

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 19, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

We write to request that you direct the appropriate office(s) within the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) to investigate and determine whether EcoHealth Alliance, Inc. (EcoHealth) should be deemed ineligible and therefore excluded from receiving federal contracts and grants. According to National Institutes of Health (NIH) documents provided to the House Oversight Committee Republicans and more recently the jarring exposé in *Vanity Fair* entitled “*This Shouldn’t Happen: Inside the Virus-Hunting Nonprofit at the Center of the Lab-Leak Controversy*,” EcoHealth and its principal, Dr. Peter Daszak, have at the very least acted in an unethical and noncompliant manner.<sup>1</sup> Under what is referred to as the nonprocurement common rule, an individual or entity may be suspended or debarred for unethical conduct which affects the entity’s present responsibility to perform a grant or contract.<sup>2</sup> EcoHealth and Dr. Daszak’s conduct likely meet this threshold.

According to *Vanity Fair*, Daszak immediately engaged in a cover-up of the origins of COVID-19. He and a small cadre of scientists worked in concert to “present the lab-leak hypothesis as a groundless and destructive conspiracy theory.”<sup>3</sup> As the exposé points out, Daszak, due to his close ties to the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), was in a position to uncover the truth of the origins of COVID-19, but that was not in his own financial or reputational interest.<sup>4</sup> Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, a Columbia University economist, who oversees the *Lancet’s* COVID-19 commission dismissed Dr. Daszak from the effort after “[Dr. Daszak] flatly refused to share progress reports from his contested research grant.”<sup>5</sup> To the detriment of the U.S. government’s efforts to uncover the virus’ origin, this was not the beginning of Dr. Daszak obfuscation of the truth. It was Dr. Daszak’s well-established pattern.

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine Eban, “*This Shouldn’t Happen: Inside the Virus-Hunting Nonprofit at the Center of the Lab-Leak Controversy*,” VANITY FAIR (Mar. 31, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Pursuant to 2 CRF § 180.800(b)(1), (3) which states, in pertinent part: “A willful failure to perform in accordance with the terms of one or more public agreements or transactions...or a willful violation of a statutory or regulatory provision or requirement applicable to a public agreement or transaction.”

<sup>3</sup> Eban, *supra* note 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

In 2014, NIH awarded EcoHealth a \$3.7 million grant entitled “Understanding the Risk of Bat Coronavirus Emergence.”<sup>6</sup> As early as 2016, EcoHealth and Dr. Daszak fell out of compliance with the grant terms when they failed to timely file an annual report. As documents provided to the Committee show, when he did file the report, it was clear that EcoHealth in collaboration with the WIV had engaged in gain of function research in violation of the federal moratorium.<sup>7</sup> Dr. Daszak argued and bullied NIH into accepting his own definition of gain of function, shielded his work from NIH, and supported the WIV’s decision to take down their online database of virus sequences.<sup>8</sup> All the while, he claimed to know what was in the database but refused to share it saying: “We don’t think it’s fair that we should have to reveal everything we do.”<sup>9</sup> In October 2021, NIH demanded Dr. Daszak come clean and turn over information on virus sequences.<sup>10</sup> Instead of complying, to date he continues to withhold information claiming to be “waiting for the Chinese government to authorize their [the database of virus sequences] release.”<sup>11</sup> This is an outrageous position to take given the fact that Dr. Daszak’s research is funded by U.S. taxpayers and he may hold the keys to uncovering the origins of COVID-19—a virus that has taken the lives of over six million people across the globe

Republicans on the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis and the Committee on Oversight and Reform request that HHS immediately commence to adjudicate EcoHealth and Dr. Daszak’s present responsibility, compliance with NIH’s grant requirements, and general integrity and ethics. Upon conclusion of that process, we request that you provide a briefing to Select Subcommittee staff including any findings and plans regarding suspension and/or debarment.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. To make arrangements to for the requested briefing, please contact the Select Subcommittee Republican Staff at (202) 225-5074. 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. Further, the Select Subcommittee is empowered to investigate “any...issues related to the coronavirus crisis.”<sup>12</sup> Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

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<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*; Letter from Dr. Lawrence Tabak, Deputy Dir., Nat’l Insts. Of Health, to Hon. James Comer, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight & Reform (Oct. 20, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Sharon Lerner & Mara Hvistendahl, *NIH Officials Worked With EcoHealth Alliance to Evade Restrictions on Coronavirus Experiments*, THE INTERCEPT (Nov. 3, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Eban, *supra* note 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

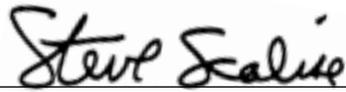
<sup>12</sup> H. Res. 935(3)(a)(10).

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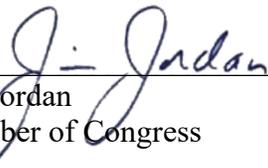
Sincerely,



Steve J. Scalise  
Ranking Member  
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis



James Comer  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and Reform



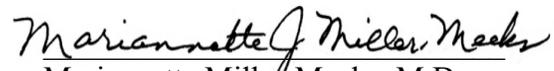
Jim Jordan  
Member of Congress



Mark E. Green, M.D.  
Member of Congress



Nicole R. Malliotakis  
Member of Congress



Mariannette Miller Meeks, M.D.  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable James E. Clyburn, Chairman  
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis

The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney, Chairwoman  
Committee on Oversight and Reform