

Republicans revive discredited Wuhan Lab Leak theory and call Anthony Fauci to testify

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16 February 2023

On Monday, February 13, 2023, the Republican chair of the House Select Committee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, Brad Wenstrup of Ohio, and the Republican chair of the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, James Comer of Kentucky, requested in writing that former Chief Medical Advisor to President Biden, Dr. Anthony Fauci, and the president of the EcoHealth Alliance, Dr. Peter Daszak, respond to questions.

The two committees are seeking to revive the repeatedly discredited conspiracy theory that China created SARS-CoV-2 in a lab in Wuhan, from which it was released, either deliberately or accidentally. The Select Committee was created by the new House of Representatives, now under Republican control, but House Democrats are cooperating in this probe and have filled their allotted seats on the panel without objection.

The request on Monday by the Republican chairmen is a follow-up to their December 13, 2022 letter that demanded senior Biden administration officials, Dr. Daszak, and, for the first time, the scientists who authored and published the preliminary report titled, “The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2” in March 2020, sit for transcribed interviews.

The scientists’ finding of a natural origin for SARS-CoV-2, published as “correspondence” in the highly respected *Nature Medicine* journal, has been accessed on-line close to six million times and cited in more than 2,000 media outlets, according to *The Intercept*. The influential report was in response to concerns that peculiarities in the genome of the coronavirus raised the possibility that it had been engineered.

However, after Dr. Fauci assembled an international team of evolutionary virologists to collaborate on the “origin” question, the resulting evidence led the scientists to conclude that while they could not yet determine the exact path of the natural origin, “... the evidence shows that SARS-CoV-2 is not a purposefully manipulated virus ...” They added that “since we observed all notable SARS-CoV-2 features ... in related coronaviruses in nature, we do not believe that any type of laboratory-based scenario is plausible.”

After three years of further investigation into the origin of SARS-CoV-2, not a shred of evidence has been found to support the reactionary Wuhan lab leak conspiracy theory, which claims that the virus was engineered and released, accidentally or deliberately. Nonetheless, attempts to perpetuate this monstrous lie continue, because of political motives rather than scientific considerations.

Three major studies since the “Proximal Origin” paper have

confirmed that the original epicenter of the COVID pandemic was the wet market in Wuhan where live wildlife was sold and traded, and animal handlers had become infected. These studies were carried out by both Chinese researchers and international epidemiologists and evolutionary biologists, who reached similar conclusions. Dr. Michael Worobey, evolutionary biologist at the University of Arizona and author of the one of those studies, noted, “When you look at all the evidence together, it’s an extraordinary clear picture that the pandemic started at the Huanan market!”

These later studies were further corroborated by recent field research conducted on bat coronaviruses that found coronaviruses like SARS-CoV-2 are common in the Southeast Asian peninsula, providing further supporting evidence to the natural origin theory, which is the dominant perspective of the overwhelming majority of reputable scientists in the field. Indeed, nearly all pandemics begin as spillover events from animals to humans.

Yet the December 13, 2022 letter, and the following request by the committees on Monday, were carefully planned to undermine the highly critical and important work these scientists have done, by subjecting their findings to innuendos and political attacks to induce the public to accept the bald-faced lie they have been promoting from day one: that the Chinese Communist Party engineered the virus and released it into the world.

Representative Comer said in the December 13, 2022 letter, “Discovering the origin of COVID-19 is vital to providing accountability and protecting Americans in the future. Mounting evidence points to the virus originating from a leak at the Wuhan lab. EcoHealth Alliance, a U.S. National Institutes of Health grantee, passed taxpayer funds to the Wuhan lab to conduct gain of function research on bat coronaviruses—research that may have started the pandemic. Dr. Fauci was warned early on that the virus appeared man-made and pointed to a lab leak and instead of blowing the whistle may have attempted to cover it up.”

In Monday’s letter, Wenstrup said, “The American people deserve real answers after years of suffering through the coronavirus pandemic and related government policies ... Government scientists and government-funded researchers have so far been less than forthcoming on their knowledge and actions, including work with the Wuhan Institute of Virology and potential pandemic pathogens.”

