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COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY  
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTERVIEW OF: GREGORY FOLKERS

Tuesday, December 12, 2023

The interview in the above matter was held via Zoom, commencing at  
10:05 a.m.

22 Appearances:

23

24

25 For the SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS:

26

27 MITCH BENZINE, Staff Director

28 MADELINE BREWER, Majority Counsel

29 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Minority Counsel

30 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Minority Senior Counsel

31

32 For the COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND

33 INVESTIGATIONS

34

35 JOHN STROM, Majority Counsel

36 ALAN SLOBODIN, Majority Counsel

37 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] MINORITY COUNSEL

38

39

40 For the U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES:

41 TARA GANAPATHY, Senior Counsel

42 MARTA COOK, Senior Adviser

43 DARIA BERSTELL, Legislative Analyst

|    |                         |          |
|----|-------------------------|----------|
| 44 | Exhibits                |          |
| 45 | Majority Exhibit No.    | Page No. |
| 46 | 1 - Email communication | 49       |
| 47 | 2 - Email communication | 52       |
| 48 | 3 - Email communication | 53       |
| 49 | 4 - Email communication | 57       |
| 50 | 5 - Email communication | 59       |
| 51 | 6 - Correspondence      | 65       |
| 52 | 8 - Correspondence      | 99       |
| 53 | Minority Exhibit No.    | Page No. |
| 54 | A - Email communication | 77       |

55 Mr. Benzine. I think we're good to go on the  
56 record.

57 This is a transcribed interview of Mr. Greg  
58 Folkers conducted by the House Select Subcommittee on  
59 the Coronavirus Pandemic, the Committee on Oversight  
60 and Accountability, and the Committee on Energy and  
61 Commerce, under the authority granted to them by  
62 House Resolution 5, House Rule 10, and the rules of  
63 the Committee on Oversight and Accountability and  
64 Committee on Energy and Commerce.

65 This interview was requested by Chairman Brad  
66 Wenstrup, Chairman James Comer, Chair Cathy McMorris  
67 Rodgers, Chairman Morgan Griffith, and Chairman Brett  
68 Guthrie as part of the Committee's oversight of the  
69 federal government's response to the coronavirus  
70 pandemic.

71 Further, pursuant to House Resolution 5, the  
72 Select Subcommittee has wide-ranging jurisdiction,  
73 but specifically to investigate the origins of the  
74 coronavirus pandemic, including but not limited to  
75 the federal government's funding of gain of function  
76 research.

77 Pursuant to House Rule 10, the Committee on  
78 Oversight and Accountability has jurisdiction to  
79 investigate any matter at any time, and pursuant to  
80 House Rules 10 and 11, the Committee on Energy and  
81 Commerce has jurisdiction for public service health  
82 agencies, including the National Institutes of Health  
83 and the entities it funds, as well as federal  
84 biomedical research and development.

85 As an accommodation to the witness, this  
86 interview is being conducted virtually. This  
87 accommodation does not set a precedent for the  
88 purposes of the Select Subcommittee and transcript  
89 interviews moving forward.

90 Can the witness please state his name and spell  
91 his last name for the record?

92 The Witness. Sure. My name is Gregory K.  
93 Folkers, F-O-L-K-E-R-S.

94 BY MR. BENZINE.

95 Q Thank you, Mr. Folkers. My name is Mitch  
96 Benzine and I am the staff director for the Majority  
97 Staff of the Select Subcommittee. I want to thank  
98 you for being here today for this interview. We  
99 recognize you are here voluntarily and we appreciate  
100 that.

101 Under the Select Subcommittee and Committee on  
102 Oversight and Accountability's rules, you are allowed  
103 to have an attorney present to advise you during this  
104 interview. Do you have an attorney representing you  
105 in a personal capacity present with you today?

106 A I do not. I have two attorneys affiliated  
107 with HHS and NIH, respectively.

108 Mr. Benzine. Will counsel for Health and Human  
109 Services identify themselves?

110 Ms. Ganapathy. Yes, Tara Ganapathy, T-A-R-A,  
111 G-A-N-A-P-A-T-H-Y, senior counsel at HHS.

112 Mr. Benzine. Thank you.

113 For the record, starting with the rest of the  
114 Majority Staff, can the additional staff members

115 please introduce themselves with their name, title,  
116 and affiliation?

117 Ms. Brewer. Madeline Brewer, counsel, Committee  
118 on Oversight and Accountability.

119 Mr. Strom. John Strom, senior counsel,  
120 Oversight Investigation Subcommittee, Energy and  
121 Commerce Committee Majority.

122 Mr. Slobodin. Alan Slobodin, chief  
123 investigative counsel, House Energy and Committee,  
124 Majority Staff.

125 [REDACTED] Democratic counsel,  
126 Select Subcommittee.

127 [REDACTED] senior counsel,  
128 Democrat, Select Subcommittee.

129 [REDACTED] counsel, Energy and  
130 Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight Investigations,  
131 Minority.

132 Ms. Cook. Marta Cook, M-A-R-T-A, C-O-O-K,  
133 senior adviser for oversight at NIH.

134 Ms. Berstell. Daria Berstell, Office of  
135 Assistant Secretary for Legislation, HHS.

136 Mr. Benzine. Thank you, all.

137 BY MR. BENZINE.

138 Q Mr. Folkers, before we begin, I would like  
139 to go over the ground rules for this interview. The  
140 way this interview will proceed is as follows. The  
141 Majority and Minority Staff will alternate asking you  
142 questions, one hour per side per round, until each  
143 side is finished with their questioning.

144 The Majority Staff will begin and proceed for an

145 hour, and then the Minority Staff will have an hour  
146 to ask questions. We will then alternate back and  
147 forth in this manner until both sides have no more  
148 questions.

149 If either side is in the middle of a specific  
150 line of questions, they may choose to end a few  
151 minutes past an hour to ensure completion of that  
152 specific line of questioning, including any pertinent  
153 follow-ups.

154 In this interview, while one member of the staff  
155 for each side may lead the questioning, additional  
156 staff may ask questions.

157 There is a court reporter taking down everything  
158 I say and everything you say to make a written record  
159 of the interview. For the record to be clear, please  
160 wait until the staffer questioning you finishes each  
161 question before you begin your answer, and the  
162 staffer will wait until you finish your response  
163 before proceeding to the next question.

164 Further, to ensure the court reporter can  
165 properly record this interview, please speak clearly,  
166 concisely, and slowly. Also, the court reporter  
167 cannot record non-verbal answers, such as nodding or  
168 shaking your head, so it is important that you answer  
169 each question with an audible, verbal answer.

170 Exhibits may be entered into the record.  
171 Majority exhibits will be identified numerically,  
172 Minority exhibits will be identified alphabetically.

173 Do you understand?

174 A Yeah, I understand all that. Thanks,

175 Mr. Benzine.

176 Q We want you to answer our questions in the  
177 most complete and truthful manner possible, so we  
178 will take our time. If you have any questions or do  
179 not fully understand the question, please let us  
180 know, we will attempt to clarify, add context to it,  
181 or rephrase our questions.

182 Do you understand?

183 A I understand.

184 Q If we ask about specific conversations or  
185 events in the past, and you are unable to recall the  
186 exact words or details, you should testify to the  
187 substance of those conversations or events to the  
188 best of your recollection. If you recall only a part  
189 of a conversation or event, you should give us your  
190 best recollection of those events or parts of  
191 conversations that you do recall.

192 Do you understand?

193 A Understood.

194 Q Although you are here voluntarily and we  
195 will not swear you in, you are required pursuant to  
196 Title 18, Section 1001 of the United States Code to  
197 answer questions from Congress truthfully. This also  
198 applies to questions posed by congressional staff in  
199 this interview. Do you understand?

200 A I understand.

201 Q If, at any time, you knowingly make false  
202 statements, you could be subject to criminal  
203 prosecution. Do you understand?

204 A Understood -- I understand.



205 Q Is there any reason you are unable to  
206 provide truthful testimony in today's interview?

207 A There's no reason.

208 Q The Select Subcommittee follows the rules  
209 of the Committee on Oversight and Accountability.  
210 Please note that if you wish to assert a privilege  
211 over any statement today, that assertion must comply  
212 with the rules of the Committee on Oversight and  
213 Accountability.

214 Pursuant to that, Committee Rule 16(c) (1)  
215 states, "for the Chair to consider assertions of  
216 privilege over testimony or statements, witnesses or  
217 entities must clearly state the specific privilege  
218 being asserted and the reason for the assertion on or  
219 before the scheduled date of testimony or  
220 appearance." Do you understand?

221 A Understood.

222 Q Ordinarily, we take a five-minute break at  
223 the end of each hour of questioning, but if you need  
224 a longer break or a break before that, please let us  
225 know, and we will be happy to accommodate. However,  
226 to the extent that there is a pending question, and  
227 this is possible, we would ask that you finish  
228 answering the question before we take a break. Do  
229 you understand?

230 A I understand. I would like to interject  
231 one thing. I'm here taking care of super old people,  
232 and there may be a circumstance where I have to duck  
233 in the next room. And I have someone here helping,  
234 but -- so if there's such an interruption, I'll make

235 sure it's quick.

236 Q Absolutely. Just ask and we're happy to  
237 accommodate whatever you need.

238 A Thank you for that.

239 Q Do you have any other questions before we  
240 begin?

241 A I don't think so. Thank you for asking.

242 Q All right. Absolutely.

243 I want to start the questioning by kind of  
244 briefly running through your education and  
245 experience.

246 Where did you attend undergraduate school and  
247 what degree did you graduate with?

248 A I went to Dartmouth College, graduated in  
249 '81, and I have an English degree with some premed  
250 and other science courses.

251 Q Have you received any further degrees, and  
252 if so, from where and in what?

253 A I have a master's degree in science  
254 journalism from Boston University, and I have an MPH  
255 degree from Johns Hopkins from the Department of  
256 Microbiology and Immunology.

257 Q Thank you. Who is your current employer?

258 A I'm currently retired, so I do consulting  
259 work.

260 Q And what was your position immediately  
261 before retiring?

262 A I was the chief of staff of the immediate  
263 office of the director at NIAID, National Institute  
264 of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

265 Q And how long were you chief of staff?

266 A I was chief of staff from 2006 to January  
267 of this year. And before that, I had other roles at  
268 NIAID.

269 Q Can you briefly run through what the other  
270 roles were?

271 A Sure. I came as a science writer in the  
272 communications office. And after a few years, I  
273 moved down to the director's office as a special  
274 assistant/adviser.

275 Q Was Dr. Fauci the director of NIAID for  
276 your entire tenure?

277 A He was.

278 Q As chief of staff, can you describe your  
279 relationship with Dr. Fauci? What's the kind of  
280 normal relationship a chief of staff had?

281 A So what my role was to kind of make the  
282 trains run on time. I delegated tasks to people on  
283 the staff. We prepared Dr. Fauci for events,  
284 meetings, lectures, things like that, so --

285 Q Obviously, you were chief of staff for him  
286 for almost 20 years. Did you also have a personal  
287 relationship with Dr. Fauci?

288 A Sure. I've been to his house a couple  
289 times, and I know Dr. Fauci.

290 Q You just did it a little bit, but can you  
291 elaborate a little bit more on what your kind of  
292 standard roles and responsibilities were as chief of  
293 staff?

294 A So a big part of what we did was preparing

295 him for the daily activities. He gave a lot of  
296 lectures that I would help prepare or staff would  
297 help prepare. He did a fair number of media  
298 interviews. Some of those, if it needed prep, I  
299 would help with that, others would help with that.  
300 We had some writing projects, editing writing, I did  
301 a fair amount of that. I did a lot of information  
302 gathering on many, many diseases. We study 300, 400  
303 diseases. So things like that.

304 Q While as chief of staff, did you hold a  
305 security clearance?

306 A I did not.

307 Q Thank you. And you can tell me to slow  
308 down on this list, but I want to run through a list  
309 of names and ask you if you had any communication  
310 with them, phone, email, in-person, specifically  
311 regarding the origins of COVID-19, the Wuhan  
312 Institute of Virology, or EcoHealth Alliance,  
313 starting January 1st, 2020-ish, and going up until  
314 you left.

315 A Okay.

316 Q And it's just to the best of your  
317 recollection, and for now, we'll stick with yes or  
318 no, and we'll come back and talk about it more if  
319 there are yeses.

320 Dr. Francis Collins.

321 A Collins, no direct, no.

322 Q Dr. Fauci?

323 A Yes.

324 Q Dr. Lawrence Tabak?

325 A No.

326 Q Dr. Hugh Auchincloss?

327 A Yes.

328 Q Dr. Cliff Lane?

329 A Yes.

330 Q Dr. David Morens?

331 A Morens. Yeah, David Morens, yes.

332 Q Dr. Erik Stemmy?

333 A No.

334 Q Dr. Ping Chen?

335 A No.

336 Q Dr. Ian Watson?

337 A No.

338 Q Dr. Andrew Pope?

339 A No.

340 Q Dr. Victor Dzau?

341 A No.

342 Q Dr. Robert Redfield?

343 A No.

344 Q Dr. Michael Lauer?

345 A No.

346 Q Dr. David Christian Hassell?

347 A No.

348 Q Dr. Jeremy Farrar?

349 A No.

350 Q Dr. Kristian Andersen?

351 A No.

352 Q Dr. Michael Farzan?

353 A No.

354 Q Dr. Eddie Holmes?

355 A No.

356 Q Dr. Ian Lipkin?

357 A No.

358 Q Dr. Andrew Rambaut?

359 A No.

360 Q Dr. Christian Drosten?

361 A No.

362 Q Dr. Ron Fouchier?

363 A No.

364 Q Dr. Marion Koopmans?

365 A No.

366 Q Dr. Peter Daszak?

367 A No.

368 Q Dr. Aleksei Chmura?

369 A How do you spell Chmura?

370 Q C-H-M-U-R-A.

371 A No.

372 Q He's also affiliated with EcoHealth?

373 A No.

374 Q No?

375 A No.

376 Q Dr. Kevin Olival?

377 A I'm sorry, could you spell the last name?

378 Q O-L-I-V-A-L.

379 A No.

380 Q Dr. Michael Worobey?

381 A No.

382 Q Dr. Jonathan Picard?

383 A No.

384 Q Dr. Florence Debarre?

385 A No.

386 Q Dr. James LeDuc?

387 A No.

388 Q Dr. Shi Zhengli?

389 A No.

390 Q Dr. George Gao?

391 A No.

392 Q Dr. Ralph Baric?

393 A No.

394 Q All right. Thank you. I want to come  
395 back, and talk about the four yeses.  
396 Dr. Morens.

397 A David Morens, yeah.

398 Q It's Morens? Can you elaborate a little  
399 more on your communications with Dr. Morens about  
400 these subjects?

