



United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

March 6, 2023

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Avril Haines, J.D.
Director of National Intelligence
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
1500 Tysons McLean Drive
McLean, V.A. 22102

Dear Director Haines:

Nearly three years have passed since the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 and the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC) has not reached a consensus about the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic which has killed over 1.1 million Americans.^{1,2} The Intelligence Community (IC) was tasked on May 26, 2021 to spend 90 days evaluating all intelligence related to the pandemic origins and report their assessments to the White House at the conclusion of the focused analysis. The decision to limit the review to only the IC rather than direct a whole-of-government investigation all but eliminated the U.S. government's ability to openly share assessment results with any meaningful transparency.

We write to request that you immediately deliver to Congress each IC assessment used and relied upon by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) for its consensus publications.³ The Wall Street Journal's February 26, 2023 report that the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) joined the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in its assessment in favor of a lab leak origin was widely communicated.⁴

¹ World Health Organization, *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic*, Emergencies (Feb. 27, 2023) available at <https://www.who.int/europe/emergencies/situations/covid-19>.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Case, Death & Laboratory Testing Trends by Location*, COVID Data Tracker, (Feb. 27, 2023) available at <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases-deaths-testing-trends>.

³ Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), Press Release: Intelligence Community Statement on Origins of COVID-19, April 30, 2020, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/press-releases/item/2112-intelligence-community-statement-on-origins-of-covid-19>.

See also ODNI, Press Release: Unclassified Summary of Assessment on COVID-19 Origins, August 27, 2021, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2021/item/2236-unclassified-summary-of-assessment-on-covid-19-originsunclassified>.

See also ODNI, Press Release: Declassified Assessment on COVID-19 Origins, October 29, 2021, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2021/item/2263-declassified-assessment-on-covid-19-origins>.

⁴ Gordon, Michael and Warren Strobel, Lab Leak Most Likely Origin of COVID-19 Pandemic, Energy Department Says, The Wall Street Journal (Feb. 26, 2022) available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-origin-china-lab-leak-807b7b0a>.

While we acknowledge that ODNI delivered its new classified COVID-19 origins short update summary to Congress the following day, we request the actual individual IC element assessments, to include memoranda; emails; interim and final assessments provided by each IC element, and any other information considered. Congress should be able to review the independent evaluations without filters, ambiguity or interpretations of the intelligence. There is clear bipartisan support in Congress to make these assessments available immediately in full as evidenced by the unanimous March 1, 2023, Senate passage of the COVID-19 Origin Act to declassify information related to the origin of COVID-19.⁵

Secondly, we request a detailed briefing about the process ODNI used to synthesize and develop each final publication and how records from non-IC elements, such as those from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) were obtained and included in the analysis. We request to be briefed about how ODNI ensured that the conclusions represented in the final publications were the most accurate analysis of intelligence derived from all sources. For example, did ODNI assign equal weight to IC assessments or did ODNI weigh assessments accordingly when considering the unique expertise in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as both an investigative and intelligence agency, which employs law enforcement special agents and bioforensic scientists, among other experts. We also request ODNI to address how any differences in analytic judgment were fully considered and brought to the attention of the White House.

Finally, we are concerned that the world-class credentials of the scientists and other experts in the IC elements were not matched by ODNI reviewers. If ODNI does not make all IC individual assessments available to Congress, then it will be important for ODNI to provide full descriptions of the credentials, training, experience, and job titles about each individual involved in ODNI's synthesis of IC assessments, to include all detailees, individuals on interagency personnel agreements, unpaid and paid consultants, federal contractors and political appointees. It will also be important for ODNI to provide that same information about each individual who accompanied or presented the ODNI IC consensus reports to the White House.

The COVID-19 origins investigation has been obfuscated by the Chinese Communist government's lack of cooperation. We and the American public expect better behavior from our own government. During a February 27, 2023 press conference about a new intelligence assessment by the Department of Energy (DOE), John Kirby, the White House National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications, stated, "If we have something that we believe can be reported to Congress and the American people, that we're confident in, we will absolutely do that."⁶ The ODNI has failed to be transparent with Congress and the American people by standardizing agency conclusions and thereby ignoring the breadth of scientific and other expertise in each agency. By shielding the independent IC element results, ODNI failed to publicly inform the American people that the FBI and DOE assessed that the first SARS-CoV-2 human infection was most likely the result of a laboratory-associated incident. It is time for the Administration to declassify the assessments, make the information available to the public, and start rebuilding the public's trust through transparency.

We look forward to your swift attention to this matter and request a response by March 20, 2023.

Sincerely,

⁵ The Senate also unanimously passed this bill as S.1867 in the 117 Congress. For the current bill, see S.619 – *A bill to require the Director of National Intelligence to declassify information relating to the origin of COVID-19, and for other purposes*, (Mar. 1, 2023) available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/619?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22COVID%5Cu201319+Origin+Act+of%22%5D%7D&s=1&r=1>.

⁶ C-Span, *White House Press Conference*, NSC Strategic Communications Coordinator, John Kirby (Feb. 27, 2023) available at <https://twitter.com/cspan/status/1630298129386856456?s=20>.



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United States Senator



Chuck E. Grassley
United States Senator



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator



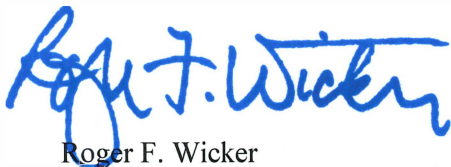
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