

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 27, 2021

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

Dear Dr. Fauci:

In a May 2020 interview with National Geographic, when asked about the origins of SARS-CoV-2, you appeared to confidently assert that the virus originated naturally. More recently, however, in a statement made during an interview with PolitiFact you indicated a lower level of confidence in a natural origin and called for continued efforts to investigate the matter. In order to better understand your evolving opinion, I request information related to your statements on SARS-CoV-2's origin.

In a May 2020 interview, when asked specifically about the potential for a laboratory origin of SARS-CoV-2, you appeared to be dismissive of the possibility that a laboratory played any part in the origin of the virus. In fact, you decisively stated, “[i]f you look at the evolution of the virus in bats, and what’s out there now is very, very strongly leaning toward this [virus] could not have been artificially or deliberately manipulated.”¹

One year later, on May 11, 2021, in an interview with PolitiFact you appeared to be less confident that the virus originated in nature. Instead of echoing your comment from a year ago, you stated:

No, I am not convinced about that. I think that we should continue to investigate what went on in China until we find out to the best of our ability exactly what happened. Certainly the people who investigated it say it likely was the emergence from an animal reservoir that then infected individuals but it could have been something else.²

¹ Nsikan Akpan and Victoria Jaggard, *Fauci: No scientific evidence the coronavirus was made in a Chinese lab*, National Geographic, May 4, 2020, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/anthony-fauci-no-scientific-evidence-the-coronavirus-was-made-in-a-chinese-lab-cvd#close>.

² *United Facts of America Day 2: Join PolitiFact in conversation with Dr. Anthony Fauci after a year of dangerous misinformation and a public health crisis*, PolitiFact, May 11, 2021, (<https://www.pscptv.com/w/1ZkKzereynoxv>) (Statement of Dr. Anthony Fauci beginning at 12:04, transcribed from audio).

Even though you expressed that you were “not convinced” that the virus had occurred naturally, days later, you apparently told a reporter that it is “highly likely” that the virus occurred naturally, but that “no one is 100% sure.”³ The ambiguity of your recent statements about the virus’ origins raises questions regarding your assertion from a year ago when you confidently stated that the virus could not have been manipulated and that it occurred naturally.

Further, your high level of confidence in rejecting a potential laboratory origin in May 2020 is perplexing, given that public reports highlighted safety concerns at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV). Specifically, on April 14, 2020, the Washington Post published an article about information contained in two 2018 State Department cables where U.S. diplomats expressed concerns about the safety of the Wuhan laboratory.⁴ It is not clear whether you had knowledge of the safety concerns at the WIV when you made your statement on the virus’ origins in May 2020. It would be troubling if you were not aware of those concerns, given that taxpayer money went to the laboratory through a National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases grant.⁵ It would also be troubling that if, at the time of your statement in May 2020, you were aware of the concerns raised in these cables, and yet, you still dismissed the possibility that a laboratory could have played a part in the origins of SARS-CoV-2.

Since 2020, your comments on this pandemic have shaped the public’s perception and understanding of the virus and its origin. Because your most recent comments on the virus’ origin appear inconsistent with your statement last year, I ask that you provide the following information by no later than June 10, 2021:

1. Please explain what evidence you relied on in asserting in May 2020 that the SARS-CoV-2 virus was more likely to have emerged from a natural origin.
2. Please explain what evidence you relied on in May 2020 to reject the possibility that the virus originated in a laboratory.
3. Please indicate what, if any, knowledge you had about the 2018 State Department cables.⁶ If you had knowledge of those cables did you factor the safety concerns at the WIV into your May 2020 assertion about the virus’ origin?

³ Tweet by Weijia Jiang, May 24, 2021 (<https://twitter.com/weijia/status/1396913345815617539?s=20>).

⁴ Josh Rogin, State Department cables warned of safety issues at Wuhan lab studying bat coronaviruses, Wash. Post, Apr. 14, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/04/14/state-department-cables-warned-safety-issues-wuhan-lab-studying-bat-coronaviruses/>.

⁵ Tyler Olson, Fauci defends 'modest' collaboration with Wuhan scientists, says NIH didn't fund 'gain of function' research, Fox News, May 25, 2021, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/fauci-gain-of-function-wuhan-collaboration-spillover>.

⁶ Josh Rogin, State Department cables warned of safety issues at Wuhan lab studying bat coronaviruses, Wash. Post, Apr. 14, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/04/14/state-department-cables-warned-safety-issues-wuhan-lab-studying-bat-coronaviruses/>.

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4. Please explain what evidence led you to lowering your confidence in a natural origin for SARS-CoV-2 on May 11, 2021.
5. Please explain what evidence you relied on in determining on May 24, 2021 that it is still “highly likely” that SARS-CoV-2 is of natural origin.
6. Please explain what information and data you relied on to determine that the potential laboratory origin of SARS-CoV-2 is not as likely as a natural origin.
7. Please specify when you concluded that the virus’ origins should be thoroughly investigated.⁷ Please explain how you reached this conclusion.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson
U.S. Senator

⁷ Tweet by Weijia Jiang, May 24, 2021 (<https://twitter.com/weijia/status/1396913345815617539?s=20>).