401 A So David was in our immediate group, and I  
402 don't recall specific conversations about the origins  
403 of COVID with David.

404 Q What about conversations about the Wuhan  
405 Institute of Virology?

406 A I don't recall talking about that with  
407 David.

408 Q And what about EcoHealth?

409 A Years ago, we did a lecture, the director  
410 gave a lecture for an EcoHealth event, and I imagine  
411 we talked about EcoHealth in that context. This was  
412 probably 15, 20 years ago.

413 Q This was at, if you recall, the Cosmos  
414 Club in DC?

415 A Yes, it was a -- yes, it was a talk about  
416 the Zika virus at the Cosmos Club, yes.

417 Q So you don't recall after the pandemic  
418 broke out if you had any conversations with  
419 Dr. Morens about any of these subjects?

420 A Nothing specific that I recall.

421 Q All right. Can you elaborate a little  
422 more on Dr. Lane?

423 A Dr. Lane has been at the Institute for  
424 40-odd years. He's an HIV physician who has also  
425 done a fair amount of work on emerging diseases such  
426 as Ebola and others. He's the head of one of our  
427 research divisions, and he's the clinical director  
428 for the Institute.

429 Q Do you recall any specific conversations  
430 with him regarding the origins of COVID, the WIV, or  
431 EcoHealth?

432 A I do not.

433 Q What about Dr. Auchincloss? Any specific  
434 conversations with him?

435 A Dr. Auchincloss was in my immediate  
436 office. I don't recall any specific conversations  
437 with him about origin-type things or WIV or -- yeah,  
438 I don't.

439 Q And then Dr. Fauci, anything you recall?

440 A Well, he and I spoke daily. We had a  
441 morning meeting and frequently I would mention a  
442 paper or a news article that came up. And I suspect  
443 that there were short conversations. I don't  
444 remember a specific day or conversation.



445 Q Do you recall any conversations  
446 surrounding the termination or suspension of the  
447 EcoHealth grant?

448 A I don't. I wasn't in that loop. I don't  
449 recall.

450 Q Did you have any conversations with any of  
451 these people over personal email or personal cell  
452 phone?

453 A Not that I recall. Yeah, not that I  
454 recall.

455 Q Moving forward a little bit. Did you have  
456 any communications once the pandemic started, we'll  
457 do January 2020 as a good timeframe. Did you have  
458 any communications with anyone affiliated with the  
459 State Department regarding COVID-19?

460 A Not that I recall.

461 Q Did you have any communications with  
462 anyone affiliated with the Department of Energy  
463 regarding COVID-19?

464 A Not that I recall.

465 Q Vanity Fair reported that in mid-2019  
466 Deputy Secretary of Energy Brouillette alerted a top  
467 Dr. Fauci adviser about the coronavirus work at the  
468 WIV. To the best of your recollection, you are not  
469 the one that received that warning?

470 A No, I don't know that name. How do you  
471 spell that?

472 Q B-R-O-U-I-L-L-E-T-T-E.

473 A No, nothing from Mr. Brouillette.

474 Q Similar question. If the answer again is

475 nothing, then that's fine. Vanity Fair also  
476 reported that in October of 2020, then-Secretary  
477 Brouillette told Dr. Fauci that the Department of  
478 Energy scientists had evidence suggesting COVID-19  
479 originated at the Wuhan Institute. Do you have any  
480 knowledge of that?

481 A I don't.

482 Q Again, Secretary Brouillette offered  
483 Department of Energy resources to NIAID and NIH to  
484 help with the pandemic. Do you have any knowledge of  
485 that?

486 A I do not.

487 Q Do you know if NIAID ever ended up  
488 partnering with any of the national laboratories?

489 A I don't. I do not.

490 Q Moving on a little bit again. Throughout  
491 the course of the pandemic, did you have any  
492 communication with anyone affiliated with Twitter or  
493 now X?

494 A I did not. I had a Twitter account, but I  
495 didn't have any communication with officials of  
496 Twitter.

497 Q Any communication with anyone affiliated  
498 with Facebook or Meta?

499 Ms. Ganapathy. Mitch, are these communications  
500 pertaining to origins, or just communications with  
501 people who work at the social media companies?

502 Mr. Benzine. Pertaining to COVID-19 or the  
503 pandemic.

504 Ms. Ganapathy. So I mean, anything not related

505 to origins would be outside the scope of this  
506 interview. If you need to know that to establish  
507 something that is related to the origin, and your  
508 question line is about the origins, then we can answer  
509 that. But we didn't really come here to talk about  
510 things --

511 Mr. Strom. Why don't we let him answer the  
512 question first.

513 Mr. Benzine. If the answer is no, then the  
514 answer is no. Also, we have jurisdiction over more  
515 than just origins. If you want us to bifurcate  
516 interviews going forward, we can, but I think it's  
517 easier on the witness if we just ask the questions  
518 that we have.

519 Ms. Ganapathy. I mean, so okay, first of all,  
520 just for purposes of getting this on the record. The  
521 letter that precipitated this interview all pertained  
522 to COVID origins. If you're saying that moving  
523 forward we should expect questions on any topic that  
524 is within the committee's, the three committees'  
525 jurisdiction, then we need to know that, because that  
526 is not consistent with the accommodations that we've  
527 made thus far. But I'll allow the witness to answer  
528 questions about whether he had those communications.

529 You can go ahead, Mr. Folkers.

530 BY MR. BENZINE.

531 Q Any communications with Facebook or Meta  
532 regarding COVID-19?

533 A No.

534 Q Any communications with YouTube regarding

535 COVID-19?

536 A No.

537 Q And then throughout the pandemic, did you  
538 have any direct or off-the-record conversations with  
539 anyone in the press regarding COVID-19 origins?

540 A I'm sure I did. Yeah, I know reporters  
541 who may have asked questions. I don't recall a  
542 specific instance.

543 Q Okay. I want to talk and elaborate a  
544 little bit more on your specific relationship with  
545 Dr. Fauci who was the director during your tenure.

546 You just said that you had a daily meeting with  
547 him. Was that pretty consistent throughout your time  
548 as chief of staff?

549 A Well, a couple things were consistent.  
550 His office was essentially next to mine, so he would  
551 pop in or have me come in. So we had side-bar  
552 meetings like that. And we had a morning meeting  
553 where we did a roundtable with our immediate staff  
554 most mornings. And as you might imagine, these were  
555 in-person early on, and then after that, Zoom  
556 meetings.

557 Q What were the kind of normal contents of  
558 those meetings? What was the normal run of show?

559 A So typically, I would start off and  
560 present things that I had seen overnight since the  
561 previous meeting on our issues. Our issues, as you  
562 know, are infectious diseases, immunology, transplantation, and I would  
563 flag for the group what  
564 I would sometimes call the top ten heading

565 interesting things.

566 And we would go around the table and people may  
567 or may not weigh in on what I had discussed, and then  
568 they talk about what they were working on and the  
569 progress they were making or any other observations.  
570 So it was a round robin usually about ten people.

571 Q Okay. What about communications with  
572 Dr. Fauci over the phone, is that common?

573 A It was not uncommon. Sometimes if there  
574 was an event the next day and he needed some clarity,  
575 he would call me and vice versa.

576 Q What about text messages? Did you ever  
577 text with Dr. Fauci?

578 A You know, I don't recall. He's -- I don't  
579 recall. But we did speak on the telephone.

580 Q Any use of encrypted messaging services  
581 like Signal or WhatsApp?

582 A No, I've never used those. No.

583 Q What about over email? Just kind of  
584 ballpark, what was the volume of emails that you had  
585 with Dr. Fauci during the pandemic? Like, how many  
586 per day or per week? I imagine it's quite a few, so  
587 ballpark it.

588 A Quite a few. So I had a list where I  
589 shared information on our topics. Our topics, as you  
590 know, are things like HIV and hepatitis and things  
591 like that. And I had the COVID listserv which was  
592 very busy, there's lots of news and things happening.  
593 So I imagine of the many, many emails I sent, I  
594 probably sent Dr. Fauci ten or a dozen emails many days.

595 That's a ballpark.

596 Q What about like direct, outside of  
597 listserv communication, how many were you on the to,  
598 from, or CC line for, with Dr. Fauci also on the to,  
599 from, or CC line?

600 A Oh, several every day.

601 Q What was kind of the normal, like, topics  
602 of communication? Was it just sharing articles or  
603 was it discussing issues or potential policies?

604 A You know, lots of things. A lot of it  
605 related to -- I did a lot of speech writing and slide  
606 preparation, and a lot of it related to that. You  
607 know, for instance, I may have something on a slide  
608 and he said, what is this? What does this mean?  
609 Explain this to me like I'm eight years old. That  
610 sort of thing. So work products that were kind of in  
611 play.

612 Q Drafting of papers or journal articles?

613 A We did some of that. Some of those  
614 discussions were in person, some of those were  
615 certainly back and forth with drafts of manuscripts.

616 Q And as chief of staff, did you have access  
617 to Dr. Fauci's calendar?

618 A I did have access to his calendar. I  
619 usually looked at the front page, but I did have  
620 access to his calendar.

621 Q Did he keep more than one official  
622 calendar?

623 A Not that I'm aware.

624 Q Did you have access to his email account?

625 A I did have access to his email account.

626 Q What did that access look like? Was it  
627 you could see incoming emails or be able to send  
628 emails on behalf of?

629 A It was both. And one of the reasons for  
630 this is early on in 2020, there was a lot of hate  
631 mail, really vile stuff. And a few of us were going  
632 through his email and trying to, you know, get rid of  
633 that, you know, hateful, you know, anti-Semitic, anti  
634 -- homophobic stuff. So that was part of the reason  
635 for the access. And eventually, you know, it let up.  
636 But that was part of the reason.

637 Q Did you beyond the kind of like hate mail  
638 or threatening emails, did you screen any emails that  
639 went in or out of Dr. Fauci's email account?

640 A I'm not sure what you mean by screen.

641 Q Were you able to see emails and remove  
642 them from his inbox or handle it without Dr. Fauci  
643 being aware?

644 A I guess I could have done that, but I  
645 wouldn't have presumed to do that.

646 Q Okay. The second half of my original  
647 question. Were you able to send emails on his  
648 behalf?

649 A I could, but it didn't -- it would say  
650 Greg -- Greg Folkers on behalf of Dr. Fauci, so I --

651 Q Was that common? He was very busy. I  
652 imagine some of this was delegated?

653 A It was uncommon, because it was just as  
654 easy to write something under my own, with my own

655 account.

656 Q To your knowledge, did he maintain more  
657 than one email account?

658 A Not to my knowledge.

659 Q Did you have access to his official phone?

660 A I did not.

661 Q Did he have more than one official phone?

662 A Not that I'm aware of. He's had the same  
663 number for decades.

664 Q Before we get into more --

665 Mr. Benzine. And Tara, we can discuss this off  
666 the record if you want to. Before we get into more  
667 origin specific things, I have one  
668 non-origins-related question.

669 Ms. Ganapathy. Why don't we talk about that off  
670 the record because we came here to talk about origins  
671 stuff. Can we do those questions and then why don't  
672 we discuss separately whether out-of-scope questions  
673 would be permissible.

674 Mr. Benzine. Let's do it now. We can go off  
675 the record.

676 (Discussion held.)

677 BY MR. BENZINE.

678 Q Moving on to how the pandemic originated.  
679 Yes or no, in your experience is investigating the  
680 origins of COVID-19 important?

681 A I'm sorry, can you say that again?

682 Q Is investigating the origins of COVID-19  
683 important?

684 A Yes, absolutely.



685 Q Is discovering the origins of COVID-19  
686 important?

687 A Absolutely.

688 Q Can you explain a little bit as to why?

689 A Yes. If we can discern what happened and  
690 where, we can presumably do things to see that it  
691 doesn't happen again or figure out things to do so it  
692 doesn't happen again.

693 Q In your current knowledge, is the origin  
694 of COVID-19 still unsettled?

695 A In my view, it's unsettled. There are  
696 hypotheses, as you know, but it's unsettled.

697 Q Thank you. There are kind of two -- you  
698 can correct me if I'm wrong, two kind of standard  
699 pathways for an emerging disease, a zoonotic transfer  
700 or a laboratory or research-related accident; is that  
701 correct?

702 A I wouldn't give them equal weight.  
703 Historically, most disease emergence from HIV on  
704 down, viruses and other bugs have been zoonotic  
705 transfers. I'm not aware of a lab leak that resulted  
706 in a newly emerging pathogen.

707 Q There have been lab leaks of already  
708 established pathogen, like lab leaks happen, right?

709 A Lab leaks happen. I'm not aware of a lab  
710 leak resulting in a novel bug that's caused a large  
711 outbreak or pandemic.

712 Q Do you think for COVID-19, it's important  
713 to investigate both the possible pathways early,  
714 though?

715 A My opinion is absolutely, yes.

716 Q My understanding is that what became COVID  
717 was first reported December 30-ish on ProMED. Is  
718 that when you first learned of it as well?

719 A That's when I first learned of it. There  
720 were apparently other communications in China that  
721 things were happening before that ProMED notice, but  
722 that's when I learned.

723 Q There was no -- to the best of your  
724 recollection and understanding, this was a couple  
725 years ago, none of your grantees or anybody came to  
726 you and said, hey, it looks like something weird is  
727 happening in China prior to December 30th?

728 A Not to my knowledge.

729 Q And no conversations with Dr. Daszak at  
730 EcoHealth regarding COVID-19?

731 A No, I've never spoken to Dr. Daszak.

732 Q In Dr. Farrar's book called "Spike," he  
733 writes: Eddie -- meaning Eddie Holmes -- "had  
734 screenshots taken from social media in China about  
735 the coronavirus sequence. They suggest the full  
736 genome was known by a genomics company in China by  
737 December 27, 2019. It was reported to both the China  
738 CDC and the hospital who provided the sample on the  
739 27th and 28th of December."

740 Do you have any knowledge of the COVID sequence  
741 being known by China prior to December 30th?

742 A No, I have no knowledge. I also haven't  
743 read the book.

744 Q Did you have any discussions with

745 Dr. Fauci regarding China releasing the sequence?

746 A So when they did release the sequence,  
747 yes, we discussed that at our roundtable meeting. It  
748 was posted by a Chinese scientist and I think Eddie  
749 Holmes helped them and they posted on virological.org  
750 early January. I forget the date, though.

751 Q It was earlier reported that that Chinese  
752 scientist's lab was shut down for "recertification."  
753 Do you have any knowledge of that?

754 A I don't have any direct knowledge. I've  
755 seen those reports in the media, but I don't have any  
756 direct knowledge.

757 Q At this point, mid-January, January 11 or  
758 12 or so, had you had any conversations with  
759 Dr. Fauci about China being transparent regarding the  
760 outbreak?

761 A I don't recall any specific conversations.  
762 What I do recall is media coverage of folks saying  
763 that they've been very good. President Trump for  
764 instance said they had been very transparent. I  
765 don't recall any conversations with Dr. Fauci,  
766 though.

767 Q All right. There were also reports of  
768 Chinese officials gagging or silencing scientists and  
769 reporters. Do you have any recollection of any  
770 conversations with Dr. Fauci about that?

771 A I don't. Again, I've read about this in  
772 the news articles that everybody has seen, but I  
773 didn't have any direct discussion or knowledge of  
774 that.

775 Mr. Benzine. Understanding we had some time,  
776 but we're close to the end of the hour, and out of  
777 respect of keeping with that time, John, do you have  
778 any questions to fill ten minutes? Or do you want to  
779 go off the record?

780 Mr. Strom. I'm sorry, I had some audio issues  
781 earlier.

782 BY MR. STROM.

783 Q Mr. Folkers, you said that you would  
784 typically convene like a daily morning meeting at  
785 NIAID. In the late 2019 to the time you retired, who  
786 typically attended those meetings?

787 A So typically, it would be me. Other staff  
788 in the office, Dr. Auchincloss, who was the deputy  
789 director, Dr. Fauci, who was the director, and a  
790 couple other folks from the floor, from the -- yeah.

791 Q Could you give me some just some names?  
792 It helps for our perspective as we get emails and  
793 things like that we're trying to sort of work out who  
794 does what within, like, the immediate office. So  
795 it's just helpful for us to get their names.

796 A Mr. Strom, could I consult with counsel  
797 very quickly?

798 Ms. Ganapathy. Can we go off the record?

799 Mr. Strom. Sure.

800 (Pause.)

801 Mr. Strom. Okay. Back on the record.

802 BY MR. STROM.

803 Q Take it from the top, Mr. Folkers.

804 A So typically, the meeting would be me,

805 staffers of such as Dr. Hilary Marston, Dr. Andrea  
806 Lerner. Our communications director was typically in  
807 that meeting. Her name is Courtney Billet. You  
808 know, a couple administrative folks, a lady named  
809 Laurie Doepel, who was a science writer. There  
810 sometimes would be somebody from our policy analysis  
811 branch and I'm blanking on the person's name,  
812 apologies.

813 Q Would division chiefs attend as sort of  
814 relevant?

815 A No, this was different. This was just the  
816 front office group for these meetings.

817 Q You mentioned, just to be clear for the  
818 record, with it being Zoom, it's a little unusual.  
819 You mentioned that you recalled discussing EcoHealth  
820 with Dr. Fauci in relation to an event at the Cosmos  
821 Club?

822 A Correct.

823 Q But you have no recollection of talking to  
824 Dr. Fauci about EcoHealth Alliance with respect to  
825 the origins of COVID-19?

826 A You know, in the course of our roundtable,  
827 EcoHealth was mentioned frequently in the clips. So  
828 I imagine EcoHealth came up. I don't remember a  
829 specific conversation with Dr. Fauci about EcoHealth.

830 Q So I just want to make sure we're speaking  
831 from the same sort of lexicon here. When you say you  
832 don't recall a specific discussion with Dr. Fauci  
833 about EcoHealth, what do you mean?

834 A What do I, what, mean?

835 Q You're saying you don't recall a specific  
836 discussion about EcoHealth.

837 A Right.

838 Q I guess what kind of discussion did you  
839 have with Dr. Fauci just generally about EcoHealth?  
840 Your recollection is it was news reporting clips,  
841 current events.

842 A Right. So for instance, for months  
843 including -- are we talking about 2020 now or just  
844 broadly?

845 Q 2020 to 2021, when Dr. Fauci retired, I  
846 believe you subsequently retired as well.

847 A So there was many news articles in which  
848 EcoHealth and Dr. Daszak were mentioned. And I would  
849 frequently -- and pick your publication. And I would  
850 flag it for the group, you know, we would say, look  
851 at this, Dr. Daszak said that, or someone.

852 Q Outside of these standing meetings, did  
853 you discuss EcoHealth with Dr. Fauci?

854 A No, I don't recall ever discussing  
855 EcoHealth with Dr. Fauci.

856 Q You don't recall that outside of these  
857 sort of standing daily meetings?

858 A Correct.

859 Q Okay. Sorry, I'm just trying to clarify  
860 for the record. And then my last couple of  
861 questions. You said that you didn't recall sending  
862 any text messages to Dr. Fauci. And to be clear, the  
863 timeframe here is say late 2019 to when you and he  
864 retire. But as a general matter, in your time as

865 chief of staff, you never texted him?

866 A No, he was more of a phone call type of  
867 guy. You know, I don't recall sending a text  
868 message. Was there a stray text message? Perhaps.  
869 But he was a phone call type of guy and that's how we  
870 communicated. Email also.

871 Q And then -- just to reiterate Mitch's  
872 earlier question, you don't use Signal, you don't use  
873 WeChat?

874 A Not to sound like a fogey, but I have  
875 heard of them, but, you know, I don't -- I've never  
876 used them. I've never had them on my phone.

877 Q And because there's been some issues with  
878 Dr. Morens, as well as CDC Director Walensky using  
879 personal communication channels to conduct government  
880 business, did you ever email, text, or otherwise  
881 communicate with Dr. Fauci through personal accounts,  
882 so a Gmail account or a Yahoo account?

883 A So Dr. Fauci has a textbook that he has  
884 edited for many years, and I do know that he had an  
885 account with the textbook company where they did that  
886 sort of communication.

887 Q In the 2020-2021 timeframe, did you  
888 communicate with Dr. Fauci either through a personal  
889 account of your own or personal account or to a  
890 personal account of Dr. Fauci's?

891 A It's likely that I -- this textbook is  
892 called Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine.  
893 It's likely that I exchanged messages with the  
894 account that he used for the textbook. I don't

895 recall a specific messages, but --

896 Q But beyond that, you don't recall  
897 contacting him via a personal email account, again,  
898 either you using your personal email account or you  
899 sending it to his personal email account with respect  
900 to sort of government work?

901 A No. That's correct, telephone calls,  
902 emails, three kinds of communications. Telephone  
903 calls, emails, and with regard to Harrison's a few  
904 emails about what was in the work for a chapter on  
905 HIV.

906 Q Okay. And then you mentioned earlier that  
907 you talked to the press about origins. Could you  
908 briefly describe how you understood your  
909 responsibilities as chief of staff vis-a-vis working  
910 with the media?

911 A So as a former reporter and science  
912 writer, I know a lot of these people, and folks would  
913 call me up and mostly to see if they could get Tony  
914 to talk to them, but sometimes to say, have you seen  
915 this paper or that paper, and for lots of issues and  
916 for many years.

917 I know most of my work over the years has been  
918 with HIV so, you know, reporters I know would call me  
919 and ask me, do you know a paper on this or do you  
920 know this guy? So I've had kind of ad hoc informal  
921 conversations with reporters over many years.

922 Q Okay. So we may later run through a list  
923 of potential reporters, but rather than asking you to  
924 name all the reporters it might be easier for us just



925 to simply list the ones we're interested in and go  
926 from there.

927 So, and again, similar to my earlier questions,  
928 those communications, were they done exclusively  
929 through your NIAID email account?

930 A With reporters?

931 Q With reporters, yes.

932 A Yes, telephone calls or -- yeah, NIH  
933 email. I would have no reason to use other emails.

934 Q Okay. Thank you.

935 Mr. Strom. I think that's all I have for the  
936 first hour. Thank you, sir.

937 The Witness. Thank you, sir.

938 Mr. Benzine. Off the record.

939 (Recess.)

940 [REDACTED] I wanted to put my appearance on  
941 the record. I'm [REDACTED] chief counsel for  
942 the Minority, Energy and Commerce Committee,  
943 Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.

944 BY [REDACTED]

945 Q Good morning, Mr. Folkers. As you may  
946 have heard me say earlier, my name is [REDACTED]  
947 I'm senior counsel for the Democrats. I have a  
948 couple questions for you right now, probably will  
949 have more for you throughout the day.

950 But just to get started, how long did you work  
951 as chief of staff for Dr. Fauci?

952 A So officially, the chief of staff role was  
953 created in 2006, and I retired January of this year.  
954 So I guess that's 17 years or so.

955 Q And during that time that you worked as  
956 chief of staff for Dr. Fauci, did he receive -- or  
957 you actually mentioned that he received hate email.

958 A Yes.

959 Q In any of those emails or any other  
960 format, did he get threats to his life and safety?

961 A Frequently to his life, to his daughters'  
962 lives, to his -- yeah, many, many messages like that.

963 Q Do you recall when these threats began to  
964 occur?

965 A They started March, April of 2020. And I  
966 don't know what the -- yeah, March or April of 2020  
967 is my recollection.

968 Q And do you recall any specific events or  
969 anything that led to these threats starting?

970 A There seems to be a correlation with a  
971 press conference where former President Trump talked  
972 about alternative therapies for COVID and Dr. Fauci  
973 didn't agree with these ideas. That's kind of where  
974 it started.

975 Ms. Ganapathy. [REDACTED] we want to focus on  
976 origins today. That's the scope of the interview.  
977 So I think there's some nexus there, but if you could  
978 keep it within that.

979 [REDACTED] Absolutely. And I'm almost done with  
980 these questions, so we won't be lingering on this  
981 topic.

982 BY [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

983 Q And do you recall any actions that  
984 Dr. Fauci took as a result of the threats?

985 A Well, we notified the NIH police for  
986 starters, and they notified, I guess, law enforcement  
987 higher up and he got the IT staff to come up with  
988 some kind of filters that would filter out the most  
989 egregious stuff. And I don't know if it was key  
990 words, you know, or what, but this was a filtering  
991 mechanism that the IT people put in place to deal  
992 with some of this.

993 Q And did Dr. Fauci have increased physical  
994 security?

995 A He did. I don't know when that started  
996 but 2020, second quarter, I think he started having  
997 more security. And at some point, he had a security  
998 detail at his house. I don't remember when that  
999 happened but.

1000 Q Okay.

1001 [REDACTED] Well, that's all the questions I have  
1002 on that, and I'm actually going to pass things over  
1003 to my Energy and Commerce colleagues to ask you some  
1004 other questions at this time.

1005 The Witness. Okay, thanks.

1006 BY [REDACTED]

1007 Q Good morning, Mr. Folkers. My name is  
1008 [REDACTED], I'm counsel on Energy and Commerce on  
1009 the Oversight and Investigations team on the Minority  
1010 side.

1011 My questions are going to be slightly broader.  
1012 I want to get an understanding of NIH's infectious  
1013 disease and emergent pathogens research agenda,  
1014 including some of your funding in that space, and

1015 learn more about how NIH engaged with, and understood  
1016 the utility of that research at the early stage of  
1017 the COVID-19 pandemic.

1018 A (Nodding head.)

1019 Q So broadly to start out, why does NIH see  
1020 it as important to invest in understanding the  
1021 emergence of new infectious diseases?

1022 A Well, for one thing, to see if somehow we  
1023 can prevent them from happening. You know, kind of  
1024 looking around the corner to see what nature might be  
1025 up to. So that's important, but our bread and butter  
1026 really is developing countermeasures, things like  
1027 vaccines and therapies and diagnostics, and hopefully  
1028 have them in place, so that when the next bug does  
1029 come along, you may have something that will be  
1030 immediately useful within weeks or months rather than  
1031 years.

1032 Q And can you say more about how  
1033 understanding these questions of emergence can help  
1034 on the prevention side of future pandemics?

1035 A Well, for instance, if you know there  
1036 was -- and we do know that there was a SARS outbreak  
1037 and a MERS outbreak. And you can imagine that it was  
1038 possible that another coronavirus would emerge, that  
1039 would allow you to have platforms and experiments in  
1040 place, and even drugs that seem to work broadly  
1041 against many different bugs.

1042 So that when the next outbreak happens, you  
1043 would have something that would be kind of plug and  
1044 play. Influenza is another example of that, trying

1045 to develop things kind of a priori, so that when the  
1046 next bug crosses over, you'll have things in place  
1047 that could be helpful to people.

1048 Q And what are the types of countermeasures  
1049 that could be generated from this body of research?

1050 A Well, the most important thing -- well,  
1051 one of the most important things is vaccines. If you  
1052 have an outbreak and no vaccine, you don't really  
1053 have a good way to stop it. If you have a vaccine  
1054 that's cheap and easy to administer, that's a very  
1055 powerful public health tool.

1056 Also therapies. You want something that you  
1057 could give to people with COVID. We didn't have  
1058 anything useful for months and months. So next time,  
1059 hopefully there will be a platform where you could  
1060 plug in the latest bad bug and have it useful  
1061 immediately. And diagnostics are critical. If you  
1062 don't know how to diagnose a disease, you're going to  
1063 be way behind the curve. So good diagnostics are  
1064 key.

1065 Q And you had mentioned -- and what role  
1066 does international research collaboration play in  
1067 helping to prevent and understand the potential for  
1068 new pandemics and address them when they occur?

1069 A Well, a few reasons. Some of the smartest  
1070 scientists in the world are elsewhere. We have a lot  
1071 of brilliant people in this country, but there are  
1072 really smart people in other countries, and you want  
1073 the best and the brightest on the team.

1074 Another reason there's a lot of -- historically,

1075 most of these bugs have started elsewhere. You know,  
1076 you think of almost any emerging bug like Nipah virus  
1077 from Bangladesh and India or many bugs from Africa  
1078 including HIV, influenza from China, so you kind of  
1079 want to have boots on the ground so you can see it  
1080 happening in real-time and also engage the local  
1081 experts.

1082 Q I want to shift a little to how NIH's  
1083 investments in that body of research helped NIAID and  
1084 NIH understand some of the questions that you were  
1085 facing in the early days of the pandemic, so in the  
1086 early 2020 period.

