

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

Majority (202) 225-5074  
Minority (202) 225-5051

August 23, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Becerra,

According to recent reports, a Chinese company called Prestige Biotech, Inc. (Prestige) was operating a dangerous and unlicensed laboratory in Fresno County, California. These reports indicate that the laboratory was conducting potentially dangerous experiments.<sup>1</sup> It is highly concerning that an unlicensed lab operated by a Chinese company on American soil was apparently conducting dangerous research involving COVID-19 and other viruses.

We are committed to investigating the origin of COVID-19, but also assessing the federal government's ability to keep America safe from biological threats. This assessment is critical to bolster our ability to prepare for and prevent future pandemics. Further, it is clear from court documents that various components of the Department are involved in this matter. Therefore, we request documents and communications relevant to our inquiry and in the custody and control of the Department.

On March 10, 2023, the City of Reedley, California (City) applied for a search warrant to investigate a property that was believed to be an illegal and unlicensed laboratory.<sup>2</sup> The City stated, “[i]t appears that the owners and/or occupants of the Property may also be using various dangerous chemicals and/or materials in their unpermitted laboratory activities in the locked portion of the structure that may pose serious health and safety risks.”<sup>3</sup>

On March 16, 2023, various City officials and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) executed a search warrant and found “several hundred mice that...have been genetically modified to catch and carry the COVID-19 virus.”<sup>4</sup> The mice were being kept in dangerous and

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Gligich, *Secret biological lab uncovered in Reedley containing bioengineered COVID-19 mice*, THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY SUN (July 27, 2023) available at <https://sjvsun.com/news/fresno/secret-biological-lab-uncovered-in-reedley-containing-bioengineered-covid-19-mice/>.

<sup>2</sup> Application for Inspection Warrant and Order Authorizing Entry onto the Property to Inspect Public Nuisance, 23CECG00912, Superior Court of California, County of Fresno (Mar. 10, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Application for Abatement Warrant and Order Authorizing Entry onto Property to Abate Public Nuisance, 23CECG00912, Superior Court of California, County of Fresno (Mar. 29, 2023).

unsafe conditions.<sup>5</sup> The City stated, “[t]he tenant has been unable to provide evidence of any state or federal licenses or certifications that would permit the breeding and experimentation being conducted on these mice.”<sup>6</sup>

Between May 2 and 4, 2023, staff from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Division of Select Agents and Toxins inspected the lab and determined at least 20 potentially infectious agents were stored under inadequate conditions. This included *Chlamydia trachomatis*, *E. coli*, Human Immunodeficiency Virus 1 and 2 (HIV), Malaria, and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2, known as COVID-19).<sup>7</sup> According to documents, a purported representative of Prestige provided false statements and claimed there were no infectious agents stored at the laboratory.<sup>8</sup>

To assist us in investigating not only what occurred in this case but also in developing policies to help prevent future pandemics, we request the following documents and information as soon as possible but no later than September 6, 2023:

1. All documents and communications, between or among employees or contractors of the Department, specifically including but not limited to those in the custody or control of the CDC and/or the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), regarding Prestige Biotech, Inc. or Universal Meditech, Inc.
2. All documents and communications between or among the Department and other federal, state, or local government entities, including but not limited to the FBI, the California Department of Public Health, the California Department of Toxic Substance Control, the Office of the Governor of California, Fresno County, or the City of Reedley, regarding Prestige Biotech, Inc. or Universal Meditech, Inc.
3. All documents and communications regarding or produced during or response to the May 2-4, 2023, CDC Division of Select Agents and Toxins inspections of the laboratory.

In addition to the requested documents, the Select Subcommittee may request employees of the Department participate in voluntary transcribed interviews.

The Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic is authorized to investigate “the origins of the Coronavirus pandemic” and “the implementation or effectiveness of any Federal law or regulation applied, enacted, or under consideration to address the coronavirus pandemic and prepare for future pandemics.”<sup>9</sup> To that end, the Select Subcommittee is tasked to learn from the U.S. response to the COVID-19 pandemic and recommend alterations where necessary to

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

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

<sup>7</sup> Fresno County Department of Public Health’s Application for Abatement Warrant, 23CECG00912, Superior Court of California, County of Fresno (June 15, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> H. Res. 5 § 4(a) (2023).

The Honorable Xavier Becerra

August 23, 2023

Page 3

enhance our preparedness and responses in the future. To ask any follow-up or related questions please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5074.

Thank you for your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,



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Brad Wenstrup, D.P.M.  
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Raul Ruiz, M.D., Ranking Member  
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic