

June 24, 2021

Dr. Francis Collins
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20892

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci
Director
National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
5601 Fishes Lane
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Collins and Dr. Fauci:

I write with grave concern about the latest allegations of a COVID-19 cover-up. New public reporting suggests that Chinese researchers directed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to purge gene sequences of COVID-19 cases from a key NIH database.¹ The deleted information could be critical for understanding how the virus spread and where it came from. These deletions are alarming and merit a full congressional and law enforcement investigation.

The NIH has since stated that “submitting investigators hold the rights to their data.” But that’s not what the NIH says in its public materials. It says removal of information is disfavored and is only permitted pursuant to specific protocols that do not appear to have been followed here. But moreover, why the NIH would agree to remove key data about COVID-19 in the midst of the most severe public health crisis in a century is unfathomable. It appears the removal of this data from this database was not done for scientific purposes. Rather, it could have been done to obscure the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) role in the origins of COVID-19, especially given the researchers’ apparent affiliation with Wuhan University—an institution controlled by the CCP.² American taxpayer-funded public health databases should be transparent and objective; they should not be subject to foreign influence.

In order to properly investigate the origins of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic—and to prevent future pandemics from occurring—investigators need access to information. These efforts are already hampered by the paucity of data from the early cases of the virus in Wuhan. Yet I’m growing concerned that the NIH is not taking the CCP’s

¹ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-gene-data-that-could-have-aided-research-on-early-epidemic-removed-from-database-11624472105>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/23/science/coronavirus-sequences.html>

obstruction and its motives seriously, especially following evidence that NIH dollars may have found their way to the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

These newly reported actions raise serious questions about what other data Chinese-based researchers have sought to purge from the American scientific community. The American people need to know the extent of the CCP's influence at the NIH and the CCP's role in obscuring the origins of a pandemic that has claimed over 600,000 American lives. Please answer the following questions by July 1, 2021:

1. Please provide a full accounting of COVID-19 sequences that the NIH has purged from its Sequence Read Archive since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Include the name of the researchers, the nationality of the researchers, the reason requested for purging the sequences, the NIH's rationale for purging the sequences, the date the request for the deletion was made, and the date at which the sequences were purged.
2. According to a Q&A for the Sequence Read Archive, the NIH states that its preference is to update rather than delete data submitted to the database.³ Further, the NIH indicates that it follows the policy of the International Nucleotide Sequence Database Collaboration (INSDC) with respect to withdrawal and suppression requests.⁴ Pursuant to the INSDC guidelines, under what "status" were the Chinese researchers' COVID-19 sequences submitted?
3. Were any conditions requested by the Chinese researchers on the availability of their submitted material upon the submission of the COVID-19 sequences to the Sequence Read Archive? And were any conditions granted?
4. Please describe the full process for evaluating requests for deletions of submitted material to the Sequence Read Archive. Who approves these requests for deletion?
5. Does the NIH have safeguards in place to protect data from deletion that is critical to the nation's response to a public health emergency?
6. How did the purging of COVID-19 sequences at the behest of Chinese researchers impede the United States' ability to develop therapeutics and vaccines to treat and otherwise respond to the COVID-19 pandemic?
7. How has the purging of COVID-19 sequences at the behest of Chinese researchers impeded the United States' ability to determine the origins of COVID-19?
8. Did the request for purging the COVID-19 sequences from the Sequence Read Archive raise any red flags that Chinese researchers might be attempting to conceal the origins of COVID-19 at the behest of the Chinese government? Please provide

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sra/docs/submitupdate/>

⁴ <http://www.insdc.org/documents/insdc-status-document>

documents of all internal communication at the NIH, including e-mails, that concern the deletion of these COVID-19 genetic sequences.

9. Did any staff member at NIH raise concerns about a Chinese researcher requesting the deletion of COVID-origins data during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?
10. What other scientific data, even outside of COVID-19 related information, have Chinese researchers affiliated with the CCP requested be removed from any NIH database?

I am sending a copy of this letter to the intelligence and law enforcement communities so they can take action as is appropriate. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Hawley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Josh Hawley
United States Senator

CC:

The Honorable Avril Haines
Director of National Intelligence
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
Washington, DC 20511

The Honorable Christopher Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20535