1087 So you had mentioned earlier, when did you first  
1088 learn of the emergence of COVID-19 -- or sorry,  
1089 SARS-CoV-2?

1090 A So the first time I saw it was right at  
1091 the end of December of 2019, there was a program  
1092 called ProMED and there's a posting on ProMED. And  
1093 soon after that, it got picked up by the media and by  
1094 scientific journals and the like.

1095 Q So when NIAID and NIH are faced with a  
1096 question of a new infectious disease, what are some  
1097 of the questions and uncertainties that NIAID and NIH  
1098 ask like once a new disease is discovered?

1099 A Well, the first thing is to figure out  
1100 what it is. You know, if people are dying or  
1101 hospitalized, you've got to figure out what the bug  
1102 is. And then once you figure out, is it a familiar  
1103 bug. And if it's not, what is it? That's when you  
1104 do genomic sequencing and see if there's anything

1105 else that we've dealt with that's close.

1106 And if there is, maybe you can repurpose drugs  
1107 from previous outbreaks. And if it's not close, then  
1108 you have to start moving really fast to make a  
1109 vaccine or drugs or other things like that.

1110 Q And what resources did NIAID and NIH have  
1111 at its disposal to be able to start addressing and  
1112 answering those questions?

1113 A So with coronaviruses, you know, the  
1114 coronaviruses were a backwater for a long, long time.  
1115 With SARS 1, that kind of put the fear of God in  
1116 people, so we kind of ramped up the corona program,  
1117 more grants and more contracts. I don't know exactly  
1118 what the money, the graph is of the money but it went  
1119 up. With MERS, which was the second big coronavirus  
1120 outbreak, more attention and more grants.

1121 So when SARS-Co-V-2 hit, we had a fairly good  
1122 stable of researchers and we had learned a lot about  
1123 coronaviruses, so, you know, and that helped with the  
1124 response, making a vaccine and making those.

1125 Q So more specifically, what did the  
1126 investments that NIH had made in understanding the  
1127 infectious disease risk factor for emergence of  
1128 infectious diseases, how to translate research into  
1129 development of countermeasures, what did these  
1130 investments allow NIH and NIAID to learn about  
1131 COVID-19 in the early phase of emergence?

1132 A Well, one thing that was helpful from the  
1133 COVID -- from the SARS experience and the MERS  
1134 experience is that we had a lot of experience working

1135 with coronaviruses, and making vaccines. We worked  
1136 on a vaccine for MERS that we tweaked. I didn't  
1137 tweak, but the scientists tweaked it to make it  
1138 SARS-CoV-2 specific and that the basic research funded  
1139 in one of our labs allowed for production of several  
1140 vaccines that were based on the spike protein of  
1141 SARS-CoV-2.

1142 There was research going on related to SARS and  
1143 MERS, and working with those viruses that allowed the  
1144 quick development of the antivirals and a drug called  
1145 remdesivir, and there's another drug now called  
1146 molnupiravir, but those had first been tested before  
1147 SARS-Co-V-2 hit to see if they might work against  
1148 other coronaviruses. So based on previous work, we  
1149 worked fast on a vaccine and we moved fast with drug  
1150 development.

1151 Q How do you leverage those relationships  
1152 with grantees in moments of crisis like this, and  
1153 what type of collaboration is necessary between NIH  
1154 and your grantees when facing these new  
1155 uncertainties?

1156 A Well, we had established investigators who  
1157 were working on a problem. And sometimes there's a  
1158 way to have a supplement to their grant to help them  
1159 work better or faster. Sometimes there's a way to  
1160 allocate more money to get more people into the  
1161 fight. So there's mechanisms to kind of ramp up the  
1162 existing cadre of people and have more shots on goal,  
1163 more scientists, more money.

1164 Q And then did you find -- how, if at all,



1165 did NIAID and NIH expand its coronavirus research  
1166 portfolio in early 2020?

1167 A You know, I don't know the details of the  
1168 funding, but I think that a lot of investigators were  
1169 doing other things kind of transitioned part of their  
1170 efforts to COVID. For instance, HIV investigators  
1171 used some of their lab space or their expertise to  
1172 start working on COVID. So there was some fluidity  
1173 in what people could do and could work on.

1174 [REDACTED] Those are my questions. Any more  
1175 from the Minority?

1176 [REDACTED] Not at this time. We'll reserve and  
1177 we can go off the record.

1178 (Discussion held.)

1179 (Recess.)

1180 Mr. Benzine. We can go back on the record.

1181 [Majority Exhibit No. 1 was  
1182 marked for identification.]

1183 BY MR. BENZINE.

1184 Q I would like to introduce Majority Exhibit  
1185 1, which I believe we sent you in advance and it  
1186 should have Exhibit 1. It's an email. The first  
1187 email on the first page is from Dr. Fauci to  
1188 Dr. Kristian Andersen and Bates marked NIH\_2396. Do  
1189 you have that in front of you.

1190 A Yes, this is the one that says, Thanks  
1191 Kristian, talk soon, and the call?

1192 Q Yes.

1193 A Yes, I have that in front of me.

1194 Q I want to flip to -- it's on the very

1195 bottom of the first page. It's an email from you.

1196 It doesn't have a to line. Is this like a listserv

1197 that you would normally send to?

1198 A Yes. Yeah, so I sent -- I put people's

1199 addresses on the BCC line. So it's a listserv.

1200 Q Okay. And who would normally get these

1201 kinds of emails with press clips?

1202 A So I have a list of 300, 400 staffers,

1203 mostly at NIAID, some elsewhere at NIH and a couple

1204 at FDA, CDC, so colleagues interested who signed up

1205 for the list. And what I saw, when I see something

1206 interesting, I add other people to the line. This is

1207 from Science and so I must have BCC'd Dr. Fauci.

1208 Q So I want to ask, so you copied an article

1209 from Science entitled, Mining Coronavirus Genomes for

1210 Clues to the Outbreak's Origins.

1211 A Yeah.

1212 Q And why this article? Why did you send

1213 around this article?

1214 A Well, a couple reasons. One, Science is

1215 -- as you know, is kind of the -- not the Bible, the

1216 top journal. There's Science and there's Nature and

1217 they're one of the top journals. And Jon Cohen is a

1218 really good reporter. I just imagine scanning it, it

1219 seemed interesting, there's some good reporting, some

1220 good quotes. Yeah, those are the reasons.

1221 Q Was Dr. Fauci not normally on this BCC

1222 list?

1223 A So it's a very busy list of, you know,

1224 over the course of COVID I've sent out 55,000

1225 messages to this list, you know, articles on COVID  
1226 issues. Dr. Fauci was not on the list, but if I saw  
1227 something that seemed that it might be useful, I  
1228 would add him on an ad hoc.

1229 Q Why, to the best of your recollection, did  
1230 you add him to this article?

1231 A Again, because it was Science. Again,  
1232 it's a reporter that has a good reputation. And just  
1233 reading it, it looked like he -- it looked like good  
1234 content. It's been a while but it had some nice  
1235 figures, things like that.

1236 Q The article mentions both the Wuhan  
1237 Institute of Virology and EcoHealth Alliance. Did  
1238 you have any conversations with Dr. Fauci about this  
1239 article after sending it?

1240 A You know, I probably brought this to the  
1241 group. What day was this, the next Monday. I don't  
1242 recall how we got into it, people said this is  
1243 interesting or, you know, I don't recall.

1244 Q Going up the email chain, he forwards it  
1245 to Jeremy Farrar and Kristian Andersen.

1246 A Uh-huh.

1247 Q And says, "this just came out today. You  
1248 may have seen it. If not, it is of interest to the  
1249 current discussion."

1250 Did you have any insight into what Dr. Fauci,  
1251 Dr. Farrar, and Dr. Andersen were discussing at that  
1252 time?

1253 A I did not. I did not know what the -- I  
1254 didn't know.

1255 Q Dr. Andersen sends back a longer email  
1256 that's now been in the public for quite some time and  
1257 Dr. Fauci says, "thanks, Kristian, talk soon on the  
1258 call."

1259 We can shift now and introduce Majority Exhibit  
1260 2.

1261 A Yes.

1262 Q It's Bates numbered REV\_756 through 758.

1263 [Majority Exhibit No. 2 was  
1264 marked for identification.]

1265 BY MR. BENZINE.

1266 Q Do you have that in front of you?

1267 A I've got it.

1268 Q So on the page 757, there's an email from  
1269 Dr. Farrar setting up a teleconference for February  
1270 1st, or February 2nd if you're in Australia, and at  
1271 the bottom is the attendee list and it lists Tony  
1272 Fauci. Were you aware -- were you involved at all in  
1273 the planning of this call?

1274 A I was not. I read about this later, but I  
1275 was not.

1276 Q Dr. Fauci didn't walk into your office and  
1277 say, I have a call with 12 esteemed virologists from  
1278 around the world to discuss the origins of the  
1279 pandemic?

1280 A No, he didn't. I'm trying to look at the  
1281 date. So this was a Saturday. Am I right?

1282 Q February 1st, yes.

1283 A No, I wasn't aware of this call.

1284 Q When did you become aware of the call?

1285 A Later in reporting on the internet and  
1286 elsewhere, when some of these emails were FOIA'd,  
1287 that's when I learned about it.

1288 Q So the FOIAs came out in 2021. Would that  
1289 be a safe assumption you learned about the call  
1290 sometime in 2021?

1291 A I'm surprised. I thought it was sooner,  
1292 yeah, but that's when I learned about it. I hadn't  
1293 been aware of this call.

1294 Q Okay. I want to introduce Majority  
1295 Exhibit 3, an email chain with Dr. Fauci and Stewart  
1296 Simonson and a couple others, and Bates marked  
1297 SSCP-NIH-1796 through 1798.

1298 [Majority Exhibit No. 3 was  
1299 marked for identification.]

1300 BY MR. BENZINE.

1301 Q I want to draw your attention to the  
1302 email, the header of the email that's on the bottom  
1303 of 1796 from Anthony Fauci to Garret Grigsby, Brian  
1304 Harrison, Lawrence Kerr, Robert Kadlec from February  
1305 1, 2020.

1306 First, did Dr. Fauci always email in Greenwich  
1307 Mean Time or did he email in Eastern Standard at all?

1308 A I don't know if I understand the question.

1309 Q On the date line of this email, it says  
1310 February 1, 2020 at 11:58 Greenwich Mean Time plus 1.  
1311 Was that standard in his email?

1312 A I don't think so. I wouldn't know how to  
1313 do it, I don't know if it's a setting but that's not  
1314 familiar to me.

1315 Q For the clarity of the record, the email  
1316 that I'm going to reference is a summary of the  
1317 February 1st conference call. The call occurred at  
1318 2:00 p.m., Greenwich Mean Time, which, of course, is  
1319 different than Eastern Standard Time, but this is  
1320 discussing the same call.

1321 A Yes.

1322 Q So that email flows on to page 1797.

1323 A Yes.

1324 Q And it's a long summary of the call. "The  
1325 call with Jeremy Farrar went very well. Francis  
1326 Collins joined and there were several highly credible  
1327 scientists in addition to the two that I had spoke  
1328 with last night on the call with expertise in  
1329 evolutionary biology."

1330 I want to draw your attention to one particular  
1331 sentence. It's in the kind of top third maybe. I'm  
1332 trying to find it. It starts with "suspicion." It  
1333 starts on the right-hand side of the email about a  
1334 third of the way down.

1335 A Okay, yeah.

1336 Q And reads, "the suspicion was heightened  
1337 by the fact that scientists in Wuhan University are  
1338 known to have been working on gain of function  
1339 experiments to determine the molecular mechanisms  
1340 associated with that virus's adapting to human  
1341 infection and the outbreak originated in Wuhan."

1342 Did Dr. Fauci ever relay any of those concerns  
1343 to you?

1344 A No, not that I recall.

1345 Q In any of the meetings following this, did  
1346 you have any conversations regarding potential gain  
1347 of function research in Wuhan?

1348 A Not that I recall, you know.

1349 Q Sitting here today, are you aware of the  
1350 correspondence in Nature titled The Proximal Origin  
1351 of SARS-CoV-2?

1352 A The Nature Medicine article? Yes, I'm  
1353 aware of that, yeah.

1354 Q When did you become aware of that, to the  
1355 best that you can recall?

1356 A So as you probably know, there's a site  
1357 called virological.org, and there was a pre-print of  
1358 that Nature Medicine paper that came out mid -- I  
1359 want to say mid-February. I think that's when I  
1360 first saw it, and I shared it with folks on my  
1361 listserv. And then when the paper came out in Nature  
1362 Medicine, I read it then again, yeah.

1363 Q Is that how you became aware of it, where  
1364 you get like an email blast from Virological?

1365 A No, that's a site that I bookmark. Over  
1366 the pandemic, there's been a lot of interesting viral  
1367 genetic analyses from the very first day. So it used  
1368 to be a really useful site. It doesn't seem to be  
1369 that active anymore, but in the early days, there was  
1370 lots of information on viral genetic trees and things  
1371 like that.

1372 Q So to find this particular paper, you were  
1373 just scanning Virological. Did anyone send this  
1374 paper to you?

1375 A You know, I imagine it could have been two  
1376 things, Mr. Benzine. One is just scanning it, you  
1377 can go to the site, you can see what's new. There's  
1378 on the right that says two days, three days, you can  
1379 see what's new. And I imagine I also saw it on  
1380 Twitter, people tweeting it and saying, you know,  
1381 this is whatever they said, this is good, this is  
1382 interesting.

1383 Q The authors and Dr. Farrar sent some  
1384 drafts to Dr. Fauci along the way. Were you at all  
1385 involved in the drafting of this paper?

1386 A No, I've not -- I'm not aware that he saw  
1387 drafts. But, no, I was not involved in the paper.

1388 Q After the paper come out either on  
1389 Virological or Nature Medicine, did Dr. Fauci ever  
1390 have any discussions with you about it?

1391 A So both times when the paper came out, we  
1392 discussed, you know, it came up in the morning group.  
1393 I forget to what extent we discussed it. But people  
1394 said something to the extent that this is a good  
1395 write-up, this is a good hypothesis, things like  
1396 that.

1397 Q No discussions about drafts being shared  
1398 ahead of time?

1399 A Not that I'm aware of.

1400 Q Any discussions about the February 1st  
1401 conference call in any of those meetings?

1402 A Not that I recall.

1403 [Majority Exhibit No. 4 was  
1404 marked for identification.]



1405 BY MR. BENZINE.

1406 Q All right. I'm going to shift a little  
1407 bit and go to Majority Exhibit 4, which is an email  
1408 from Dr. Morens to Cristina Cassetti is the first  
1409 page.

1410 A Yes, I see it.

1411 Q They're unfortunately not Bates marked,  
1412 but I want to flip through. It's on the fifth page  
1413 there's a large email from Dr. Daszak to Dr. Morens  
1414 and Dr. Stemmy.

1415 A Yep, I see it.

1416 Q And the original request is from  
1417 Dr. Morens to -- it looks like it went to Dr. Lipkin  
1418 and Dr. Daszak on like the second to last page. And  
1419 he wrote, "do you have any insight info on this new  
1420 coronavirus that is in the public domain or any  
1421 thoughts?"

1422 And Dr. Daszak responded, "yes, lots of  
1423 information. I spoke with Erik Stemmy and Alan Embry  
1424 yesterday before the news was released."

1425 A I'm a little bit lost here.

1426 Q Okay. So if you flip to the last page  
1427 where it's just Dr. Morens' signature block.

1428 A Okay. The last page I have is about the  
1429 topics from Peter Daszak and the bottom is a block.  
1430 That's the last page I have. And that might be --

1431 Q Well, we can just focus on the one that we  
1432 were talking about earlier from Dr. Daszak to  
1433 Dr. Morens and Dr. Stemmy with the redacted blocks in  
1434 the middle.

1435 A Got it. Okay, yeah.

1436 Q And he writes, "hi, David, happy to have a  
1437 phone call regarding the Wuhan coronavirus but just  
1438 wanted to mention a few things for your information  
1439 and hopefully to pass on for Tony Fauci for when he's  
1440 being interviewed regarding the new coronavirus."

1441 And then he provides some talking points about  
1442 what EcoHealth has been doing pursuant to a grant in  
1443 China with the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

1444 A Right.

1445 [Majority Exhibit No. 5 was  
1446 marked for identification.]

1447 BY MR. BENZINE.

1448 Q And then keeping that exhibit in front of  
1449 you, I want to introduce Majority Exhibit 5.

1450 A Yeah.

1451 Q Which is an email from you to Jennifer  
1452 Routh, Dr. Fauci, and a couple others.

1453 A Got you.

1454 Q And you say, "also, in talking about  
1455 coronavirus, we have on our team, Vincent, and folks  
1456 we fund, Peter Daszak, Ralph Baric, Ian Lipkin,  
1457 probably the world's experts on non-human  
1458 coronaviruses."

1459 What did you mean by we have on our team?

1460 A We have on our team. People we fund,  
1461 people in our ecosystem. So Vincent is an intramural  
1462 scientist and the other ones are grantees.

1463 Q How did you come about that list? How did  
1464 you determine to put Dr. Daszak, Dr. Baric, and

1465 Dr. Lipkin on this list?

1466 A This is a derivative of an email that  
1467 David sent me, as I recall. Yeah, these look like  
1468 David's words that I was sharing with people in our  
1469 front office.

1470 Q So it would have been Dr. Morens that  
1471 would have suggested speaking to Dr. Daszak,  
1472 Dr. Baric, and Dr. Lipkin, to the best of your  
1473 recollection?

1474 A You know, I don't think -- I think what I  
1475 was saying here is that, you know, when you're  
1476 talking to a press conference or to a reporter, you  
1477 can make the point that we have smart people in place  
1478 studying coronaviruses.

1479 So, yeah, when I say talking about COVID, I know  
1480 that the next day there was a press conference at the  
1481 White House of the Coronavirus Task Force. I guess  
1482 we thought that these would be useful data points  
1483 like what are you guys doing? And the answer is we  
1484 have some smart scientists who study coronaviruses.

1485 Q But sitting here today, you don't recall  
1486 how those three names got on this email?

1487 A You mean Baric, Ian, and Daszak?

1488 Q Yeah.

1489 A Yeah, it came from David.

1490 Q Okay.

1491 A From Dr. Morens, yeah.

1492 Q Going down, you then write from David M.

1493 And then --

1494 A Yes.

1495 Q And then provide what appears to be near  
1496 identical information to what Dr. Daszak provided  
1497 Dr. Morens?

1498 A It looks very close.

1499 Q Did you know that what you sent to  
1500 Dr. Fauci came from Dr. Daszak versus from  
1501 Dr. Morens?

1502 A I did not. Yeah, I did not know that.

1503 Q In your experience, would that be common  
1504 that you would kind of take talking points from a  
1505 grantee about the grantee's work and just pass it  
1506 along?

1507 A No, it would be uncommon. Yeah, I was  
1508 reading off of what David had written.

1509 Q You sound a little surprised. Does it  
1510 surprise you that Dr. Morens just took what  
1511 Dr. Daszak had provided to him and provided it to  
1512 you?

1513 A I don't know. It seems like good  
1514 information that's all in the public domain. I just,  
1515 you know, my surprise is that, Mr. Benzine, is I've  
1516 seen these emails on the internet over and over, and  
1517 I hadn't seen this one. I had seen the one that  
1518 mentioned David and me, but I hadn't seen this one.

1519 Q So before today, you didn't know that the  
1520 information in your email had come from EcoHealth?

1521 A No, I did not.

1522 Q You can put those aside if you would like,  
1523 but sticking in kind of the EcoHealth realm. During  
1524 Dr. Daszak's transcribed interview with these

1525 committees, he told me that he briefed NIAID's staff  
1526 in April or May of 2021 after his trip with the WHO  
1527 to Wuhan. Were you aware of that briefing?

1528 A I was not.

1529 Q Okay. Dr. Daszak testified that Dr. Fauci  
1530 was at that briefing. But you weren't aware of it?

1531 A I don't recall that.

1532 Q Without flooding you with paper, starting  
1533 in April of 2020, NIH's extramural division had  
1534 invited Dr. Lauer to start compliance enforcement  
1535 efforts on the EcoHealth grant, in part because they  
1536 were then late on a progress report. And then their  
1537 sub-grant agreements were out of compliance. Were  
1538 you involved in any of Dr. Lauer's efforts to bring  
1539 EcoHealth into compliance?

1540 A I was not.

1541 Q Did Dr. Fauci have any conversations with  
1542 you regarding Dr. Lauer's efforts?

1543 A Not that I recall. You know, as with many  
1544 things I read about this after the fact. But I  
1545 wasn't involved in those discussions.

1546 Q It seems a little strange that the  
1547 director of an agency wouldn't talk to his chief of  
1548 staff about a grant that is being terminated within  
1549 his agency. Does that come across as a little  
1550 strange?

1551 A I don't -- I don't recall that  
1552 conversation.

1553 Q Okay.

1554 Mr. Benzine. I think that's probably it on my

1555 end. John, were you able to get up and running?

1556 Ms. Berstell. I got the exhibits, restarted my  
1557 Outlook, and I sent them to Mr. Folkers. So they  
1558 should be in your email. If they are, we can give  
1559 him a few minutes to print them.

1560 The Witness. I see two. Okay.

1561 Ms. Berstell. Okay. Why don't we take a couple  
1562 minutes.

1563 Mr. Benzine. We can go off the record for a few  
1564 minutes.

1565 (Recess.)

1566 Mr. Strom. Back on the record.

1567 BY MR. STROM.

1568 Q Mr. Folkers, I'm going to ask you about  
1569 the larger packet of documents first.

1570 A Okay.

1571 Q And you don't need to read all of them,  
1572 but I just want to ask you some specific questions  
1573 building off of what Mitch asked you just now.

1574 A Okay.

1575 Q This will be Majority Exhibit --

1576 Mr. Strom. Are we on 3 or 4?

1577 Mr. Benzine. 6.

1578 Mr. Strom. 6. So this will be Majority Exhibit  
1579 6.

1580 [Majority Exhibit No. 6 was  
1581 marked for identification.]

1582 BY MR. STROM.

1583 Q Majority Exhibit 6 is a series of  
1584 correspondence between Dr. Lauer and EcoHealth

1585 Alliance. It begins in April 2020 and runs through  
1586 August 19, 2022.

1587 So you stated earlier that one of your duties as  
1588 chief of staff is to not only sort of maintain  
1589 situational awareness but also handle the flow of  
1590 paperwork as it moves around the Office of Director.

1591 So I would like you to look at the first page  
1592 here of the April 19, 2020 email. Do you recall,  
1593 whether it was in the sort of standard meetings or in  
1594 one-off meetings, whether you ever spoke with  
1595 Dr. Fauci about the suspension of the EcoHealth  
1596 grant?

1597 A I don't recall speaking to him about any  
1598 of this, actually. You know, this correspondence was  
1599 with another one of our divisions. This was kind of  
1600 out of our wheelhouse. All of these documents are  
1601 unfamiliar to me. These didn't come through me.

1602 Q Is it an unusual event to have a grant  
1603 suspended or to have these additional conditions upon  
1604 it?

1605 A You know, I can't speak to that. There's  
1606 a separate division as you may know that does grant  
1607 funding and grant management and things like that. I  
1608 don't know the frequency of this sort of condition.

1609 Q So just as a general matter, as I  
1610 understand the processes at NIAID and NIH -- so  
1611 please step in and correct me if I'm wrong.

1612 A Mm-hmm.

1613 Q The decision, there's a presumption in  
1614 favor of continuing to fund. When there's a

1615 compliance issue, there's a presumption in favor of  
1616 continuing to fund the science provided that  
1617 sufficient safeguards can be put in place. Is that  
1618 your understanding?

1619 A To be honest, Mr. Strom, I don't know much  
1620 about this. The whole grant management realm is  
1621 something separate from what I do.

1622 Q So who at the Office of Director handled  
1623 these kind of grant management issues?

1624 A Nobody in our immediate office. We have a  
1625 separate division called the Division of Microbiology  
1626 and Infectious Diseases that you may have spoken to  
1627 folks there, and they would deal with this sort of  
1628 thing.

1629 Q So we did speak with Dr. Erbelding and  
1630 again to spare you the paperwork and on Zoom here,  
1631 she testified that the decision to reinstate grant --  
1632 the EcoHealth Alliance grant, to her knowledge, was  
1633 made by Dr. Auchincloss. Do you have any  
1634 recollection of the reinstatement of the EcoHealth  
1635 grant being discussed at the Office of Director?

1636 A This is not something we discussed at our  
1637 roundtable. That makes sense. Within our small  
1638 group, that makes sense that Dr. Auchincloss with  
1639 Dr. Erbelding and her people decided that or came up  
1640 with that decision. But this is not the sort of  
1641 thing that my immediate group dealt with.

1642 Q So when did Dr. Auchincloss, to your  
1643 recollection, become acting director?

1644 A When did he become acting director? When



1645 Dr. Fauci retired at the end of 2022. And before  
1646 that, he was the principal deputy director, as you  
1647 know, for many years.

1648 Q So in January of 2022, who would have been  
1649 the director?

1650 A Dr. Auchincloss would have been the acting  
1651 director.

1652 Q But you were still serving as chief of  
1653 staff?

1654 A Chief of staff of the immediate office,  
1655 yes.

1656 Q Okay. So if he is acting director and  
1657 you're chief of staff of the immediate office, how  
1658 did you not have any awareness of this January  
1659 2022 -- the conditions on the award being imposed and  
1660 the subsequent reinstatement? That's what I'm  
1661 struggling with.

1662 A Because there's kind of a firewall between  
1663 what we do bureaucratically on the seventh floor of  
1664 Building 31 and the scientific side, the extramural  
1665 divisions who do grants management and that sort of  
1666 thing.

1667 Q But I guess, and I want to make sure I'm  
1668 being accurate. You have no recollection of this, or  
1669 you're saying affirmatively, I was not involved?

1670 A Both. Both. This is the sort of thing  
1671 that did not come up in our group, and as a  
1672 consequence I had no recollection.

1673 Q I'm just asking. You don't recall  
1674 scheduling a meeting for Dr. Auchincloss, you don't

1675 recall Dr. Erbeling trying to say, like, we've got  
1676 to make a decision on this grant. You don't recall  
1677 any sort of Office of Director activity related to  
1678 the reinstatement decision?

1679 A I have no recollection, I had no  
1680 involvement.

1681 Q Okay.

1682 BY MR. SLOBODIN.

1683 Q Mr. Folkers, do you have any recollection  
1684 of the 60 Minutes TP program segment about the  
1685 EcoHealth Alliance grant work back in May of 2020?  
1686 Does that ring any bells for you?

1687 A Can you tell me more? It's not ringing a  
1688 bell, but --

1689 Q Well, this would have been at the time  
1690 that EcoHealth Alliance's grant, that NIH was  
1691 attempting to terminate the grant, and Dr. Daszak and  
1692 EcoHealth had been on the 60 Minutes program before,  
1693 and then they were featured again on this program to  
1694 talk about what they had -- the work they had done in  
1695 recent years about viruses, and how they were  
1696 discovering novel viruses and the value of their  
1697 research. You don't have any recollection of that?

1698 A 60 Minutes, the TV show?

1699 Q Yes.

1700 A Yeah, I don't recall that.

1701 BY MR. STROM.

1702 Q Going back to your sort of your role  
1703 involving handling media inquiries. Did you sort of,  
1704 in the course -- and the relevant time period is

1705 really 2022 until you retired, so the COVID outbreak.

1706 When you're fielding media calls, do you typically

1707 suggest that they follow up with subject matter

1708 experts?

1709 A So I rarely field media calls. We have a

1710 press office and generally reporters would go through

1711 the press office and they would triage those calls to

1712 various people. I do know some reporters having been

1713 at this for a long time who would call me directly

1714 and ask who should I talk to or who, you know, what's

1715 next? So I had the occasional ad hoc call with

1716 reporters.

1717 Q Okay. So a couple of follow-ups to that.

1718 So the formal media calls, how -- does a reporter

1719 just call NIAID's main press office and then they get

1720 the -- how is the incoming call sort of received as a

1721 process?

1722 A Well, most of the time, it comes through

1723 the media line. They can email or they can call in

1724 and say, I'm, you know, John Strom from Newsday and I

1725 want to talk to somebody about Zika virus, I would

1726 like to talk to Dr. Fauci or if he's not available

1727 somebody who is expert.

1728 So that's the SOP that works best. Sometimes

1729 reporters will ping people individually and sometimes

1730 a reporter might call me and say, who's the right

1731 person? Can you get Tony for me or -- because they

1732 know I know him.

1733 Q I imagine a lot of it is asking, can you

1734 get Tony for me.