Comer added, “Evidence continues to mount pointing to the virus leaking from an unsecure [sic] lab in Wuhan. We know

EcoHealth Alliance acted as a middleman, improperly funneling thousands of taxpayer dollars to the Wuhan lab to conduct risky gain-of-function research on bat coronaviruses which could have started the pandemic. Dr. Fauci was alerted early on that COVID-19 had markings of a manipulated virus yet may have chosen to cover it up instead of blowing the whistle.”

The “origin” of the current attempt to reignite the Wuhan Lab Leak lie stems from the hack job by then Republican Senator Richard Burr, ranking member of the Senate’s Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, whose minority staff wrote a 35-page interim report concluding, “Based on the analysis of the publicly available information, it appears reasonable to conclude that the COVID-19 pandemic was, more likely than not, the result of a research-related incident.” Interestingly, some of the evidence cited by the minority staff report is based on a now largely discredited *ProPublica/Vanity Fair* article by Jeffery Kao and Katherine Eban.

Answers to these “origin” questions by experts like Drs. Kristian Andersen, Robert Garry, and Edward Holmes been repeatedly printed in full and available to the public in numerous publications running the gamut of political tendencies. In a lengthy interview published in the *New York Times* in June 2020, Dr. Andersen explained that when he and his colleagues first met to discuss the “origin” question, “the features of SARS-CoV-2 that we identified based on early analyses ... didn’t appear to have an obvious immediate evolutionary precursor. We hadn’t yet performed more in-depth analyses to reach a conclusion. Rather, [we] were sharing our preliminary observations.”

He then responded to the question about the implausibility of the “laboratory-based scenario” in a manner that appeared to sense the political implications of their work. Quoting him in full, he said:

The features in SARS-CoV-2 that initially suggested possible engineering were identified in related coronaviruses, meaning that features that initially looked unusual to us weren’t.

Many of these analyses were completed in a matter of days, while we worked around the clock, which allowed us to reject our preliminary hypothesis that SARS-CoV-2 might have been engineered, while other “lab”-based scenarios were still on the table.

Yet more extensive analyses, significant additional data, and thorough investigations to compare genomic diversity more broadly across coronaviruses led to the peer-reviewed study published in *Nature Medicine*. For example, we looked at data from coronaviruses found in other species, such as bats and pangolins, which demonstrated that the features that first appeared unique to SARS-CoV-2 were in fact found in other, related viruses.

Overall, this is a textbook example of the scientific method where a preliminary hypothesis is rejected in favor of a competing hypothesis after more data become available and analyses are completed.

explained as Edward as August 2022,

leak theory rests on an unfortunate coincidence: that SARS-CoV-2 emerged in a city with a laboratory that works on bat coronaviruses. Some of these bat coronaviruses are closely related to SARS-CoV-2. But not close enough to be direct ancestors. Sadly, the focus on the Wuhan Institute of Virology has distracted us from a far more important connection: That, like SARS-CoV-1 [which emerged in 2002] before it, there’s a direct link between a coronavirus outbreak and a live animal market. Consider the odds that a virus that leaked from a lab was first detected at the very place where you would expect it to emerge if in fact had a natural animal origin—vanishingly low. And these odds drop further as we need to link both the A and B lineages to the market [molecular epidemiology found two lineages of the virus were present in the same region within weeks of each other—Lineage B around 18 November 2019 and Lineage A within a few weeks of the first event].”

Clearly, the intention of the Republican-led hearings is to function as an inquisition to not only tarnish the reputation of these principled scientists but to also demand the subordination of scientific inquiry to political diktats.

The Biden administration and the entire state apparatus have declared the pandemic over, demanding the end to all emergency funds in support of the population still reeling from the mass debilitating event including the continued catastrophic loss of 1.2 million lives just in America.

At the same time, the representatives of the financial oligarchs in both parties are all too anxious to take the opportunity to scapegoat China for the outbreak and subsequent pandemic that has wrought social misery on an unprecedented scale. This is part of the propaganda campaign to prepare the public for war with a country of 1.4 billion people who are now facing their own coronavirus catastrophe since the Chinese Communist Party abandoned its Zero-COVID policy. As many as 1 to 1.5 million Chinese, most of them working class, have died, according to unofficial estimates.



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