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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

August 19, 2021

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

The Honorable Francis Collins  
Director  
National Institutes of Health  
9000 Rockville Pike  
Rockville, MD 20892

Dear Secretary Becerra and Director Collins:

On August 17, 2021, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) produced approximately 200 pages of heavily redacted emails in response to our June 11, 2021 letter.<sup>1</sup> This production included redacted emails from National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) official Ping Chen, concerning her report on a visit to the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in 2017.<sup>2</sup>

Based on other documents in our possession, including a January 19, 2018 State Department cable regarding safety concerns at the WIV, we are concerned that HHS has redacted important information potentially relating to these safety issues. Below is a timeline regarding Ping Chen's 2017 report and the January 2018 cable about the WIV:

- **October 24, 2017:** Ping Chen visits the WIV prior to it going live as a Bio Safety Level 4 lab.<sup>3</sup>
- **October 26, 2017:** Ping Chen sends an email to Gray Handley, NIAID Associate Director for International Research Affairs, and other colleagues regarding her trip to the Wuhan lab. An unredacted portion of this email is below:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Ron Johnson, Ranking Member, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, et al., to Xavier Becerra, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services, and Francis Collins, Director, National Institutes of Health, June 11, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> According to her emails, Ping Chen is the "Director of NIAID Office in China, Office of Global Research, NIAID, NIH."

<sup>3</sup> Freedom of Information Act Production to Judicial Watch, Inc., from, Department of Health and Human Services, Email from Ping Chen to Gray Handley, Apr. 16, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Production to Ron Johnson, Ranking Member, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, at JohNIH-00004166, Email from Ping Chen to Gray Handley, et al., Oct. 26, 2017.

**From:** Chen, Ping (NIH/NIAID) [E]  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 26, 2017 5:01 AM  
**To:** Handley, Gray (NIH/NIAID) [E]; Bernabe, Gayle (NIH/NIAID) [E]; Meegan, James (NIH/NIAID) [E]; Rosa, William (NIH/NIAID) [E]  
**Subject:** trip report

Hi,

This week I went to Wuhan to visit the Bio safety lab 4 in Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), an institute under the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS). My contact who helped arrange the visit is Dr. Zhengli Shi, who is a Chinese collaborator on a NIAID grant to EcoHealth for SARS like corona virus project.

The P4 lab is located in a new developing zone about one hour car ride from the current institute location in central Wuhan city. The location will be the new campus for the entire institute in the near future (a lot of construction is going on right now). Since we are not allowed to take photos so only the photo from the outside is attached.

- **November 6, 2017:** Gray Handley emails Ping Chen, “Please send us by e-mail your full report on the visit and then we can decide what to do with that information.”<sup>5</sup>
- **November 22, 2017:** Ping Chen emails Gray Handley and other NIAID officials with a copy of her written report, noting that the “[Environment, Science, Technology, and Health] ESTH has been working with the health group in the embassy for cables.”<sup>6</sup>
- **November 27, 2017:** Gray Handley responds to Ping Chen and states, “**P.S. There is enough good information in your report that it needs to be shared in some form or another.**”<sup>7</sup>
- **January 19, 2018:** The Beijing Embassy issues a cable with the subject line: China Opens First Bio Safety Level 4 Laboratory. The cable identifies safety concerns at the WIV.
  - For example, “[d]uring interactions with scientists at the WIV laboratory, they noted that the new lab has a serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at JohNIH-00004164, Email from Gray Handley to Ping Chen, et al., Nov. 6, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at JohNIH-00004163, Email from Ping Chen to Gray Handley, et al., Nov. 22, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* Email from Gray Handley to Ping Chen, et al., Nov. 27, 2017 (emphasis added).

and investigators needed to safely operate this high-containment laboratory.”<sup>8</sup>

- **April 14, 2020:** Josh Rogin publishes an article in the *Washington Post* about the January 19, 2018 State Department cable and the safety concerns at the WIV.<sup>9</sup>
- **April 15-16, 2020:** Ping Chen emails Gray Handley about the January 19, 2018 cable stating, “I was listed as drafter. About half of the content was taken from my [visit] summary.”<sup>10</sup>

Based on this April 2020 correspondence, it appears that Chen’s November 2017 report partially served as the basis for the January 2018 cable that raised safety concerns about the Wuhan lab. However, because of HHS’s redactions and incomplete document production, it is unclear whether Chen raised similar safety concerns to her colleagues in the enclosed email chain regarding her trip to the Wuhan lab. If Chen did raise safety concerns about the Wuhan lab to NIAID and National Institutes of Health officials as early as November 2017, it is unclear what actions, if any, those officials took.

The enclosed email chain is one of many examples of how HHS’s redactions are inhibiting legitimate oversight into the agency’s awareness of safety issues at the Wuhan lab and the origins of COVID-19. Accordingly, we request you to produce following information immediately:

1. A complete unredacted copy of Ping Chen’s report on her visit to the WIV on October 24, 2017; and
2. All unredacted communications referring or relating to Ping Chen’s report on her visit to the WIV in October 2017, including but not limited to the enclosed email chain.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson  
Ranking Member  
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations



Rand Paul  
United States Senator

Enclosure

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<sup>8</sup> Cable from U.S. Embassy in Beijing, China Opens First Bio Safety Level 4 Laboratory, Jan. 19, 2018 at 2 [on file with staff].

<sup>9</sup> Josh Rogin, State Department cables warned of safety issues at Wuhan lab studying bat coronaviruses, Apr. 14, 2020, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/04/14/state-department-cables-warned-safety-issues-wuhan-lab-studying-bat-coronaviruses/>.

<sup>10</sup> Freedom of Information Act Production to Judicial Watch, Inc., from, Department of Health and Human Services Emails from Ping Chen to Gray Handley, Apr. 15-16, 2020.