1735 A Yeah, there was a lot of that.

1736 Q So of the reporters that called the line,  
1737 the media center, for lack of a more knowledgeable  
1738 term.

1739 A Yeah.

1740 Q You guys assemble lists of outside  
1741 experts, whether it's grantees or just sort of  
1742 recognized subject matter experts to then refer the  
1743 reporters to?

1744 A I'm sorry, I don't know if I got the  
1745 question.

1746 Q Sure. So if somebody calls and asks a  
1747 question about the origins of COVID-19 and they want  
1748 to know more about the potential reservoirs, natural  
1749 reservoirs for the disease, if NIAID doesn't have  
1750 sort of a prepared statement or doesn't have an  
1751 in-house expert that can answer that on the record or  
1752 doesn't have time to, does NIAID keep a list of  
1753 outside experts to say, go talk to this virologist or  
1754 go talk to this individual because they're a grantee  
1755 of ours, they're a true subject matter expert on this  
1756 issue?

1757 A I don't think there's a list. I think  
1758 what might happen is if somebody had a specific  
1759 question and the press person didn't know how to  
1760 proceed, they would contact our Division of  
1761 Microbiology and Infectious Disease and say, what  
1762 would you suggest.

1763 And I imagine at that point, someone would say,  
1764 we have this grantee in, you know, in Cambodia, we

1765 have this grantee in Fort Collins, Colorado that you  
1766 should talk to. Or maybe we have somebody on staff,  
1767 you know, who could speak to it.

1768 Q Even with the -- I assume the increased  
1769 volume of press calls on COVID, that was still the  
1770 standard practice?

1771 A As far as I know. But as you noted, a lot  
1772 of people just wanted to talk to Dr. Fauci. That was  
1773 the ask.

1774 Q Sure. So switching over to the smaller  
1775 subset of reporters that you've got by virtue of you  
1776 just being in the science communication field for a  
1777 while, who were those reporters that would reach out  
1778 to you directly? You mentioned like John Cohen of  
1779 Science, but there has to be some others.

1780 A You know, can I talk to counsel for a  
1781 second? You know, Mr. Strom, I'm uncomfortable here  
1782 giving names.

1783 Ms. Ganapathy. Let's go off the record for one  
1784 minute, we'll consult, and then we'll come back, if  
1785 that's okay.

1786 Mr. Strom. Perfect. Just make sure you're on  
1787 mute. We'll go off the record.

1788 (Pause.)

1789 Mr. Strom. For the benefit of the court  
1790 reporter, let's officially say we're going back on  
1791 the record.

1792 BY MR. STROM.

1793 Q Go ahead, Mr. Folkers.

1794 A So you asked me the names of a couple

1795 people who might calling me directly. John Cohen of  
1796 Science who I've known for a long time would  
1797 sometimes say, hey, can I talk to Tony. And Helen  
1798 Branswell of Stat, again, would do the same thing.

1799 Those are the two that come to mind. And there  
1800 was nothing, you know, they were trying to kind of  
1801 cut the Gordian Knot, and just get things done fast  
1802 because sometimes you call the press office and  
1803 there's a list of people before you.

1804 So, you know, those are the type of people who  
1805 might call. I don't remember specific days or  
1806 topics, but over the years, those are the types of  
1807 people who I would have those conversations with.

1808 Q What about reporters at The New York Times  
1809 and Washington Post?

1810 A Gosh, nobody is springing to mind. Years  
1811 and years ago, there was this reporter at the Times,  
1812 but he's not -- he's long since retired. You know, I  
1813 can't think of anybody at the Post who would call me  
1814 directly.

1815 Mr. Benzine. John, if I can butt in for one  
1816 question.

1817 BY MR. BENZINE.

1818 Q What about journal editors? Would the  
1819 Lancet or Nature or any of those and say, hey, we  
1820 really want to do this with Dr. Fauci?

1821 A No, they would contact him directly. And  
1822 that did happen, they would say, Dr. Fauci, can you  
1823 write an editorial, an essay for us? So they would  
1824 go to him, rather than to me.

1825 Mr. Benzine. Thank you.

1826 BY MR. STROM.

1827 Q And then in sort of a similar vein, as  
1828 part of the process of speaking with reporters and  
1829 this would extend just beyond Science and Stat, but  
1830 to mainstream reporters that you may not specifically  
1831 recall speaking to, did you ever refer them to  
1832 specific journal articles or try to sort of maybe  
1833 bridge the gap between mainstream media and sort of  
1834 the scientific literature?

1835 A You know, I'm not quite sure what you  
1836 mean. If somebody was calling?

1837 Q So just to clarify. For example, did you  
1838 ever send the Proximal Origins paper that Mitch  
1839 mentioned earlier to a reporter?

1840 A No, not that I recall. I don't think I  
1841 would have, because after that paper came out, those  
1842 same authors and others had more fulsome discussions  
1843 of their theories and hypotheses. So I don't recall  
1844 sending Proximal Origins to anybody.

1845 Q Okay. And just so I understand, your  
1846 recollection is that you did not, particularly in the  
1847 early 2020 timeframe, speak on a one-on-one basis  
1848 with reporters at Bloomberg, New York Times, The  
1849 Washington Post?

1850 A Not that I recall. Not that I recall.

1851 Q Okay. And if you don't recall, you don't  
1852 recall.

1853 Mr. Strom. I think this may be a good stopping  
1854 point. I candidly lost track of the specific time so

1855 let's go off the record real quick.

1856 (Pause.)

1857 (Recess.)

1858 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] We can go back on the record.

1859 BY [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

1860 Q Hello again, Mr. Folkers.

1861 A Hello.

1862 Q A couple of questions for you just in  
1863 general. And you may not know the answer to this,  
1864 but do you know how many grants a year on average  
1865 NIAID oversees?

1866 A I don't know offhand. It's thousands. I  
1867 don't know, but it's in the thousands.

1868 Q So in general, would it be possible for  
1869 Dr. Fauci or anyone who was in his position to have  
1870 specific knowledge of every single one of those  
1871 grants?

1872 A No, it's probably physically impossible.

1873 Q In the prior round, we spoke about some  
1874 emails where you brought to Dr. Fauci's attention an  
1875 EcoHealth Alliance grant. So that's one way  
1876 obviously that a grant would be brought to his  
1877 attention. Are there other ways that specific grants  
1878 would be brought to his attention?

1879 A So I think if somebody wrote a paper, like  
1880 in Dr. Fauci's instance, a really nice HIV paper,  
1881 that would bring that grant to his attention. And  
1882 other diseases, too. You know, that's probably the  
1883 main way.

1884 Q Okay. And now we're going to revisit some



1885 of those emails that the Majority asked you about in  
1886 the prior round that related to bringing the  
1887 EcoHealth Alliance grant to Dr. Fauci's attention.

1888 So we're going to start with two exhibits to  
1889 sort of look at simultaneously. The first being  
1890 Exhibit A, which I just sent to you or which was just  
1891 sent to you. It starts, on the first page it's an  
1892 email from David Morens. And the other one we're  
1893 going to look at is one that the Majority has already  
1894 provided to you as Exhibit 4.

1895 [Minority Exhibit A was  
1896 marked for identification.]

1897 The Witness. Okay, I've got this.

1898 BY [REDACTED]

1899 Q So as I mentioned, Exhibit A is a January  
1900 27th, 2020 email from Dr. Morens to you. So you can  
1901 take a look at that. It looks like this is the email  
1902 you used as your basis for your later email to  
1903 Dr. Fauci. We can see the mention of Peter Daszak,  
1904 Ralph Baric, Ian Lipkin. Do you see all of that?

1905 A Yeah.

1906 Q So is this the email where you got that  
1907 information?

1908 A It must be. It must be.

1909 Q And then we'll look at Majority Exhibit 4,  
1910 and we'll have to go through it a bit to the bottom  
1911 of the third page.

1912 A Okay.

1913 Q There is an email from Dr. Morens to Peter  
1914 Daszak. Do you see that?

1915 A Yes. That begins, "great info"?

1916 Q Exactly, yes.

1917 A Okay.

1918 Q And I'm just going to read out loud, it's  
1919 a short little email, but it says, "great info,  
1920 thanks. Tony doesn't maintain awareness of these  
1921 things and doesn't know unless program officers tell  
1922 him, which they rarely do, since they are across town  
1923 and may not see him more than once a year or less."

1924 The Tony he's referring to in this email, is  
1925 that Dr. Fauci?

1926 A It must be, yes.

1927 Q And does that idea that he does not  
1928 maintain awareness of these things, being grants,  
1929 make sense to you?

1930 A It makes sense, just because there's so  
1931 many grants and so many disciplines. I wish I had a  
1932 number for you, but it's tens of thousands, I'm sure.

1933 Q Thank you. And then if you go through  
1934 that chain of emails, going back in time to the fifth  
1935 page, that's where we see the information about the  
1936 EcoHealth Alliance grant being sent from Peter Daszak  
1937 to David Morens, correct?

1938 A Correct, yeah.

1939 Q And if we flip back to Exhibit A, you can  
1940 see that that's the information and in Exhibit A  
1941 Dr. Morens even tells you, "I have been getting some  
1942 of this info from Peter." Do you see that?

1943 A Yes. Yes.

1944 Q So he let you know --

1945 A I'm sorry, where does he say that?

1946 Q It's the very end of the first paragraph.

1947 A Got it. Yeah, I see that.

1948 Q So he says, "I have been getting some of

1949 the info from Peter." And then below that is

1950 basically the paragraph that Peter Daszak had sent to

1951 David Morens?

1952 A Correct, yes.

1953 Q You then took this information in, I

1954 believe, Majority Exhibit 5, and you sent this

1955 information to Dr. Fauci. This is a Monday, January

1956 27th email. And I believe this was in advance of an

1957 HHS press conference, correct?

1958 A My recollection is that it was in advance

1959 of a White House Coronavirus Task Force press

1960 conference.

1961 Q But you were sending Dr. Fauci this

1962 information to prepare him for that press conference?

1963 A Yes, exactly. Just, you know, if the

1964 question came up, Dr. Fauci, what's your institute

1965 doing with coronavirus, he would have some reference

1966 points.

1967 Q And before this email, do you have any

1968 knowledge that Dr. Fauci was aware of the EcoHealth

1969 Alliance group?

1970 A On January 27th? I don't have any direct

1971 recollection. I don't know for sure what he knew

1972 when.

1973 Q I believe this has already been covered

1974 but just to reiterate. Do you recall you, yourself,

1975 ever meeting Dr. Daszak?

1976 A I never met him. I've seen him speak on  
1977 YouTube and such, but I've never met him. You know,  
1978 like a lot of people, he looks familiar because  
1979 you've seen him a million times, but I've never met  
1980 him in the flesh, as it were.

1981 Q And do you recall whether or not Dr. Fauci  
1982 met Dr. Daszak?

1983 A He met him I know for sure at that Cosmos  
1984 Club event years ago, and I know that because there's  
1985 a picture. I didn't go to the event. And other than  
1986 that, I don't know if they've met.

1987 Q Okay, thank you.

1988 [REDACTED] Those are the question on that topic.  
1989 I'm going to pass things over to my colleague,  
1990 [REDACTED] who has a few questions for you.

1991 [REDACTED] Hi, can you see me?

1992 [REDACTED] No, we cannot see you, but we can  
1993 hear you.

1994 The Witness. I can hear you.

1995 [REDACTED] I'm assuming that will be fine.

1996 BY [REDACTED]

1997 Q I would like to revisit the Majority  
1998 Exhibit 2, Mr. Folkers.

1999 A You broke up. I'm sorry, I didn't hear  
2000 that exactly.

2001 Q Sure. I will bring your attention back to  
2002 Majority Exhibit 2.

2003 A Exhibit 2? Okay. Got it.

2004 Q And may I ask you to scroll down or flip

2005 to the second page of that exhibit.

2006 A Yes.

2007 Q Who is sending that email on the second  
2008 page?

2009 A I'm sorry, you asked me who was sending  
2010 it?

2011 Q Yes.

2012 A It looks like Dr. Farrar, Jeremy Farrar  
2013 wrote it.

2014 Q And in that email, it looks like he's  
2015 sending time information, like time zone for the call  
2016 that all the participants would be calling in from,  
2017 if I'm correct?

2018 A Correct.

2019 Q The agenda? Does that sound correct?

2020 A You know, I wasn't involved in this, so  
2021 I'm not sure if it's correct. But I see what you're  
2022 talking about here.

2023 Q Okay. So just based on this email, does  
2024 it look like this came before or at least organized  
2025 the call or laid the foundation for it to happen?

2026 A Gosh, I'm sorry, [REDACTED] I didn't get  
2027 that at all. It broke up.

2028 Q Based on this email and information that  
2029 Jeremy Farrar is sending here?

2030 A Yes.

2031 Q Does it look like Jeremy Farrar organized  
2032 the call?

2033 A It does look that way, yes.

2034 Q Okay. And what day was the call?

2035 A You know, I'm losing track here. I think  
2036 before we discussed that it was on a Saturday. I  
2037 think it was February 1st.

2038 Q I think that is correct. February 1, and  
2039 that would be a Saturday.

2040 A Yeah. And the time zone, it says the next  
2041 day, Dr. Holmes, who would be in Australia.

2042 Q So it doesn't strike me as unusual that  
2043 you wouldn't be looped in or made aware of a call  
2044 that Dr. Fauci did not organize, that was quickly  
2045 organized by Jeremy Farrar on the early hours of a  
2046 Saturday and was held on a Saturday, a non-business  
2047 day. Would that be unusual?

2048 A Yeah, it would be unusual for me to be in  
2049 this loop, yeah, on a Saturday or regardless of  
2050 scientists, as a non-scientist I wouldn't have had  
2051 any much -- I wouldn't be of much help here.

2052 Q Okay.

2053 [REDACTED] That is all for me. Thank you,  
2054 Mr. Folkers.

2055 [REDACTED] So we'll turn it over to our Energy  
2056 and Commerce colleagues.

2057 BY [REDACTED]

2058 Q Hi, Mr. Folkers. I have a few questions  
2059 about decisions made about the EcoHealth Alliance  
2060 grant termination in 2020. And if you are not  
2061 familiar with these conversations or not in a place  
2062 to comment, that is good as well.

2063 Can you share your reaction to the suspension  
2064 and then termination of the EcoHealth grants in April

2065 2020?

2066 A You know, I was not in that loop. I read  
2067 about it later, but I was not in the loop. I forget  
2068 where I read about it, but I think it came out in the  
2069 media a few days later.

2070 Q And based on what you learned, do you have  
2071 any concerns, did you have any concerns at the time  
2072 about the way that the grant was terminated?

2073 A You know, I really don't recall.

2074 Q And based on your position, did you have  
2075 any -- what was your perception of the way that the  
2076 grant termination affected the relationship between  
2077 NIH and the scientific community, including your  
2078 grantees?

2079 A My feeling at the time -- and this was  
2080 probably based on things I had read -- was that it  
2081 seemed like there wasn't due process and there was  
2082 concern in the scientific community. I didn't know  
2083 the details to really have an informed opinion, but I  
2084 remember that being kind of the reaction from some  
2085 other scientists.

2086 Q And then did you directly hear from the  
2087 scientific community about the termination of the  
2088 grant and did they raise any concerns to you?

2089 A Not to me.

2090 Q Okay. I want to refer back to Majority  
2091 Exhibit 5.

2092 A Okay. Got it.

2093 Q So why did you see Dr. Daszak and  
2094 Dr. Baric as important collaborators or teammates, as

2095 you put it, in preparation for Dr. Fauci's press  
2096 conference?

2097 A You know, they're big names in the field,  
2098 prominent people. Yeah, they were well-known  
2099 scientists in the community.

2100 Q And what did you hope to gain from that  
2101 partnership or what did NIH institution hope to gain  
2102 from that partnership?

2103 A Well, this is kind of what we do, we fund  
2104 hopefully the best scientists in different areas, so  
2105 that we can develop or learn more about the disease  
2106 and develop interventions. You know, the reason that  
2107 I brought this up that day is -- one reason you can  
2108 say Fauci was giving a talk on Tuesday. I thought  
2109 as part of that talk where he talked about our  
2110 research activities, he could mention, oh, by the  
2111 way, we're doing this and this and this.

2112 Q And this may go back to questions we asked  
2113 in our previous round, but what did having folks like  
2114 Dr. Daszak and Dr. Baric kind of in your arsenal of  
2115 collaborators, how did that allow you to address some  
2116 early questions related to how to address COVID-19?

2117 A Well, Dr. Baric who is a virologist in  
2118 North Carolina, he's been studying lots of viruses  
2119 including coronaviruses and he has cell culture  
2120 systems and he had drug leads. So he was probably  
2121 well-positioned to move the science quickly. And  
2122 ditto for Ian Lipkin. He had a pretty sophisticated  
2123 group at Columbia with a lot of really powerful  
2124 assays in place. So, yeah.



2125 Q Was there a perception to this that having  
2126 those folks and their body of knowledge, the research  
2127 that they have conducted would allow NIH to move the  
2128 needle on developing countermeasures?

2129 A Oh, I think so. They had grants and they  
2130 were long-term grantees and they had done important  
2131 work. So, yeah, I think that was the hope and the  
2132 expectation.

2133 Q Okay. Shifting gears slightly, and I will  
2134 be brief. We had spoken about some of the work that  
2135 you have done in your role and liaising between  
2136 reporter requests for Dr. Fauci. Can you just share  
2137 a bit about what the type of information Dr. Fauci  
2138 was trying to communicate to the public and why it's  
2139 important to have that accurate, consistent  
2140 communication from infectious disease experts in  
2141 times of scientific uncertainty?

2142 A Sure. Things, as you recall, were  
2143 changing really fast, not only what we knew about the  
2144 virus but where, what we were learning about the  
2145 immune response and where we were with vaccines and  
2146 therapies. So I think he's a credible person who has  
2147 done this for a long time and he was trying to keep  
2148 folks up to speed as to where the efforts were going  
2149 and what was being accomplished.

2150 Q Okay.

2151 [REDACTED] I have no further questions.

2152 [REDACTED] I believe we are all set and can go  
2153 off the record.

2154 (Pause.)

2155 Mr. Benzine. We can go back on the record.

2156 BY MR. BENZINE.

2157 Q Mr. Folkers, I have a few follow-up  
2158 questions from the last hour and then a couple more,  
2159 and then I will turn it over to John.

2160 You were asked a couple times whether or not  
2161 Dr. Fauci know every grant in his multi-billion  
2162 dollar portfolio. And I don't think that's ever the  
2163 expectation, right? That would just be too much  
2164 information for one person to know.

2165 But by the time January, February 2020 rolled  
2166 around, especially when we got into March and April,  
2167 the EcoHealth grant and the Wuhan Institute of  
2168 Virology were very much in the news, very much in the  
2169 news in conjunction with the pandemic, accused of  
2170 various things, dangerous research that could have  
2171 possibly sparked a pandemic.

2172 At that point, and we talked about this a little  
2173 bit. But at that point, it feels a little odd that  
2174 he wouldn't request more information than what you  
2175 had already given him.

2176 A Oh, I think he has all sorts of -- he had  
2177 all sorts of information streams. I would be a  
2178 broker for things in the public domain such as news  
2179 articles and journal articles. People in our various  
2180 divisions would brief him. So it wasn't just me. It  
2181 was people like -- I think one of you mentioned you  
2182 talked to, Emily Erbelding. People on her team would  
2183 brief him as well. Dr. Auchincloss would brief him  
2184 as well. So I think the answer is that it was a

2185 multi-factorial effort.

2186 Q Okay. That makes sense. You testified  
2187 earlier that you had access to his calendar. Would  
2188 you see when those things would happen? Would you  
2189 see on his calendar a briefing by Dr. Erbeling  
2190 regarding EcoHealth, or would these things just kind  
2191 of happen?

2192 A So what I routinely did was print out the  
2193 face sheet of the Outlook calendar. So I was broadly  
2194 aware of things going on. If I had time, you know,  
2195 sometimes I would dig in and see what it was about  
2196 but, you know, usually not unless I was part of that  
2197 discussion.

2198 Q You also -- go ahead.

2199 A No. Sorry.

2200 Q No worries. You also said earlier, and  
2201 again, correct me if I'm misinterpreting your  
2202 testimony, but that sometimes you prepared talking  
2203 points for Dr. Fauci?

2204 A Yeah, talking points and other background  
2205 material.

2206 Q Beyond the emails that have been  
2207 introduced into evidence today, did you ever prepare  
2208 talking points regarding EcoHealth or the Wuhan  
2209 Institute of Virology?

2210 A I don't recall ever preparing talking  
2211 points on either of those.

2212 Q Okay. And you talked a little bit, we've  
2213 talked maybe more than a little bit, about the  
2214 standing Monday meeting, I think is when it was

2215 within the immediate Office of the Director.

2216 To your knowledge, did Dr. Fauci have any  
2217 standing leadership meetings within NIAID? Would he  
2218 get division directors together, would he have a  
2219 standing meeting with Dr. Auchincloss?

2220 A So a couple things. Our meeting was every  
2221 day, our roundtable was every day. And we had other  
2222 meetings every week. So we had an executive  
2223 committee meeting every Thursday where different  
2224 topics were presented. Dr. Fauci would meet  
2225 routinely with the division directors. You probably  
2226 know we have several research divisions. He met  
2227 frequently with Dr. Auchincloss. I don't know if it  
2228 was daily or not but, yes, other meetings.

2229 Q Did he have any standing meetings with NIH  
2230 leadership?

2231 A Yes, every week there's a meeting of all  
2232 the Institute directors. You probably know we have  
2233 27 institutes, and so there was a meeting of those  
2234 folks and their, I guess in some cases, staff  
2235 members.

2236 Q Did you attend those meetings with  
2237 Dr. Fauci?

2238 A I didn't. I did not.

2239 Q What about any standing meetings with HHS  
2240 leadership?

2241 A To my knowledge, there was no standing  
2242 meeting. I think there were meetings on different  
2243 issues scheduled episodically, but there was no  
2244 weekly or monthly meeting.

2245 Q All right. I want to ask kind of a  
2246 baseline question. Can you explain what the  
2247 clearance process is for policy documents flowing  
2248 through the Office of the Director?

2249 A So there were a couple different types of  
2250 documents. There were press releases and  
2251 backgrounders, and they would be vetted by various  
2252 people including me. Occasionally, we had strategic  
2253 plans that would be vetted by subject matter experts  
2254 and people like me. There were things from the  
2255 scientific side that I didn't see, but I think they  
2256 came to Dr. Fauci via Dr. Auchincloss.

2257 Q So the scientific side would be changes in  
2258 grant policy or like whether or not -- I mean, not  
2259 every funding decision gets elevated to the principal  
2260 deputy or the director. But funding decisions, those  
2261 kinds of things?

2262 A Correct. You know, big global changes in  
2263 grant policy would probably be taken to our advisory  
2264 council which meets three times a year, outside  
2265 advisers.

2266 Q All right. In 2014, there was a federal  
2267 government-wide ban or moratorium on new funding for  
2268 genome function research with a couple exceptions.  
2269 Are you generally aware of that?

2270 A I'm broadly aware of it, yes.

2271 Q Were you at all involved in that policy  
2272 change?

2273 A I was not. That was, I think, done at the  
2274 NIH as we call Building 1 level, you know, and I

2275 think other entities within HHS were involved. But I  
2276 was not involved this that.

2277 Q To your recollection, was Dr. Fauci  
2278 involved in that?

2279 A At some point, he was. I don't know where  
2280 in the process, whether he saw the final document,  
2281 whether he was part of the deliberations. But my gut  
2282 check, I don't know exactly what, but he was involved  
2283 somewhere, somehow.

2284 Q But you don't recall, like, kind of how?

2285 A I don't. I don't know if he was  
2286 consulted, I don't know. I don't know the details.

2287 Q I'm going to switch gears a little bit and  
2288 start to wrap up my questions. In early 2020, Cliff  
2289 Lane took a trip to China, I believe it was the end  
2290 of January into the first couple days of February.

2291 A Yes, sir.

2292 Q Were you involved at all in the planning  
2293 or execution of that trip?

2294 A I was not. I don't know who was actually,  
2295 but I remember the trip.

2296 Q To your recollection, was Dr. Fauci  
2297 involved at all in the planning or execution of that  
2298 trip?

2299 A I don't know. You know, I'm sure Cliff  
2300 consulted with him, but I don't know the extent of  
2301 their conversations.

2302 Q And then around the same time period in  
2303 2021, the WHO led another trip investigating the  
2304 origins of the coronavirus. Were you at all involved

2305 in the U.S. efforts in that trip?

2306 A I was not.

2307 Q And then my last question before I hand it  
2308 over. At any point in your tenure during the  
2309 pandemic, were you contacted by anyone in the  
2310 intelligence community to assist in their efforts to  
2311 investigate the origins?

2312 A I was not.

2313 Q All right.

2314 Mr. Benzine. Thank you.

2315 The Witness. You're welcome.

2316 Mr. Benzine. John, over to you.

2317 BY MR. STROM.

2318 Q Mr. Folkers, if we can go back to Majority  
2319 Exhibit 6, which is the 30-some odd pages of  
2320 correspondence.

2321 So you mentioned earlier that sort of your side  
2322 of the Office of Director house was briefings,  
2323 external events, news clippings, things like that.  
2324 Did you also -- were you also responsible for  
2325 official correspondence?

2326 A I was not responsible for official  
2327 correspondence. There's -- no, my group was not.  
2328 You know, other than routine things, you know, like  
2329 perfunctory letters, like if we had a visit from say  
2330 a Lithuanian Health Ministry, you know, we would  
2331 draft something like that.

2332 Q So if you will turn to the second page,  
2333 and this is an April 24, 2020 letter.

2334 A We're on Exhibit 6?

2335 Q On Exhibit 6.

2336 A Okay. I'm sorry, what page?

2337 Q It is the second page which is numbered

2338 3017.

2339 A Okay, got it.

2340 Q So if you look in the top right, it says

2341 on the letterhead here, Public Health Service,

2342 National Institutes of Health, National Institute of

2343 Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

2344 A Yes.

2345 Q But it's signed by Dr. Lauer, and

2346 obviously Dr. Stemmy and Ms. Linde are CC'd on it.

2347 A Right.

2348 Q So if Dr. Lauer, and I think everyone

2349 agrees he's at the NIH level. Why is he signing it

2350 with NIAID stationery.

2351 A Gosh, I have no idea. It seems like it

2352 should be a different letterhead.

2353 Q And then so Erik Stemmy is obviously part

2354 of Dr. Erbelding's division?

2355 A Yes.

2356 Q Who is Emily Linde?

2357 A I don't know Emily. I've seen the name.

2358 I think she's a person who helps with the grants

2359 processing system. I don't know Ms. Linde.

2360 Q Okay. And so I guess my sort of question,

2361 there's no like right way to phrase this, but does

2362 NIAID control its own sort of stationery? I'm trying

2363 to understand why if this was handled exclusively on

2364 the enforcement side by Dr. Lauer, the letters are on



2365 NIAID stationery?

2366 A I don't have a good answer. This is a  
2367 letterhead we frequently use, so I don't know why  
2368 Dr. Lauer or his team would put this on that  
2369 letterhead.

2370 Q Okay.

2371 Mr. Strom. I don't believe I have any further  
2372 questions. Alan, I don't know if you have any to  
2373 wrap with, or Mitch.

2374 BY MR. SLOBODIN.

2375 Q Mr. Folkers, I was just curious, how did  
2376 you come to be appointed chief of staff to Dr. Fauci?

2377 A You know, I don't know the selection  
2378 process, but I had worked at NIAID for many years and  
2379 I had been an adviser in his office. So I guess I  
2380 was in the mix and a known quantity. I don't know  
2381 who decided or who picked me exactly.

2382 Q Did you not have an interview with  
2383 Dr. Fauci for this position?

2384 A Gosh, that was a long time ago. I don't  
2385 remember a formal interview for this position.

2386 Q Well, what was Dr. Fauci's expectation of  
2387 you in this position as chief of staff? What was he  
2388 looking for you to do?

2389 A I can't speak to what he was thinking, but  
2390 I think, in general, it was to have the trains run on  
2391 time, make things work, meet deadlines, help him  
2392 represent the Institute well, things like that.

2393 Mr. Strom. Al, can I ask a question?

2394 Mr. Slobodin. Sure.

2395 BY MR. STROM.

2396 Q So I guess I'm sort of struggling to  
2397 understand the division of labor here. It sounds  
2398 like for grants and science, that's Dr. Auchincloss.  
2399 For a lot of the sort of public affairs,  
2400 congressional relations stuff is more your side of  
2401 the house?

2402 A Well, we have a few research divisions,  
2403 and Dr. Auchincloss would be -- he's a scientist and  
2404 a surgeon. He was the one who interacted mostly with  
2405 the research divisions, and he was in charge of the  
2406 executive committee meeting every week where the  
2407 research divisions would come together. You know, I  
2408 did communication stuff. But we also have a  
2409 communications office, a policy office, a budget  
2410 office on our floor. So there were other offices in  
2411 the mix.

2412 Q And sort of in the 2014 to when you  
2413 retired timeframe, who headed the policy office?

2414 A There were a couple people. I'm trying to  
2415 think. I want to say Tara Schwetz was the director  
2416 at some point. There's a woman who does it now named  
2417 Dr. Schneider. There's another person and the name  
2418 escapes me, I apologize.

2419 Q So I asked you just to look at the second  
2420 exhibit that I sent you that hasn't been entered into  
2421 the record yet.

2422 A Okay.

2423 Q It's a seven-page document, a letter that  
2424 begins May 28, 2016.

2425 A This was the one -- I apologize, I'm  
2426 getting lost here. What's the date on the top?

2427 Q May 28, 2016.

2428 A Yes, I see that. It's a letter that  
2429 Aleksei Chmura --

2430 Q And let me formally move it in as an  
2431 exhibit and I just want to ask you some quick  
2432 questions about it. So this is Majority Exhibit 8, I  
2433 believe, is that correct Mitch?

2434 Mr. Benzine. Yes.

2435 [Majority Exhibit No. 8 was  
2436 marked for identification.]

2437 BY MR. STROM.

2438 Q Okay. This is correspondence between  
2439 EcoHealth Alliance and primarily Dr. Stemmy but also  
2440 Jenny Greer, who is a grants management specialist at  
2441 NIAID. You don't need to read the full paper because  
2442 I'm just going to ask you a couple specific  
2443 questions. But if you turn to page 6, which is a  
2444 July 7th, 2016 letter from the department or from  
2445 NIAID.

2446 A Yes, I see it. Thanks.

2447 Q So it says in the second bullet there,  
2448 excuse me, second bullet there, it states that,  
2449 "SARS-like chimeras generated under this grant show  
2450 evidence of enhanced viral growth, greater than one  
2451 log over the parental backbone strain. Dr. Daszak  
2452 will immediately stop all experiments with these  
2453 viruses and provide NIAID program officer, grant  
2454 management specialist, and Wuhan Institute of

2455 Virology full biosafety committee with the relevant  
2456 data information related to these unanticipated  
2457 outcomes."

2458 For shorthand, we're just going to call that the  
2459 viral growth policy.

2460 A Okay.

2461 Q As you've described that process, it  
2462 wouldn't -- so first of all, are you aware of this  
2463 policy either contemporaneously when it was created  
2464 or subsequently?

2465 A I wasn't in on this loop. I am aware of  
2466 this after the fact having seen it in the media and  
2467 now reading this. But, yeah, I didn't know about  
2468 this before.

2469 Q But you don't have, so you don't have any  
2470 contemporaneous recollection of the development of  
2471 this policy?

2472 A No, this is something that would have been  
2473 done elsewhere.

2474 Q Okay. And so based on your time at NIAID  
2475 and your time as chief of staff, how would a policy  
2476 like this relating to essentially how science is  
2477 supposed to be done at NIAID or this particular  
2478 subset of experiment is supposed to be conducted?  
2479 For this kind of policy, what would have been the  
2480 typical clearance process?

2481 A I'm not sure exactly. I suspect they came  
2482 up with this in the division and it was signed off by  
2483 perhaps Dr. Erbeling and perhaps by Dr. Auchincloss,  
2484 but I don't know what the chain of events was.

2485 Q Okay. And that's fine. We're just trying  
2486 to sort of understand the division of  
2487 responsibilities.

2488 A I get it.

2489 Q And how it came into being.

2490 Mr. Strom. Sorry, Alan. I don't have any  
2491 further questions after that. Thank you.

2492 Mr. Slobodin. Just a point of clarification.

2493 BY MR. SLOBODIN.

2494 Q So you were saying earlier that Dr. Fauci  
2495 couldn't be expected to have specific knowledge on  
2496 the grants -- about the grants?

2497 A Right.

2498 Q Is that right? So how would he have been  
2499 in a position then to be testifying before the Senate  
2500 and insisting that there wasn't gain of function  
2501 research funded by the NIAID grant?

2502 A I think he had extensive briefings on that  
2503 project.

2504 Q On that grant -- on that grant, he had a  
2505 lot of briefings?

2506 A Yes, but if the questions I heard before  
2507 was if NIAID has 8,000 grants and if you were to pick  
2508 one out, would Dr. Fauci know anything about it. The  
2509 answer would be no. But you know, if something was  
2510 on his desk and he had to know about it, he had been  
2511 briefed, he would be brought up to speed.

2512 Q And then these morning staff meetings.

2513 A Yes.

2514 Q So I'm just trying to get a little better

2515 sense about them.

2516 A Yes.

2517 Q So you have these articles, you're trying  
2518 to flag something for the attention of the group.

2519 A Yes.

2520 Q What would have been the purpose? Would  
2521 you have flagged something that you thought it was  
2522 something being misrepresented about the pandemic, or  
2523 anything at NIAID? Would that be the sort of thing  
2524 discussed, like, hey, I want to bring to your  
2525 attention somebody is putting out this statement and  
2526 this seems to be problematic to us? Did that ever  
2527 come up at one of these morning meetings?

2528 A You know, it must have. Generally, as I  
2529 mentioned before, there was a lot of traffic on my  
2530 listserv. I tried to pick the top ten that might be  
2531 relevant to things that people were writing or  
2532 presenting on. But certainly there were articles, I  
2533 can't think of a specific example, that  
2534 misrepresented the science or so on, and I would flag  
2535 that for the group.

2536 Q Do you have any recollection, would you  
2537 have flagged something -- like there was an editorial  
2538 piece under the name of Senator Tom Cotton where he  
2539 was expressing his concerns that maybe the pandemic  
2540 may have had some relationship to laboratory  
2541 research? Do you have any recollection whether that  
2542 kind of article would have been flagged at a morning  
2543 meeting?

2544 A You know, I remember when Senator Cotton

2545 was making those statements and I remember reportage, I don't remember  
2546 the op-ed, but I suspect  
2547 that was discussed in the meeting, that Senator  
2548 Cotton has this hypothesis.

2549 Q What was the sense of the group at this  
2550 meeting, whether it was Senator Cotton or anybody  
2551 else that at that time was espousing concern that the  
2552 pandemic could have been started by some mishap or  
2553 some incident involving the laboratory?

2554 A You know, I don't remember the sense in  
2555 the group, that sense more broadly in the scientific  
2556 community was that it probably was not true. I don't  
2557 remember a specific meeting where we hashed that out  
2558 or people opined one way or the other.

2559 Q But --

2560 A But I do remember clearly Senator Cotton's  
2561 interviews, and I don't remember the editorial you're  
2562 referring to, but I knew what he was saying.

2563 Q So do you have any recollection of  
2564 Dr. Fauci's reaction at all? Would he have said,  
2565 gee, well, he's off on the wrong track, maybe we need  
2566 to set up a briefing? Maybe we need to reach out to  
2567 him?

2568 A I don't remember a conversation like that.

2569 Q Okay. But any kind of reaction --

2570 A Not --

2571 Q -- to a U.S. Senator saying that? You  
2572 don't recall?

2573 A Not that I recall, yeah.

2574 Q Well, do you recall anything about

2575 Dr. Fauci's, like, reactions to in the early days of  
2576 the pandemic about concerns of some inaccuracies or  
2577 inaccurate information getting out to the broader  
2578 public and what to do about that?

2579 A I'm not sure I get the question.

2580 Q Well, this is not -- we were struggling in  
2581 the early days just to understand what this threat  
2582 was.

2583 A Right.

2584 Q We didn't know much about it. Dr. Lane  
2585 was part of a group that went to China to try to get  
2586 some firsthand observational information and whatever  
2587 else could be gleaned to try to find out how similar  
2588 this was to a virus, is this novel? If it's novel,  
2589 how lethal was it, how transmissible was it? What's  
2590 the mode of transmission?

2591 A Right.

2592 Q So I know there were a lot of things that  
2593 we were struggling with in the early days as far as  
2594 information and how to communicate to the public.

2595 Ms. Ganapathy. Mr. Folkers, if you could just  
2596 wait for Alan to finish asking the question before  
2597 you begin. I'm worried a little bit about  
2598 cross-talk.

2599 BY MR. SLOBODIN.

2600 Q I'm sorry about the length of the  
2601 question. I'm just trying to get to see if you have  
2602 any recollection of Dr. Fauci's direction or any  
2603 guidance he provided to you and your staff about  
2604 anything that you all needed to do in terms of



2605 outreach to the press or maybe even preparing  
2606 statements for him at a White House press conference  
2607 to correct something that was in the public record  
2608 that he was concerned about.

2609 A Well, what was going on at that time, as  
2610 you probably recall, is Dr. Fauci was downtown at the  
2611 White House a lot with the Coronavirus Task Force.  
2612 And I think a lot of those efforts and discussions  
2613 were being handled down there with press briefings  
2614 and things like that. I don't recall Dr. Fauci  
2615 directed me or my staff to do things different in  
2616 terms of communication.

2617 We were communicating about COVID, we wrote  
2618 articles, Dr. Fauci and others gave talks. So things  
2619 were going on, and a lot of things that I wasn't  
2620 privy to were under way downtown at the task force.

2621 Q Okay. So going back to your appointment  
2622 as chief of staff. I'm just wondering that maybe  
2623 that was an indication of the importance that  
2624 Dr. Fauci placed in clear, strong, communication to  
2625 the public about public health issues, and he wanted  
2626 somebody with your experience and background to help  
2627 him with that. Would that be fair?

2628 A I like the way you characterized it. I  
2629 think that would be fair, because he had the bully  
2630 pulpit and I think he valued having people who could  
2631 write and then help him with speeches.

2632 Q Just as an example. Do you recall, I had  
2633 mentioned the 60 Minutes program before that was  
2634 involving EcoHealth Alliance. But he was also on 60

2635 Minutes, and on that program he held up a map of the  
2636 world. It was a map he showed our committee at a  
2637 hearing. And the map -- actually, it was two maps.  
2638 One was a map of the world in 1984.

2639 A Yeah.

2640 Q And it showed picture 2 emerging diseases,  
2641 one of them HIV, I forget the other one, they were  
2642 both in Africa.

2643 A Yes.

2644 Q That was it. And then you fast forward  
2645 30-some odd years later and then you have a map and  
2646 there's like 45, 46 plus points all over the world of  
2647 emerging infectious diseases to dramatize the threat.

2648 A (Nodding head.)

2649 Q Did you play any role in that? I'm just  
2650 trying to see how you fit in with a lot of this  
2651 communication strategy and how this all worked at  
2652 NIAID.

2653 A So years ago, I helped him develop that  
2654 map. As you indicated, there were initially two dots  
2655 on the map. There was Ebola which was 1976 and then  
2656 there was HIV in 1981. And over the years and in  
2657 various papers we built out that map, and as you  
2658 know, there have been dozens, hundreds of emergences.  
2659 But, yeah, that was a really good prop that's used a  
2660 lot.

2661 Q Okay. But you don't have any  
2662 recollection -- well, what do you recall about any,  
2663 what's his big concern? Did anybody ever mention to  
2664 you in terms of communications with regard to the

2665 COVID response or broadly? I know we're here trying  
2666 to see what we can learn about issues related to  
2667 origins of the pandemic, which I know figured a lot,  
2668 but I'm just curious, of course we hope to speak to  
2669 him directly, but what did you hear -- or maybe I  
2670 should put the question to you, as a communications  
2671 specialist, what was your main concern about  
2672 communications?

2673 A It sounds trite, but it was to get  
2674 information out quickly that was correct and vetted  
2675 to the extent possible, whether we were learning  
2676 something about the immune system or some therapy  
2677 that was in a phase 2 trial. Things like that. Getting  
2678 things out there quickly and not having them stuck in  
2679 a log jam somewhere.

2680 Q Okay. Exactly what was Dr. Morens' role?  
2681 And did you guys work closely together?

2682 A So he was -- he came to our office about  
2683 20 years ago, and as you may know, he's a physician  
2684 and an epidemiologist and a historian of medicine.

2685 And his role was as an adviser to not only  
2686 Dr. Fauci but all of us, because he's written a lot  
2687 of good papers, he has a lot of experience in the  
2688 Public Health Service, he did outbreak  
2689 investigations, he was in the EIS service at CDC. So  
2690 he was somebody who knew a lot about a lot of things,  
2691 that could be consulted, and he was a good writer he  
2692 was a good speaker, expert on the 1918 pandemic.

2693 Did that answer your question? He was a  
2694 scientific adviser, and he also did some mentoring of

2695 scientists in our intramural program a couple,  
2696 helping them.

2697 Q Was he helping more in communication, or  
2698 was it more just an adviser, a strategic adviser of  
2699 some kind?

2700 A You know, kind of both. He wrote some  
2701 papers with Dr. Fauci. And he was an adviser because  
2702 he knew a lot about disease emergences and he's  
2703 written about them for 40 years. He is a good  
2704 resource.

2705 Q All right.

2706 Mr. Slobodin. Well, I appreciate your time.  
2707 Thank you.

2708 The Witness. Thank you.

2709 BY MR. BENZINE.

2710 Q Just kind of one follow-up question. Have  
2711 you had any communications with Dr. Morens since you  
2712 left NIAID?

2713 A So that's -- I spoke to him once. There  
2714 was a health concern that I heard about from a mutual  
2715 friend and I called him about that, and he's okay.  
2716 And there may have been another such call, but that's  
2717 the extent of it.

2718 Q No communications about congressional  
2719 oversight efforts?

2720 A No. When we spoke, he told me he had a  
2721 lawyer and that was it. He didn't tell me the name  
2722 of the lawyer. He was cagey. And at that point, I'm  
2723 not sure I had been scheduled for this event, so we  
2724 didn't really go there.

2725 Q Okay.

2726 Mr. Benzine. That is all I have. John, do you  
2727 have anything before we go off?

2728 Mr. Strom. Nothing from me, thank you.

2729 Mr. Benzine. All right. We can go off the  
2730 record.

2731 [Whereupon, at 1:50 p.m., the taking of the  
2732 instant interview ceased.]