

United States Senate

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION
JUDICIARY
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

March 1, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

The COVID 19 pandemic has taken a significant toll on American life as well as the U.S. economy. Test kits, antibody therapies, and vaccine development have occurred in record time due to Operation Warp Speed and the ingenuity of the private sector. However, the investigation into the origins of the pandemic are not complete. Without this knowledge, it will be difficult to prevent a future, similar pandemic. I urge you to use your leadership to ensure investigations by the World Health Organization (WHO) are free from conflicts of interest.

Concerns have been raised about the lack of transparency of the events that took place at the time the outbreak started in Wuhan, China.¹ In addition, concerns have been raised regarding the manner in which World Health Organization investigators were chosen to study the outbreak and some of the conflicts of interest that exist in those investigators.^{2,3}

Following the 2014 breakdown of security measures that resulted in cross contamination with a dangerous bird flu strain and the accidental mailing of live anthrax spores from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to other labs, Tom Frieden, the director of the CDC under president Obama testified “We also need to encourage a culture of openness and effective reporting of past or future incidents – since a key aspect of effective response is to support rapid reporting of problems.”⁴

On February 13, 2021, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said, “We have deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the COVID-19 investigation were communicated and questions about the process used to reach them. It is imperative that this report be

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/30/asia/wuhan-china-covid-intl/index.html>

² <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-03402-1>

³ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/who-are-the-covid-investigators-11613401955>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/washington/testimony/2014/t20140716.htm>

independent, with expert findings free from intervention or alteration by the Chinese government.”⁵

Transparency is an issue upon which we can agree. In light of that, I respectfully request you use your leadership to ensure the ongoing investigation of the COVID-19 pandemic origin be free from conflict of interest. WHO should be required to have independent investigators to conduct this study. WHO should not include researchers with conflicts of interest or with a lack of experience in forensic investigation. We owe this to the over 500,000 Americans who have died from this disease, to their families, and to future Americans who face possible pandemics.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marsha Blackburn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator

⁵<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/13/statement-by-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan/>