

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 19, 2021

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
Ronald Reagan Building
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Administrator Power:

Republicans are conducting oversight of the cooperative agreement between the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Washington State University (WSU). The agreement, announced on October 5, 2021, requires WSU to conduct research to better detect emerging pathogens and prevent pandemics.¹ On October 20, 2021, just two weeks after award, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) admitted to the Committee that it funded dangerous gain-of-function research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in Wuhan, China.² This revelation came after repeated denials by NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Director Dr. Anthony Fauci that the United States was funding gain of function research at the WIV. Considering the inability of NIH and NIAID to be transparent with the American people regarding dangerous research conducted on the taxpayer dime and the possibility of a laboratory leak or research accident leading to the COVID-19 pandemic, the terms of this agreement are concerning. The Committee needs to understand what measures are in place, under the agreement, to prevent researchers from potentially artificially creating another pandemic.³

According to the agreement between USAID and WSU, American taxpayers will help fund dangerous viral research, the very type of research at the center of the COVID-19 origin investigation. The agreement is supposed to:

[F]ocus on finding previously unknown pathogens from three viral families that have a large potential for viral spillover from animals to humans: coronaviruses, the family that includes SARS-Cov-2 the virus that causes COVID-19; filoviruses, such as the Ebola virus; and paramyxoviruses which includes the viruses which includes the viruses that cause measles and Nipah.⁴

¹ Sara Zaske, *WSU to lead \$125 million USAID project to detect emerging viruses*, WSU INSIDER (Oct. 5, 2021).

² Letter from Lawrence A. Tabak, Principal Deputy Dir., Nat'l Inst. of Health, to Hon. James Comer, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight & Reform (Oct. 20, 2021).

³ *Id.*

⁴ Zaske, *supra* note 1.

Further, the agreement is worth approximately \$125 million over a five-year period and will involve up to 12 targeted countries, including countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.⁵ According to WSU, these countries will “carry out large-scale animal surveillance programs within their own countries, safely, using their own laboratory facilities.”⁶ Countries will conduct research of the highly lethal pathogens in Biosafety level 4 (BSL4) labs.

BSL4 labs around the world are far less safe and secure than their designation suggests. This is the highest possible level of lab security, where researchers “study infections that pose a high risk of aerosol-transmitted laboratory infections and life-threatening disease for which no vaccine or therapy is available.”⁷ However, according to the Global Health Security Index, “only one-quarter of countries with maximum containment facilities score highly on indicators of biosafety and biosecurity preparedness.”⁸ This was the case, for example, at WIV, where the Department of State reported serious safety concerns before the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis.⁹ Despite that, NIH and NIAID still sent the WIV U.S. taxpayer dollars.

Because of biosafety concerns, especially in China, it is vital that the taxpayer funds associated with this agreement are allocated to laboratories that are safe and secure. Based on assessments from the Department of State and the U.S. Intelligence Community, this agreement should *not* include any laboratory in China due to the possibility COVID-19 originated from the WIV—China’s largest BSL4 lab—and China’s general refusal to cooperate with the international community’s ongoing COVID-19 investigation.¹⁰ There are options other than China, and it is critical that USAID and WSU protect national security and act with the best interests of the American people in mind.

To better understand USAID and WSU’s cooperative research agreement, we request a staff-level briefing focused on laboratory security and international partners as soon as possible but no later than November 29, 2021.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

⁵ Press Release, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, *USAID Announces New \$125 Million Project to Detect Unknown Viruses with Pandemic Potential* (Oct. 5, 2021).

⁶ Zaske, *supra* note 1.

⁷ U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVS., *Biosafety Levels* (last reviewed Nov. 13, 2015).

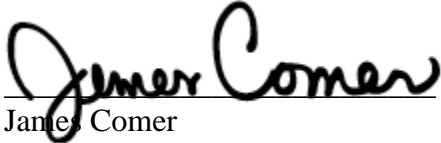
⁸ Dr. Filippa Lentzos & Dr. Gregory D. Kolbrentz, *Mapping Maximum Biological Containment Labs Globally*, KING’S C. LONDON (May 2021).

⁹ Josh Rogin, *State Department Cables Warned of Safety Issues at Wuhan Lab Studying Bat Coronaviruses*, WASH. POST (Apr. 14, 2020).

¹⁰ Michael R. Gordon, Warren P. Strobel, & Drew Hinshaw, *Intelligence on Sick Staff at Wuhan Lab Fuels Debate on Covid-19 Origin*, WALL ST. J. (May 23, 2021); Off. of the Dir. of Nat’l Intelligence & Nat’l Intelligence Council, *Unclassified Summary of Assessment on COVID-19 Origins* (Aug. 27, 2021).

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Sincerely,



James Comer
Ranking Member
House Committee on Oversight and Reform



Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Carolyn Maloney, Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform