man in Washington state, had traveled to Wuhan but did not visit the market in question or know anyone who had the virus.²⁶

The WHO went beyond merely enabling the Chinese government to perpetuate its campaign to suppress evidence of a deadly virus throughout January. On January 28, 2020, WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus praised Chinese President Xi Jinping and “the seriousness with which China is taking this outbreak, especially the commitment from

¹⁹ Statement, World Health Organization, WHO statement regarding cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, China (Jan. 9, 2020), <https://www.who.int/china/news/detail/09-01-2020-who-statement-regarding-cluster-of-pneumonia-cases-in-wuhan-china>.

²⁰ Disease Outbreak News, World Health Organization, Novel Coronavirus - China (Jan. 12, 2020), <https://www.who.int/csr/don/12-january-2020-novel-coronavirus-china/en/>.

²¹ News Release, World Health Organization, Thailand responding to the novel coronavirus (Jan. 13, 2020), <https://www.who.int/thailand/news/detail/13-01-2020-thailand-responding-to-the-novel-coronavirus>.

²² Disease Outbreak News, World Health Organization, Novel Coronavirus – Thailand (Jan. 14, 2020), <https://www.who.int/csr/don/14-january-2020-novel-coronavirus-thailand-ex-china/en/>.

²³ @WHO, Twitter (Jan. 14, 2020), <https://twitter.com/who?lang=en>.

²⁴ @WHO, Twitter (Jan. 19, 2020), <https://twitter.com/who?lang=en>.

²⁵ Press Release, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, First Travel-related Case of 2019 Novel Coronavirus Detected in United States (Jan. 21, 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p0121-novel-coronavirus-travel-case.html>.

²⁶ Erin Schumaker, *1st confirmed case of new coronavirus reported in US: CDC*, ABC NEWS, Jan. 21, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/1st-confirmed-case-coronavirus-reported-washington-state-cdc/story?id=68430795>.

top leadership, and the transparency they have demonstrated.”²⁷ At the time of that announcement, the WHO’s international experts had not even been granted access to China.²⁸

On May 18, 2020, President Xi announced that the Chinese government would give \$2 billion to the WHO and other countries to respond to the coronavirus pandemic.²⁹ White House National Security Council Spokesman John Ulyot said the “[Chinese Communist Party’s] commitment of \$2 billion is a token to distract from calls from a growing number of nations demanding accountability for the Chinese government’s failure to meet its obligations . . . to tell the truth and warn the world of what was coming.”³⁰ Also, on May 18, 2020, President Trump sent a comprehensive and damning letter to Dr. Tedros detailing the WHO’s failures and calling for swift reform.³¹

Republicans on the Committee on Oversight and Reform detailed these concerns and others in an April 9, 2020, letter to Dr. Tedros.³² To date, the WHO has yet to provide a briefing or any relevant documents, or made a commitment to do so. It appears the full weight of the Select Subcommittee may be necessary to compel the WHO to cooperate with this investigation.

The Chinese government is exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic to steal U.S. vaccine research and disrupt the medical supply chain, among other things.

On May 10, 2020, the *New York Times* reported China has escalated cyberattacks with the goal of stealing American research and development related to the search for therapeutics and a cure for COVID-19.³³ The Department of Defense and the Pentagon have also seen an increase in phishing schemes targeting government employees working from home.³⁴

These tactics are not new. China has a long history of stealing intellectual property of all types. In fact, according to the FBI, the Chinese government invested in U.S. academia to steal confidential information and technology from U.S. companies and the government.³⁵

²⁷ News Release, World Health Organization, WHO, China leaders discuss next steps in battle against coronavirus outbreak (Jan. 28, 2020), <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/28-01-2020-who-china-leaders-discuss-next-steps-in-battle-against-coronavirus-outbreak>.

²⁸ Hinnerk Feldwisch-Drentrup, *How WHO Became China’s Coronavirus Accomplice*, FOREIGN POLICY, Apr. 2, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/02/china-coronavirus-who-health-soft-power/>.

²⁹ Evelyn Cheng, *China’s Xi pledges \$2 billion to help fight coronavirus*, CNBC, May 18, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/18/chinas-xi-pledges-2-billion-to-help-fight-coronavirus-at-who-meeting.html>

³⁰ @ZekeJMiller, Twitter (May 18, 2020), <https://twitter.com/ZekeJMiller/status/1262431926213844994>.

³¹ Letter from Donald J. Trump *supra* note 4.

³² Letter from Jim D. Jordan *supra* note 1.

³³ David Sanger & Nicole Perlroth, *U.S. to Accuse China of Trying to Hack Vaccine Data, as Virus Redirects Cyberattacks*, N.Y. TIMES, May 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/10/us/politics/coronavirus-china-cyber-hacking.html>.

³⁴ Paul Shinkman, *Hackers Exploit Coronavirus to ‘Surge’ Attacks on the Pentagon*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, Apr. 13, 2020.

³⁵ See CHINA: THE RISK TO ACADEMIA, FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, 1 (2019) available at <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/china-risk-to-academia-2019.pdf/view>; see also, *Scholars or Spies: Foreign Plots Targeting America’s Research and Development*, Hearing Before the H. Comm. on Space, Science, and

The Chinese government has mostly relied on state-sponsored hackers to steal public health data and clinical vaccine research remotely, but they are also using researchers and students to steal materials from inside laboratories working to develop treatments for COVID-19.³⁶

While stealing American pharmaceutical research with one hand, China is brazenly using the other to limit pharmaceutical exports to the United States.³⁷ China is the second largest exporter of drugs and biologics to the U.S., behind only Canada. Some experts estimate that nearly 97 percent of all antibiotics in the United States are manufactured in China.³⁸

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, twenty-three medications with a possible connection to treating coronavirus, including Hydroxychloroquine and Azithromycin, have gone on the FDA's Drug Shortage List, with more expected in the coming weeks.³⁹ Many of these shortages are a direct result of China's declining manufacturing capacity.⁴⁰ China's critical role in the U.S. pharmaceutical supply chain has become a national security issue.

China has not been satisfied to simply leverage its place in the medical supply chain to exert influence against the United States. While the world's attention is turned to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, China has claimed sovereignty over disputed islands in the South China Sea, intimidated Taiwan, and attempted to quash the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong.⁴¹ China's attempts to exploit the pandemic extend as far as Africa, where it offers vulnerable countries much-needed debt relief in exchange for lucrative national assets.⁴² Director-General Dr. Tedros has supported China's anti-Taiwan stance by calling the country racist.⁴³

The Subcommittee must hear from witnesses who can answer questions in-person about Chinese government malfeasance and the complicity of the World Health Organization.

Given the serious nature of the allegations against China and the Subcommittee's broader goal of investigating any issues related to this pandemic, we urge you to immediately call WHO

Technology, 115th Cong. (2018) (statement of Lamar Smith, Chairman) *available at* <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/SY/SY21/20180411/108175/HHRG-115-SY21-MState-S000583-20180411.pdf>; *see also* Kate O'Keeffe, *U.S. Probes University of Texas Links to Chinese Lab Scrutinized Over Coronavirus*, WALL ST. J., May 1, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-probes-university-of-texas-links-to-chinese-lab-scrutinized-over-coronavirus-11588325401>.

³⁶ Sanger *supra* note 33.

³⁷ Barnini Chakraborty, *China hints at denying Americans life-saving coronavirus drugs*, FOX NEWS, Mar. 13, 2020, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/chinese-deny-americans-coronavirus-drugs>.

³⁸ Yanzhong Huang, *U.S. Dependence on Pharmaceutical Products from China*. COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, (Aug. 14, 2019), <https://www.cfr.org/blog/us-dependence-pharmaceutical-products-china>.

³⁹ Tori Marsh, *Live Updates: Which Drugs are in Shortage Because of COVID-19*, GOODRX (Apr. 14, 2020), <https://www.goodrx.com/blog/covid-19-drug-shortages-updates/>.

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ Alex Ward, *How China is ruthlessly exploiting the coronavirus pandemic it helped cause*, VOX, Apr. 28, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/2020/4/28/21234598/coronavirus-china-xi-jinping-foreign-policy>.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ Letter from Donald J. Trump *supra* note 4.

The Honorable James E. Clyburn

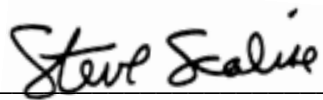
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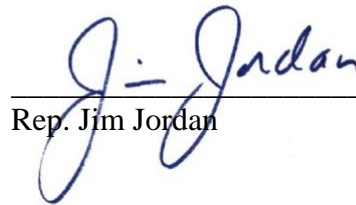
Director-General Dr. Tedros and Chinese Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai to testify. Furthermore, we urge you to convene such hearings in-person, in the Capitol, to convey the seriousness of our questions and to fulfill our constitutional obligation to conduct oversight in this extraordinary case.

The Chinese government's efforts to undermine the American effort to combat COVID-19 and sabotage the global economic recovery are ongoing. We urge the Subcommittee to return to the Capitol and help us hold the Chinese government accountable for its cynical strategy to exploit a pandemic of its own making.

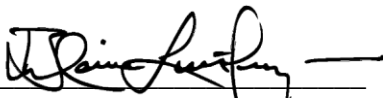
Sincerely,



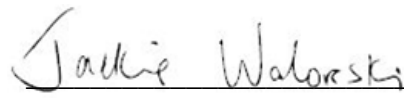
Rep. Steve Scalise
Ranking Member



Rep. Jim Jordan



Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer



Rep. Jackie Walorski



Rep. Mark E. Green, MD

cc: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader