

INVESTIGATING THE PROXIMAL ORIGIN
OF A COVER-UP

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS
PANDEMIC
OF THE

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

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Written opening statements and the written statements of the witnesses are available on the U.S. House of Representatives Document Repository at: docs.house.gov.

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Documents entered into the record during this hearing are listed below.

- * Working Paper, Chretien and Cutlip, "Critical Analysis of Andersen *et al.* The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2"; submitted by Rep. Wenstrup.
- * Overview, Department of Health and Human Services; submitted by Rep. Dingell.
- * Democratic Staff Report, July 2023; submitted by Rep. Ruiz.
- * Questions for the record to: Dr. Andersen; submitted by Rep. Mfume.
- * Questions for the record to: Dr. Garry; submitted by Rep. Mfume.

Documents are available at: docs.house.gov.

INVESTIGATING THE PROXIMAL ORIGIN OF A COVER-UP

Tuesday, July 11, 2023

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:02 a.m. in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Brad R. Wenstrup (Chairman of the Subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Wenstrup, Malliotakis, Miller-Meeks, Lesko, Cloud, Joyce, Greene, Jackson of Texas, McCormick, Jordan, Comer, Ruiz, Dingell, Mfume, Ross, Bera, Tokuda and Raskin.

Dr Wenstrup. The Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic will come to order. Welcome, everyone.

Without objection, the chair may declare a recess at any time. Pursuant to rule 7D of the Committee on Oversight and Accountability, and at the discretion of Chairman Comer, Mr. Jordan, a Member of the full Committee, may participate in today's hearing for the purposes of questions.

Pursuant to rule 9D with the Committee on Oversight and Accountability, and at the discretion of the Chair, the Select Subcommittee may recognize staff for questions for a period not to exceed 15 minutes per side after all Members that wish to be recognized have been.

I now recognize myself for the purpose of making an opening statement.

Today, the Select Subcommittee is holding a hearing to examine the drafting, publication, and critical reception of the publication entitled *The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2*. "Proximal Origin" came to two primary conclusions: First, that COVID-19 is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus; and second, that no type of laboratory-based scenario is plausible.

This is not an attack on science, it's not an attack on peer review, and it's not an attack on an individual. We're examining whether government officials, regardless of who they are, unfairly and perhaps biasedly tipped the scale toward a preferred origin theory. We're examining any conflicts of interest, biases, or suppression of scientific discourse regarding the origins of COVID-19.

And we're examining the science of proximal origin, because while I believe it's not solely a scientific question, the science be-

hind the origins is vital. In one word, we're examining the scientific methodology applied to the origins question.

In my mind at this point, I view the processes to be flawed. If we're to do better in the future, we must make every effort to mend our flaws.

And overall, we're examining whether scientific integrity was disregarded in favor of political expediency, maybe to conceal or diminish the government's relationship with the Wuhan Institute of Virology or perhaps its funding of risky, gain-of-function coronavirus research, or maybe to avoid blaming China for any complicity, intended or otherwise, in a pandemic that has killed more than 1 million Americans and has had a crushing effect on all of humankind.

In the earliest stages of the pandemic, scientists and public health authorities raced to understand this novel coronavirus—called “novel” for good reason—to understand how it's spread, who is at risk, its origins, and most importantly, how to prevent loss of life.

As work advanced gradually on most of these fronts, the origins question stalled. Did it come from a natural spillover transferred from a bat to an intermediate source to a human, or was it the result of a laboratory or research-related accident? In other words, did it come from a lab?

Honestly, we may never know with 100 percent certainty the origins of COVID-19, especially without full, legitimate cooperation and transparency from all involved.

However, we do know some things for certain, that the drafting, coordination, and publication of Proximal Origin and downplaying the lab leak was antithetical to science. Not my words, that's what Dr. Redfield, the former CDC director and renowned virologist, testified to our Select Subcommittee in March.

He testified that science never selects a single narrative. We foster debate, and we're confident that with debate, science will eventually get to truth.

Did we do that?

That wasn't the case with Proximal Origin. Dr. Andersen, testifying today, wrote that the authors' main work over the past couple of weeks have been focused on trying to disprove any type of lab theory.

While it's true that the scientific method consists of raising a hypothesis and then testing the hypothesis, often through falsifiability, it's not true, nor appropriate, to make definitive conclusions based on falsification process, riddled with assumptions. Assumptions are not science.

To be clear, the goal of science is to prove and disprove. Regardless, it would be seemingly misleading to assume that Proximal Origin proved or disproved anything it sought to test.

Its conclusion is flawed as it relies on unsupported assumptions, including guessing what a hypothetical scientist would do in hypothetical experiments.

The facts are that the authors of Proximal Origin ultimately took a one-sided, educated guess. They guessed that in the previous three years science would discover a furin cleavage site in a SARS-related virus or viruses, and it didn't.

They guessed that maybe the WIV, the Wuhan Institute of Virology, wasn't working with pangolin viruses. And they were wrong, as related by ODNI, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Perhaps most troubling, it appears that the authors' views on a potential lab leak changed abruptly after the February 1 conference call with Drs. Fauci and Collins. The authors continued their pursuit to disprove the lab leak theory and fully support the nature theory, employing faulty assumptions and willfully ignoring circumstantial evidence that tended to support a lab leak hypothesis.

Why? Why?

They also tended to act more akin to politicians than scientists. Dr. Rambaut, Dr. Fauci, Dr. Collins all expressed concerns that the lab leak theory, if verified, would have significant, international, political implications particularly for China.

Dr. Fauci also wrote that downplaying a lab leak would limit the chance of new biosafety discussions that would unnecessarily obstruct future attempts of virus culturing.

These are quotes.

Why try to avoid biosafety discussions when people are dying? Science should be clear, even when politics are not.

On April 16, Dr. Collins expressed dismay that Proximal Origin didn't fully squash the lab leak theory and asked Dr. Fauci if there was anything more they could do to put it down.

I want to pause on "anything more we can do" for a second. That would suggest that they already did do something. Maybe this was a reference to Proximal Origin. I don't know for sure.

But on the very next day, on April 17, 2020, Dr. Fauci cited Proximal Origin from the White House podium when asked if COVID-19 leaked from a lab. He used Proximal Origin to downplay the lab leak theory. Why? Based on what absolute truth?

The question as to the origins of COVID-19 is fundamental to helping us predict and prevent future pandemics, protect our health and our national security, and prepare the United States for the future and to save lives.

I look forward to a strong, on-topic discussion today. I would now like to recognize Ranking Member Ruiz for the purpose of making an opening statement.

Dr. RUIZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Three years ago, when reports emerged of a deadly, highly transmissible, novel virus, the race to better understand this threat and how we could fight it began.

Scientists, doctors, and public health officials from across the globe sought to answer key questions like how the virus spread, how it would impact our most vulnerable, and what we could do to treat it.

While now we have those answers, one mystery remains unsolved. How did this virus even come to be in the first place? Since the first outbreak of COVID-19, researchers in the scientific community have worked tirelessly to get to the bottom of this very issue.

Our intelligence community has conducted a sweeping assessment of the novel coronavirus' origins at President Biden's direction.

So, let me just remind everybody here, there is currently no consensus on how this virus came to be. Whether it came from a lab or from nature is still unknown. Two Federal agencies still assess, with low and moderate confidence that the virus originated in a lab, and four government agencies still assess, with low confidence, that the virus came about through natural transmission.

While the facts remain unknown, we should let our expert communities continue to do their jobs while we, as lawmakers, focus on policies to help prevent the next pandemic and save future lives.

But instead of doing that, we are here interrogating researchers who wrote a paper three years ago so that my colleagues can push a partisan narrative and disparage our Nation's public health officials and institutions in the process.

So, let's just be clear. This isn't about building trust in public health and science. No, it's about tearing it down, about manufacturing a problem and manufacturing distrust to justify an extreme partisan agenda. It's about scoring political points by maligning public health officials who worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to reduce harm and save lives.

What's worse is, the preconceived conclusions being pushed create confirmation bias that inhibits experts from conducting objective, politics-free, scientific, and intelligence investigations, to actually help us understand the virus' origins in order to prevent and prepare for the next pandemic.

Nearly five months have gone by since the start of this Select Subcommittee. Since then, we focused on the wrong priorities and wasted time on this hyper partisan investigation which, by the way, has ended up disproving my Republican colleagues' own theory.

So, let's go over the facts. The crux of their theory rests on a February 2020 conference call where they say Drs. Fauci and Collins began a campaign to suppress the lab leak theory.

Their own investigation has thus far revealed the opposite. In fact, documents and interview testimony provided to the Select Subcommittee, at my Republican colleagues' request, confirms that Drs. Fauci and Collins hardly participated on that call.

What's more, my colleagues claim that Drs. Fauci and Collins orchestrated the Proximal Origin paper. Again, their own investigations has thus far revealed the opposite.

In fact, the records and testimony of those involved in the paper reveal that Drs. Fauci and Collins, quote, played no role in the drafting of the paper, unquote.

No, the Select Subcommittee's investigation has confirmed it was actually a scientist by the name of Dr. Jeremy Farrar who convened the conference call my Republican colleagues have hyperbolized who paved the way for the drafting and publication of the paper so much so that the authors described him as, quote, a leader, and quote, a father figure of the paper, and who my Republican colleagues didn't even bother to invite to this hearing.

Look, I've said from the day I was appointed Ranking Member that my top priority for the Select Subcommittee is focusing on for-

ward-looking policies to prevent and prepare for future pandemics, to take the lessons from the past and make them actionable solutions for the future.

I reiterated this in a letter I sent last month to my good friend and colleague, the chairman. But if we're going to continue down this path of political theater, then the very least we can do is stick to the facts.

That is why my Democratic colleagues and I released our own report this morning detailing the evidence the Select Subcommittee has received so far that dispels these baseless allegations against Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins. And that is why we invited Dr. Farrar to appear before this Subcommittee, because we are committed to following the facts.

And if my Republican colleagues are so interested in having a serious debate about the publications of this paper and the science behind it, then they should want to hear from the one person who led this effort from the beginning.

So let me conclude by saying this, as we pass the one-quarter mark of the Select Subcommittee's work this Congress, there is still time to change course. There is still time to pursue an objective analysis of the virus' origins that is free from political interference, a comprehensive, rigorous, and objective consideration of all potential possibilities of how COVID-19 emerged.

And there is still time for us to shift our focus to crafting good policies that will prevent and prepare us for the next pandemic.

So once again, I invite my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to join us in putting the needs of the American people above political theater. So, let's reject the extreme rhetoric targeting our Nation's scientists, let's disregard the conspiratorial accusations without proof against our Nation's public health officials, and let's finally start to work together of helping to save future lives.

I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. I want to point out, we invited every author of Proximal Origin—Dr. Eddie Holmes, Dr. Andrew Rambaut—but both declined that invitation. Dr. Farrar is not listed as an author, yet he was invited by the minority, and apparently he declined.

Dr. Lipkin has been voluntarily cooperating with our inquiry, but due to unforeseen circumstances, we have excused his testimony today, rightfully.

And finally, Dr. Michael Farzan's counsel said it would be inequitable and create a damaging misimpression to Dr. Farzan to include him on a panel regarding the paper with the actual authors.

So, our witnesses today are Dr. Robert Garry. Dr. Garry is currently a professor at the Tulane University School of Medicine. He holds his doctorate in microbiology from the University of Texas, and he is an author of the Proximal Origin paper.

Dr. Kristian Andersen. Dr. Andersen is currently a professor in the department of immunology and microbiology at Scripps Research. He holds a doctorate in immunology from the University of Cambridge, and he is the corresponding author of the Proximal Origin paper.

Pursuant to Committee on Oversight and Accountability rule 9G, the witnesses will please stand and raise their right hands.

Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony that you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. You may be seated.

Let the record show that the witnesses all answered in the affirmative.

The Select Subcommittee certainly appreciates you all for being here today, and we look forward to your testimony. Let me remind the witnesses that we have read your written statements, and they will appear in full in the hearing record. Please limit your oral statement to five minutes.

As a reminder, please press the button on the microphone in front of you so that it is on, and the Members can hear you. When you begin to speak, the light in front of you will turn green. After four minutes, the light will turn yellow. When the red light comes on, your five minutes has expired, and we kindly ask you to please wrap up.

I now recognize Dr. Garry to make an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF DR. ROBERT GARRY
PROFESSOR
TULANE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE**

Dr. GARRY. Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Ruiz, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today.

For the last 40 years, I have worked as a professor at Tulane University School of Medicine. I've devoted my life's work to understanding emerging viruses. At the onset it is important that I make these statements in my personal capacity. I am not speaking on behalf of Tulane University.

Although we have all lived through a very challenging viral pandemic, my personal perspective has been different than most. For nearly 20 years, I've worked closely with scientists and clinicians at the Kenema Government Hospital in Sierra Leone. KGH is a major site for research on the virus that causes Lassa fever.

Ten years ago, Ebola virus emerged just 50 miles from Kenema. Ultimately this Ebola outbreak would claim the lives of thousands of people, including dozens of healthcare workers at the Kenema Government Hospital.

Having lost many close colleagues to an outbreak of a deadly virus, the December 2019 reports of cases of a novel pneumonia in Wuhan, China, were ominous. They raised the specter of a possible and impending global disaster caused by a novel airborne virus; one I worried that the world would be ill-equipped to handle.

Shortly after the first release of the SARS-CoV-2 genetic sequence, I participated in an in-depth, molecular and phylogenetic analysis of the virus with a group of other scientists. We wrote a peer-reviewed publication in *Nature Medicine*, titled, *The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2*.

In the paper, we concluded it was likely that SARS-CoV-2 had evolved naturally. We specifically did not rule out a laboratory origin. Instead, we discussed three possible origin scenarios.

The first scenario was direct spillover from a bat to a human. The second was spillover from a bat to an intermediate animal and then to a human. The third scenario was a lab origin.

We considered the possibility that some of SARS-CoV-2 features, including a receptor binding domain and a furin cleavage site, may have arisen during passage in a laboratory.

We quickly observed these noble features in related coronaviruses which provided the straightforward evolutionary path for SARS-CoV-2 to emerge in nature. We concluded that natural origin scenarios were most plausible.

Based on the then available scientific evidence, we did not believe that laboratory-based scenarios, including bioengineering, were plausible.

Much new evidence in support of the natural origin of SARS-CoV-2 has accumulated since we wrote Proximal Origin. The Huanan Market in Wuhan was shown to be the early epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Most of the earliest diagnosed human cases from December 2019 lived in the immediate neighborhood around this market, including those that did not work or shop there.

In contrast, no clustering was observed in 2019 around the campuses of the Wuhan Institute of Virology, as would be expected if entry of SARS-CoV-2 into humans involved a laboratory accident.

The distribution of SARS-CoV-2 in the Huanan Market is also important. SARS-CoV-2-positive samples were clustered in the southwest corner of market where live SARS-CoV-2 susceptible mammals were sold.

In March 2023, my colleagues and I found that raccoon dog and civet cat DNA and RNA were present in the wildlife stall that contained the highest numbers of SARS-CoV-2-positive samples in the market. This is equivalent to finding a smoking gun carrying the main suspect's DNA at the exact scene of the crime.

Theories of COVID-19 must be investigated in a transparent manner. The Subcommittee, for example, has told that the cleavage of the furin site reorients the receptor binding domain so that it can specifically bind to a human receptor. This is untrue. The same witness described human arginines which do not exist.

Three and a half years into the COVID-19 pandemic, it is still my opinion that there is no credible scientific evidence for a lab-based origin for SARS-CoV-2.

We do remain dangerously ill-equipped to prevent or manage the emergence of novel viruses. I support the efforts of the Subcommittee to better understand the origins of coronavirus pandemics. Understanding viral origin plays an important role in developing strong policies to help prevent the next potential pandemic.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. I now recognize Dr. Andersen to give an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF DR. KRISTIAN ANDERSEN
PROFESSOR
SCRIPPS RESEARCH**

Dr. ANDERSEN. Thank you. Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Ruiz, and Members of the Select Subcommittee, I'm Kristian

Andersen, professor of Scripps Research. I've spent most of my scientific career studying infectious diseases, including origins.

Today's hearing has targeted a paper my colleagues and I published, titled, The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2. In this paper, we concluded that the virus very likely emerged as the result of a zoonosis, that is, a spillover from an animal host.

This remains the only scientifically supported theory for how the virus emerged. If convincing new evidence were to be discovered suggesting otherwise, we would, of course, revise our conclusions. This is science.

My initial hypothesis starts that SARS-CoV-2 was likely an engineered virus. This was based on limited data and preliminary analyses where I had observed features that appeared to be unique.

However, we soon discovered that those features are readily found in related coronaviruses, and the virus itself looks to be a clear product of natural selection and not actual engineering.

Allow me to briefly outline how we went from these early hypotheses to later conclusions. First, Proximal Origin was based on scientific evidence and analyses by a team of international experts with extensive track records in studying infectious disease emergence.

Second, the paper was peer-reviewed by independent experts resulting in multiple revisions.

Third, we have continued to pursue independent investigations into the origin of the pandemic and published our results.

Fourth, additional research by other researchers support our early conclusions.

Today, I hope to share more about this important research with the goal of being better prepared for future pandemics. However, I must first address several allegations made about our work.

The Select Subcommittee Majority has alleged that our paper was orchestrated by Dr. Anthony Fauci to cover up a lab origin of SARS-CoV-2 as directed during a February 1, 2020 conference call.

It has also been suggested that a grant awarded to myself and colleagues from five different countries was a quid pro quo for changing our conclusions. These allegations are false.

First, the claim that Dr. Fauci prompted the drafting of Proximal Origin to disprove the lab leak is not true. In an email to the journal, *Nature*, I stated, prompted by Jeremy Farrar, Tony Fauci, and Francis Collins, we have been working through much of the primarily genetic data to provide agnostic and scientifically informed hypotheses around the origin of the virus.

There was no prompting to disprove or dismiss a potential lab leak. In fact, when I outlined my initial hypothesis about a potentially engineered virus, Dr. Fauci told me—and I'm paraphrasing here—if you think this virus came from a lab, you should write a scientific paper about it.

Not only is this not a prompt to disprove the lab leak theory, it was specifically predicated on our initial hypothesis of a lab-associated virus.

The allegations that Dr. Fauci prompted the drafting of Proximal Origin to disprove the lab leak is, quote, mine from an email I wrote to participants of the February 1 conference call.

The scientific method is based on two basic concepts of one, formulating hypotheses, and two, testing those hypotheses, often by trying to disprove them.

My initial hypothesis was a lab theory. When I stated that we were trying to disprove any type of lab theory, I was specifically referring to us testing our early hypothesis. This is textbook science in action.

Some have alleged that I have received a Federal grant in exchange for the conclusions made in our Proximal Origin paper. There is no connection between the grant and the paper. Funding decisions on the grant were made before the pandemic—months before the February 1 conference call.

In closing, we live in a world in which the risk of devastating pandemics is real and is ever increasing. We need more research and commitment to science, not less.

However, scientists, including myself, who dedicate their professional lives to impactful research are being targeted and used as pawns in a political game.

I hope this hearing can be a starting point for more productive conversations and actions of working together to contribute to an increased knowledge of pandemics for our safety and the safety of future generations.

Thank you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you.

I now recognize myself for questioning.

Dr. Andersen, Dr. Garry, I want to, again, thank you both for coming today and offering your scientific insights on the origins of COVID-19. We appreciate your professional training and your experience as you outlined in your testimonies. Your role and voice in the ongoing public discussion about COVID's origin is an important one.

In your letter with your co-signers to Nature magazine, you highlight that notable features of SARS-CoV-2 genome that include, among other characteristics, its high affinity for human ACE-2, and the presence of a polybasic furin cleavage site. Both characteristics enable the virus to infect humans effectively and contributes to SARS-CoV-2 ability to cause illness or pathogenicity.

Your letter or opinion piece, published in Nature magazine in April 2020, also indicates that some pangolin coronaviruses exhibit strong similarity to SARS-CoV-2 in the receptor binding domain, including all six key RBD residues.

Your letter also states that this feature is found in some Malayan pangolins imported to Guangdong Province. You have stated that pangolins may have played some role in the recombination event that led to the COVID pandemic. Is that correct?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is not correct. I don't think pangolins played a role in the pandemic per se. The fact that we find similar viruses in pangolins and there is a recombinant history of the virus themselves, however, that recombinant history is very likely in bats—

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you.

Dr. Garry?

Dr. ANDERSEN [continuing]. And not actually in pangolins.

Dr. GARRY. So, I agree, I don't think there's a direct route from a pangolin to SARS-CoV-2.

Dr. WENSTRUP. That's interesting because there were comments that might make people believe otherwise that weren't necessarily in Proximal Origin but were in the comments made amongst the researchers. Would you agree with that, sir?

Dr. GARRY. I would agree with that, but there's been a lot of—

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you.

Dr. GARRY [continuing]. Extra work since then.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. There has been. There has been a lot of extra work since three years ago. I would agree with that, and I think we should all be open-minded to that extra work.

So, is it correct to say that in order for a recombination of coronaviruses to occur that the susceptible animals, such as a pangolin, and the reservoir host for the virus have to be in close physical contact and that the recombination events happen within the same subgenus of virus? Would that be correct?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is incorrect. As I already stated, those recombination events likely happens in bats, not actually in pangolins.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Well, there's been discussion about it coming from a pangolin, and I'm curious how a pangolin coronavirus found in Guangdong Province could swap genes with susceptible animals in Hubei Province.

Dr. ANDERSEN. There's no reason to suspect—

Dr. WENSTRUP. I'm not asking you a question right now, Dr. Andersen. Let me just finish my statement, please. We cannot conduct this in this manner, but I will let you speak, because I'm making a scientific point here, based on some of the discussions that I saw take place between the members of the authorship. OK?

And I'll give you your chance to rebut it, because we want the truth and we want to know the scientific process, and we want to have the scientific discussion, not talking over each other but actually having a discussion. Is that fair?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is fair.

Dr. WENSTRUP. OK. So, Guangdong Province is approximately 603 miles away from Hubei. You note in your Committee testimony that high risk animals were discovered at the Huanan Market. You also note the genetic footprints of susceptible animals, specifically raccoon dogs, were found at the market.

Were pangolins or bats sold in the Wuhan Seafood Market?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Not that we know of.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Not that I know of either.

Has there been any genetic evidence for pangolin existence in the market?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Not that we know of, no.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Not that I know of either.

Were any animal samples taken from the market positive for SARS-CoV-2 or from farms supplying the Wuhan animal markets?

Dr. ANDERSEN. There were no relevant animals that could've been positive for the virus—

Dr. WENSTRUP. Yes.

Dr. ANDERSEN [continuing]. Sample at the market because they had been removed prior to.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Or from the farms where they came from, none are reported.

Were any environmental samples recovered from the market positive for SARS-CoV-2?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Yes.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Yes.

Dr. ANDERSEN. Several.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Now, Dr. George Gao, the former director of the Chinese Center for Disease Control publicly stated that the Huanan Seafood Market was not likely the original source of the outbreak. Former CDC director in China stating that the market could have served as an amplifier or a super-spreading venue. Could you see the market being a super spreader venue?

Dr. ANDERSEN. The data is inconsistent with that scenario.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Inconsistent or consistent?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Inconsistent.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Really? People might argue that.

The second genomic SARS-CoV-2 finding you mentioned in your written testimony cited the presence of a polybasic furin cleavage site which contributes significantly.

Dr. Andersen, is it plausible that such a furin cleavage site could be inserted by a scientist, such as in 2007 by U.S. research from Montana State University? Is it plausible?

Dr. ANDERSEN. If you look at the furin cleavage site that we are specifically finding in SARS-CoV-2, it has never been used in experiments prior to this. Further, the furin cleavage site itself is suboptimal and likely out of—

Dr. WENSTRUP. So, I'm asking—

Dr. ANDERSEN [continuing]. Suggesting that this is a clear result of natural selection and not—

Dr. WENSTRUP. I'm hearing what you say, Doctor, and I appreciate that, but you said something there that stands out to me. And I think you're referring to nothing ever published. And that doesn't mean it's not plausible or possible. And that's where I stand different from you.

And I know throughout a lot of the things that I'm reading; we've talked about nothing being published. A lot of things get published long after they're done, and some things never get published, and we'll get into that.

Are you aware of the proposal that EcoHealth Alliance submitted in March 2018 to DARPA that outlined their intent to work with researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology to conduct genetic engineering that included inserting novel receptor binding domains found in SARS coronaviruses from the wild in human-adapted furin cleavage sites to assess the effect of their infectivity in humanized mice, and according to Dr. Zhengli Shi, possibly using palm civets? Are either of you aware of the proposal that EcoHealth Alliance submitted in March 2018?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I assume you refer to the proposal DEFUSE. Yes, I am aware of that.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Dr. Garry?

Dr. GARRY. Yes, I'm aware of the proposal.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Based on your professional experience and training, could deliberate recombinant research result in a virus with characteristics consistent with SARS-CoV-2?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think it's important that we take a step back and focus on what's possible versus what is plausible or probable and what we actually have evidence for. Anything is possible.

In our own Proximal Origin paper, for example, we say that we cannot disprove or prove any of the origin hypotheses. That was true at the time of writing that paper. That is true today as well.

However, it's important that we focus on what do we actually have evidence for.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Exactly.

Dr. ANDERSEN. And what do we have evidence for is that if you looked at the DEFUSE proposal, for example, is that—and I will admit it's a little messy written, so it's not clear exactly what they're proposing, but first of all, the work that's being proposed here is to be conducted in the United States, not in China.

Specifically, they're talking about S2 proteolytic cleavage sites and glycosylation sites. That's not the specific site that's actually present in SARS 1—in SARS 2. So, if you look at the proposal of DEFUSE and ask the question, could that plausibly have led to the creation of SARS-CoV-2, is that in the world of possibilities, sure.

However, is it plausible to think that that work would alert to this virus? My professional opinion on that is no.

Dr. WENSTRUP. You mentioned something—and I'm not saying this in some kind of an arrogant way, but you mentioned—I think there's times when we don't know what we don't know, and I think that needs to be considered. So, when something is possible or plausible, we don't know one way or the other.

And I sit on the Intelligence Committee. When COVID started, I was interested in what was happening as a physician, what is happening to people, how do we treat it.

But we started finding other things, and it aroused our curiosity. So, I will say that I think it's important that as more comes out, that you keep that in mind.

I want to skip ahead to some of the things—there's more I would want to talk about, but I would say that there are so many revelations that have come about since the paper was written.

I'm just curious if the Proximal Origins team would be willing to gather together and take another look at the lab theories with agnostic peer review, and can you do it without social media censoring or name-calling, or should we rely on the work of Dr. Jean-Paul Chretien and Dr. Greg Cutlip for their more comprehensive and detailed approach that we see from their scientific report produced in May 2020?

Would you be willing to regroup and maybe take a look at evidence that has come out or maybe evidence that hasn't even been revealed to the public yet?

Dr. ANDERSEN. As I stated in my opening statement, is there any new evidence that were to be unearthed suggesting that this could potentially have been associated with a lab, of course, we will consider that.

However, it's important to understand, too, that the kinds of independent investigations that we have done as a scientific team, are agnostic to the potential origin of the virus.

We are simply looking at the virus itself, we're looking at early cases, we're looking at positivity of the samples, and those just

happened to cluster around a particular market linked directly to the billion-dollar wildlife trade in China. That's an agnostic view of what does the evidence actually tell us.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Dr. Garry, an answer to my question?

Dr. WENSTRUP. Your microphone.

Dr. GARRY. Of course, we're willing to look at new evidence.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I appreciate that.

I now recognize the Ranking Member, Dr. Ruiz, from California for five minutes of questions. Or more.

Dr. RUIZ. For more than five months, under the guise of investigating the origins of the novel coronavirus, the Select Subcommittee has scrutinized the drafting and publication of the Proximal Origin paper.

The Select Subcommittee has demanded thousands of pages of internal documents from researchers involved in the paper, conducted transcribed interviews with these researchers, subpoenaed their private communications, and now called two of them to testify at today's hearing.

We have undertaken all of this work, but to what end? Has targeting these researchers and probing the publication of this paper meaningfully advanced our efforts to prevent and prepare for future pandemics?

Or has it been about fishing for evidence to prove their confirmation bias, their theories, with a goal of advancing a predetermined partisan narrative targeting Dr. Fauci, Dr. Collins, and our Nation's scientists and public health officials?

Dr. Andersen, let me ask my first question to you. In your view as a leading virologist who studies emerging pathogens, has the Select Subcommittee's examination of your paper done anything to prevent and prepare our Nation for the emergence of future novel viruses?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Not to my knowledge, no.

Dr. RUIZ. OK. Dr. Garry, same question to you. Has the Select Subcommittee's examination of the Proximal Origin paper done anything to prevent and prepare our Nation for the emergence of future novel viruses?

Dr. GARRY. Not to this date.

Dr. RUIZ. OK. When I joined the Select Subcommittee as Ranking Member, I hoped that we could work together on the challenging but critically important mission of identifying forward-looking solutions to prevent and prepare for future pandemics.

You know, I'm an emergency medicine physician. I want actionable items to do something that will help relieve pain, suffering, and save lives. I take that doctor's approach in my work in Congress, and I want to do meaningful work that will help save lives, prevent a future pandemic, and prepare for the future pandemic.

And this included taking a serious look at whether SARS-CoV-2 emerged from a natural zoonotic transfer or from a research-related incident so that we could propose substantive policies to prevent the emergence of the next deadly, novel, airborne virus.

But instead of examining this question seriously and objectively, the Select Subcommittee has so far only leveraged it to target our Nation's scientists and to vilify our Nation's public health officials.

And in doing so, the Select Subcommittee has undermined the critical mission of preventing and preparing for future pandemics.

As a result of unproven, conspiratorial accusations without proof, like those suggesting Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins covered up the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, trust in science in our Nation's public health institutions has suffered.

The Pew Research Center found that fewer than 3 in 10 Americans have a great deal of confidence in scientists to act in the public's interest.

So, while manufacturing of distrust is largely happening along party lines, it will hurt us all and our public health in the long run, whether you are Republican, Democrat, or Independent.

And we are already seeing the consequences. For example, threats against scientists and public health officials have surged in the wake of these accusations, which could have long-term impacts on our ability to cultivate a strong and growing work force to protect our public health, to work during the next pandemic.

Dr. Andersen, you've been the subject of these threats. Could you please describe the threats and harassment you've experienced since the publication of the Proximal Origin paper?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I'll say the paper itself has not resulted in threats. However, the misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories around the paper have resulted in significant harassment and threats including everything from typical targets on social media to emails to telephone calls to my office, to my own phone, to death threats.

Dr. RUIZ. Can you give us an example of one of those death threats to you and yours?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Of course. I'll—one example, for example, will be online, where there are so-called kill lists, and I have found myself on those lists, together with my co-authors, together with many other colleagues involved in anything from origin research to vaccine research. For example, Peter Hotez has been a frequent target of many of these same threats.

Dr. RUIZ. And do they say why they want to harm you?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think the conspiracy theory here which is amplified by the Select Subcommittee's Majority here, is that, basically that the virus was created and that American scientists played a role in that and have been covering that up.

And the suggestions that there have been quid pro quos, in turn, of covering this up, all of which, as the record clearly shows, is false. And these in themselves result in these threats.

Dr. RUIZ. And so, these manufactured conspiratorial accusations without that proof instills these emotions from the public that listens to them and results in an aggressive, threatening environment for you and other scientists?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Correct. And I think understandably so, because we have all lived through a devastating pandemic with a lot of personal consequences to a lot of different people, and we are all suffering and hurting.

And I think the focus has been on, there is a need to blame somebody for this. There's a need to deflect from our own personal suffering, and this has been part of that.

Dr. RUIZ. And so how does this kind of harassment undermine the ability of scientists to do critical work that helps to promote our understanding of emerging public health threats?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think it sets a terrible example for future scientists looking at the attacks directed against us, for example, and if I was a future scientist and looking at that and saying, maybe I'm not going to go into infectious disease research.

If I'm an emergency care physician or a nurse saying, maybe infectious disease is not for me because I've seen all the different harassments going on here.

So, from that perspective, it's damaging.

It's also incredibly damaging to our own work. We do study the origins of pandemics, including this one, but myself and Dr. Garry next to me, we study a lot of different viruses, together with colleagues in Africa, for example, and these viruses continue to pose threats, and of course that work is—is less active than it would have been.

Dr. RUIZ. So, confirmation bias is when you already have a—are convinced 100 percent of a certain outcome, and your world view will now be seen through a lens of that belief. And so regardless of the facts and the evidence presented to you, you will formulate that based on what your already preconceived notion is, and you will work to prove what you already believe exists.

How does that harm our public health researchers in this investigation when people are continuing to push a narrative that involves intimidating public health scientists by bringing them here, yelling at them, accusing them if they're not aligned with their confirmation bias, with their preconceived notion?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think it's deeply unhelpful.

Dr. RUIZ. As a physician and public health expert, I am deeply troubled that the Select Subcommittee has prioritized its time and resources on advancing an extreme partisan narrative over fulfilling our obligation to the American people, to mitigate future public health threats.

And so, I urge my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to cease their misguided efforts that endanger science and public health, and I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Before I recognize the next witness, I, with unanimous consent, want to submit for the record working paper from May 26, 2020, Critical Analysis of Andersen et al, the Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2, written by scientists at Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Center for Military Intelligence.

I now recognize Ms. Malliotakis from New York for five minutes of questions.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Dr. Andersen, do you believe that the former CDC director, Dr. Redfield, is a conspiracy theorist? Yes or no? Yes or no?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think to the question of whether the former director is a conspiracy theorist is not really something I have thought about, so I don't like to label people as such.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Well, I don't know how because you just accused everyone who believes that there was a lab leak to be a conspiracy theorist. And back in March, the former director of the CDC, Dr. Redfield, came before this Committee, and he said that

it was not scientifically plausible that the virus went from a bat to humans and subsequently became one of the most infectious viruses in history.

When asked why he was excluded from the February conference call that both of you, as well as ten other scientists had with Dr. Fauci, Dr. Redfield told us that Dr. Fauci wanted a single narrative surrounding the origins of COVID.

But both you—Andersen, Garry—also expressed concerns about the genetic make-up of the virus just days before the initial draft of this paper came out. So, are you both conspiracy theorists at that time?

On January 29, 2020, Dr. Fauci emailed you after you had expressed concerns to him on a phone call that you believed COVID would have been engineered. He told you that if this was true, you had to contact the FBI. You did not do that, correct?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I believe the email says that he will contact the FBI.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. OK. Do you know, have either of you had contact with the FBI, yes or no, to your knowledge?

Dr. ANDERSEN. At the time? No.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. OK. But then you reaffirmed those engineering concerns in an email to Dr. Fauci which you say, the unusual features of the virus make up a really smart part of the genome and that after discussions earlier today, Eddie, Bob, Mike, and myself all find the genome inconsistent with expectations from evolutionary theory.

Again, were you a conspiracy theorist at that time, and did you share these same concerns on the February 1 conference call? Because Dr. Garry went so far as to say, “I really can’t think of a plausible natural scenario when you get from the bat virus, or one very similar to it, COVID-19 where you insert exactly four amino acids, 12 nucleotides, and all have to be added at the exact same time to gain this function. I just can’t figure out how this gets accomplished in nature.”

So then within a matter of days, something changed, and that’s what this Committee is trying to get to the bottom of. What happened within that three-day period between the conference call and the paper that all of a sudden you did a 180 and it couldn’t possibly come from a lab, or maybe, but you’re all saying that, you know, this was, by sure, from nature? What happened in those three days?

Dr. GARRY. Well, we examined the genomes more closely, we looked at other coronaviruses, and there was some new data that came. There was—

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Where did that data come from?

Dr. GARRY. The scientific literature, you know, the publication of the pangolin genomic sequence showed that there was a receptor binding domain that was very close to the—

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. And exactly what my colleague here brought up?

Dr. GARRY. Yes, exactly.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. OK. Interesting.

Dr. GARRY. And it was a very important piece of data because it showed that a lot of the theories about, you know, the virus hav-

ing been engineered or put together in a laboratory were not true because here was a virus in nature that had a receptor binding domain with exactly the same structure.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Well, I just find it interesting based on what my other colleague here, the Chairman of the Committee, said, and with reply to the issue of the pangolins.

But something else that happened between those two days is, one of your colleagues who is not here today, was invited—Dr. Rambaut—he said—I don't know if I should say this in Committee room or not, but given the blank show that this would happen, if anyone seriously accused the Chinese of even accidental release, my feeling is we should say that given there is no evidence of a specifically engineered virus, we cannot possibly distinguish between natural evolution and escape so we are content with ascribing it to natural processes.

His concern was would he piss off China. That's what his concern was.

So, look, something happened here. Politicians may flip-flop. Scientists do not flip-flop in a matter of 72 hours. And whether it was the fear of accusing communist China for this leak, whether it was needing to get the FBI involved and what that might lead to down the line, whether it was the fact that millions of U.S. dollars had made their way, by the way, to communist China—interesting chart I have here, \$3.7 million. Were any of you aware during any of these—whether it was drafting this paper or conversations with Fauci that communist China received \$3.7 million of American tax dollars, including through—to the Wuhan Institute of Virology? Did that ever come up in any conversations with Dr. Fauci?

Dr. GARRY. It did not.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. OK. Dr. Andersen, no?

Dr. ANDERSEN. It did not. And while everyone was aware of some of the work, I was not aware of the funding going because that is obviously irrelevant to understanding the origin itself.

I should point out, though, that in terms of labeling people as conspiracy theorists, is that considering a potential lab leak is a perfectly reasonable and scientifically justified question to ask. I, myself, have asked it. I have not called people, that believe or think that this could have come from a lab, conspiracy theorists.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. OK. Well, I'd like to just take my time back because I've run out, and I just only want to acknowledge that it's not just Dr. Redfield, right? We had the Department of Energy come out with their conclusion that they believe it was likely from a lab. It is the FBI that also says it was likely from a lab, and I just wanted the record to reflect that. Thank you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize the Ranking Member of the full Committee, Mr. Raskin of Maryland, for actually seven minutes.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. We're all interested in finding out the origins of the COVID-19 epidemic to make sure that such a nightmare never happens again to us. And we need the facts. Some people clearly want to politicize the question. Some people think that the finding that it all started with a lab leak would somehow absolve Donald Trump of his lethally reckless response to the pandemic. Of course, his response was dangerously dysfunctional, regardless of how it got started. And his

own advisor on COVID-19, Deborah Birx, said that we lost hundreds of thousands of American lives because of the flaws in the response.

But even if the virus came from a lab, as indeed it could have, we don't know that yet, that would only deepen Donald Trump's culpability because he was the one who repeatedly and enthusiastically praised China's early handling of the pandemic and assured us that we was working closely with President Xi on the response to it. So, let's just get the facts straight and leave all the political myth making aside.

Now, we've heard claims repeatedly that Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins set up the February 1, 2020, conference call as part of a plan somehow to suppress the lab leak theory. But the Committee Majority's own June 2023 subpoena to Dr. Andersen says that it was Dr. Farrar who organized the conference call. Well, which is it?

Dr. Andersen, it's my understanding that the conference call was indeed set up by Dr. Farrar so top scientists could discuss SARS-CoV-2 genomic features and whether those features could illuminate the origins of the virus.

Is that correct that it was set up by Dr. Farrar?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. Dr. Farrar provided the agenda and the roster of attendees via email. You can see in the top box here, in red, the agenda, and in the bottom box in red the roster of attendees. In the agenda, Dr. Farrar, assigned himself the role of introducing and defining the focus of the call, setting up desired outcomes, and establishing next steps afterwards. Neither Dr. Fauci, nor Dr. Collins were assigned roles on this agenda.

Dr. Garry, it looks like this was in every material respect Dr. Farrar's call. Is that how you remember it?

Dr. GARRY. It is how I remember it.

Mr. RASKIN. And what contributions did Dr. Fauci or Dr. Collins make, or did they mostly just listen?

Dr. GARRY. Well, they did mostly just listen. They had very little to offer on the science. I think they were there to gather information.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. Now, Dr. Andersen, you said you began yourself with the initial hypothesis that there had been or may have been a lab leak, but you ended up not believing in that theory. Why? How did you change your mind?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think it's important to understand that we're talking about early hypotheses here on which our thinking over time evolved, and that then led to the conclusions published in a peer review paper. I would like to point out that this timeline of three days, I don't know where that's coming from.

The paper was published on the 17th of March, 2020. That's 45 days after this conference call. What's important to understand is that the thinking evolved from initially thinking that this could have been engineered to relatively rapidly discount that idea as being inconsistent with the available evidence. However, the lab leak theory itself or the idea of a lab leak can be many different things. And our continued evolution of that then followed that I was quite convinced that maybe it was cultured.

And then from there eventually realized that actually that is also unsupported, and that's what led to the conclusions in Proximal Origin.

Mr. RASKIN. But I have your paper, The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2, in which you write: Our analyses clearly show that SARS-CoV-2 is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus. Did Dr. Fauci or Dr. Collins pressure you to come to this conclusion or to suppress the lab leak theory?

Dr. ANDERSEN. They did not. That is fully a conclusion of the authors on the paper.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. Now, one of the things I admire in what you've been saying is that you follow the scientific method. You say at the—in the conclusion in your paper: Although the evidence shows that SARS-CoV-2 is not a purposefully manipulated virus, it is currently impossible to prove or disprove the other theories of its origin described here.

In other words, we fundamentally don't know. But have there been papers following your original paper that have caused you to revise the view that you have now and to go back to your original hypothesis.

Dr. ANDERSEN. No, but I will say there has been additional data and analysis, which obviously we have taken all of those into consideration. However, these early conclusions remain to this date.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. And, well, let's move on to an email that you sent to your co-authors. You wrote—and this has been I think much misunderstood: Our main work over the last couple of weeks has been focused on trying to disprove any type of lab theory.

Now, you explained in your opening statement that you meant pursuing the scientific process by which you have a hypothesis which stands unless it's disproven. Is that right? Is that what you meant by that?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct. I'm referring to the concept of what's called falsification as Chairman Wenstrup mentioned too, yes.

Mr. RASKIN. The falsification of a theory.

Dr. ANDERSEN. Yes.

Mr. RASKIN. All right. So, has there been any attempt, to your knowledge, to censor any papers that would contradict the conclusions that you arrived at here? Or put it differently, you mentioned in your opening testimony that Dr. Fauci had encouraged you to write a paper about the lab theory, if that's where the evidence took you. Is that right?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct. I'm not aware of, you know, whether papers has been censored, specifically, focused on the lab leak. I will say, again, if you look at the scientific evidence, it all points in one direction, which is the single market in the middle of Wuhan in China as the starting point of this pandemic.

There are many papers out there that have described potential lab leaks, which are typically using sort of gods of the gaps type of analogies where you're trying to say that the data is not perfect, so everything remains still possible. And that's something we agree with. As we specifically say, in the paper, you cannot disprove or prove any of the hypotheses. After origin, that was true at the time, and that's still today true.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, I just want to commend you for following the scientific method here, for being open to all new evidence, and all new data, and not succumbing to a series of political polemics and attacks. Mr. Chairman, thank you very kindly.

I yield back to you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize the chairman of the full Committee, Mr. Comer, from Kentucky for five minutes of questions.

Mr. COMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Discovering the origins of COVID-19 is vital. It's vital to preparing for future pandemics and to save lives. Dr. Andersen, in your prepared testimony, you say that you're being investigated because, "Published peer review studies that go against the preferred political narrative." Now, that goes opposite to what we have seen. The preferred political narrative has always been to attack those that think this may have come from a lab.

Your co-author says on the poster right behind me what the real political narrative is. "Given the shit show that would happen if anyone serious accused the Chinese of even accidental release."

Dr. Andersen, you responded to this message, "Yup, I totally agree that's a very reasonable conclusion. Although, I hate when politics is injected into science, but it's impossible not to, especially given the circumstance."

Sir, do you have a degree in political science or international relations?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I do not.

Mr. COMER. Do you have any experience in the foreign service or diplomatic course?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I do not. I'm a Danish citizen.

Mr. COMER. OK. Thank you. You were the one with the preferred political narrative. And you said it right there. This preference was reiterated by Dr. Collins saying that the lab leak theory would quote: Do great potential harm to science and international harmony, end quote.

We heard in our last hearing that the Biden administration was working with social media companies to censor the lab leak theory. I think you had preferred political narratives backward, sir. When was your first conversation with Dr. Fauci about the origins of COVID-19?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I believe that was on the 31st of January, 2020.

Mr. COMER. And, yes or no, he suggested you write a paper during that conversation, correct?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Dr. Fauci suggested that I consider writing a paper, specifically, predicated on my initial hypothesis, which was that of a lab associated virus, correct.

Mr. COMER. Then you had the February 1 conference call that had Dr. Fauci, Dr. Collins, and Dr. Farrar on it, correct?

Dr. ANDERSEN. There were several scientists, including those, yes.

Mr. COMER. Was Dr. Tabak also on that call?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I believe he was on the call. I'm unsure about that.

Mr. COMER. Did Dr. Fauci reiterate a suggestion to draft a paper on that call?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I don't believe that he directly suggested it, but there was support for us looking further into the origin of the pandemic, yes.

Mr. COMER. Well, did the February 1 conference call lead to the drafting of Proximal Origin?

Dr. ANDERSEN. At the time, no. These are separate events. Eventually, the conclusions from that conference call, further conversations among the authors ultimately lead up in the March 17, 2020 paper, the Proximal Origin. However, the purpose of that conference call was not to write a paper.

Mr. COMER. Well, I want to shift to the conclusions of that paper. First, our analysis clearly show that SARS-CoV-2 is not a laboratory construct or purposefully manipulated virus.

Dr. Andersen, do you stand by that statement?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I do.

Mr. COMER. Dr. Garry, do you stand by that statement?

Dr. GARRY. I do.

Mr. COMER. Dr. Garry, are there research techniques that can purposefully manipulate a virus without leaving a trace?

Dr. GARRY. There are.

Mr. COMER. What about having a virus be a laboratory construct without leaving a trace?

Dr. GARRY. If I understand your question correctly, yes, I believe there are.

Mr. COMER. So, you can't make that conclusion with certainty then?

Dr. GARRY. We didn't base it on those facts, though, sir. It was other facts and other evidence that we gathered during the course of our investigation.

Mr. COMER. Well, next you conclude that you do not believe that any type of laboratory-base scenario is plausible. Dr. Andersen, do you stand by that statement?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I do, and I think it's important to understand that while we are talking about a purposefully manipulated virus, specifically, what we are referring to in the paper here and as you will see from the record, we have handed to the Committee is that we are talking about the idea of building this virus with the intent of creating this virus.

For example, a bioweapon would be an example of this. The normal engineering of a virus, while I certainly believe that that is fully inconsistent with the evidence, we have available to us, is not specifically what we're talking about here. In a laboratory construct, we are talking about many of the different reverse genetic systems—

Mr. COMER. OK.

Dr. ANDERSEN [continuing]. Available for SARS-like coronavirus.

Mr. COMER. This is my last question. Dr. Garry, a recent interview you said saying that statement went too far. Did that statement go too far, and is a laboratory-based scenario for the origin of COVID-19 plausible?

Dr. GARRY. So, I said maybe we went too far. And I think in that particular statement that is really out of context with the, you know, almost a six-hour interview that I gave to a BBC reporter. We're talking again about the scientific method. I am simply just

referring to the fact that we were early at the time in the analysis. And that, yes, we would change our minds if other evidence, other data came forward to support another theory.

So, you know, a scientist that is a hundred percent certain of their conclusions is not a very good scientist. That you need to evaluate new data and go back. And that's all I was referring to in that sentence.

Mr. COMER. Mr. Chairman, my time has expired.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Ms. Ross from North Carolina for five minutes of questions.

Ms. ROSS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just this morning, the Select Subcommittee Democrats released a report to correct on the record the allegations that Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins had involvement in the Proximal Origin paper.

And I'd like to revisit some of the questions that Mr. Raskin asked about who organized and facilitated that paper.

And I want to be clear that I'm not suggesting that there's anything untoward or nefarious about the paper or the events leading to its publications. But my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have made allegations today, unsupported allegations, that I believe misrepresent who did what for the paper and why.

From what I understand, again, this all started on February 1, 2020, in a conference call where some virologists and scientists, including those from outside of the United States, got together to discuss a novel coronavirus and make an analysis of its genomic features.

Dr. Andersen, is it accurate to say that because this was not their area of expertise, Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins attended the call with a goal of hearing what you and other experts, including your eventual co-authors thought of the virus' genomic features?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct.

Ms. ROSS. And in the period following the call, you and your co-authors began to work on what would become the Proximal Origin paper. Is that correct?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct.

Ms. ROSS. The Select Subcommittee has reviewed thousands of pages of documents and communications between you and your co-authors.

In our review, it became abundantly clear that Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins had little to no involvement in the paper.

For example, Dr. Andersen, when asked about Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins' role in the paper, you told the Select Subcommittee staff, "They played no role in the paper." Is that correct?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct. I think it's important to understand that we are talking about an international group of known experts drafting a paper. The whole idea that NIH directors would have a role in that paper is obviously false. So, it is true to say that, yes, they played no role in this paper. Of course, they appeared to have been interested in the paper because they were interested as known experts in the conclusions and the research itself.

Ms. ROSS. Thank you. In my remaining time, let me turn to you, Dr. Garry. In the final stages of drafting the paper, you sent an email to your co-authors stating, quote—Jeremy Farrar, you were

referencing him, had been an amazing leader. You also told Select Subcommittee staff that Dr. Farrar played a substantial advisory role throughout the drafting of the paper. Is that correct?

Dr. GARRY. That is correct.

Ms. ROSS. And did Dr. Fauci or Dr. Collins ever influence the conclusions drawn in your paper?

Dr. GARRY. Not in any way.

Ms. ROSS. So, it seems to me when we don't have the cameras rolling, even my Republican colleagues might concede that Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins did not organize or facilitate the Proximal Origin and that Dr. Farrar did instead. For example, on March 5, 2023, Select Subcommittee Republican staff memo stated, and I quote: Dr. Farrar led the drafting process of the Proximal Origin paper.

And the subpoena my Republican colleagues issued as part of this investigation last month acknowledges that Dr. Farrar "organized" the February 1, 2020 conference call that they allege led to the Proximal Origin paper.

These findings underscore the fact that scientific rigor, especially in the face of global health emergencies requires international cooperation among experts in the field—epidemiologists, virologists, doctors, and public health experts like Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins must be included in the discussions concerning how we investigate and respond to pandemics.

However, just their cooperation and inclusion is not evidence of collusion or secrecy. It's simply the way the scientific process works. This kind of coordination enables us to have accurate information, strong lines of communication, and ultimately helps us save the most lives.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Dr. Miller-Meeks from Iowa for five minutes of questions.

Dr. Miller-Meeks. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And I thank our witnesses for appearing here today. Do either of our witnesses, can you comment on why the origin of SARS-CoV-2 would be important?

Dr. GARRY. Well, we need to figure out how this pandemic started so that we can put measures in place to prevent the next one. There will be another coronavirus outbreak or spillover that could potentially lead to a pandemic. Let's figure out how it happens so that we can stop that.

Dr. Miller-Meeks. And Dr. Andersen?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Yes, I would agree with that. I think it's—first of all, it's the natural thing to do. We're all humans. We want to understand what happened here. And I think from that perspective itself I think it's important. But as Dr. Garry said is that the ability to take corrective action and understand what specifically led to this pandemic so we can hope to do better and prepare better for future ones is an important one.

Dr. Miller-Meeks. Thank you. And the reason I wanted you to state that on the record is because of comments within your testimony and comments of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. Since the pandemic, I am also a physician. I'm a former director of the Iowa Department of Public Health. We had a hearing on ori-

gins with the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic in 2021.

And from the time we were looking at origins, I have said, specifically, the reason it's important to understand the origins is not to undermine scientists, it's not a conspiracy theory, it's not a political hoax, it is for three reasons. And those three reasons are to prevent and respond to the next pandemic, one. The international community and scientists, in particular, have a vested interest in understanding what type of laboratory research is done and what type of laboratory safety. Critically important.

No. 2, disclosure. The international community has a vested interest in disclosure occurring properly and within 24 hours if, in fact, there is a virus or bacteria that's released that could lead to a pandemic. And then, No. 3, the ethics of what kind of research is done and in what laboratories and if we have assurances that those laboratories and those scientists can be trusted.

So, my colleague mentioned that it was natural to have collaboration and to get information from various scientists around the world. And I would agree with that. Did you have collaboration and consensus and readily available data from the Wuhan Institute of Virology?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Only what was in the public domain.

Dr. Miller-Meeks. Dr. Garry?

Dr. GARRY. The same answer.

Dr. Miller-Meeks. OK. I would also like to point out that when you have a phone call, and four days later you—a paper is presented, and as you said, you're looking at data, when did you put the paper up for—submit it for publication?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Seventeenth of February.

Dr. Miller-Meeks. OK. But yet, there was changes to that paper or changes, as you both have said and stated within your testimony, that you got information which led you to believe that it was improbable or that a laboratory leak was not available. So, it seems to me the paper was constructed and then sent for publication, and then data came out after that.

So, specifically, in reference to the paper, one of the referees said: There are two recent reports about coronavirus and pangolins. The authors might want to comment on these.

Dr. Andersen, you stated: We have included these references as well as several others that have investigated pangolin CoV. In addition, we should point out that these additional pangolin CoV sequences do not further clarify the different scenarios discussed in our manuscript. There is nothing in these reports that changes our statements regarding a potential role of pangolins.

Then you also—a second referee asks another question that says they're surprised that you did not hypothetically refute a lab origin. And once the authors published their new pangolin sequences, the lab origin will be extremely unlikely. Your response was: Our manuscript is written explore the potential origins of SARS-CoV-2. We do not believe it is speculative. Unfortunately, the newly available pangolin sequences do not elucidate the origins of SARS-CoV-2 or refute a lab origin. Hence, the review is incorrect on this point.

There is no evidence on present data that the pangolin CoVs are directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, in your paper, you dispute and consider highly improbable, supposedly, having new data and information, highly improbable that SARS-CoV-2 emerged through laboratory manipulation.

I'm not suggesting that laboratory manipulation was deliberate or was a bioterrorism, but by your own statements, Dr. Andersen, it seems to me that you're actually saying that it's inconclusive whether or not this emerged accidentally or on purpose from a laboratory, or if there was a manipulation, or if it came from science despite the thousands of animals that had been looked at to see if it could have emerged.

I think my time is up, and I think it's—what we're finding today is that it's not as conclusive as you would like us to believe that it emerged through nature. Thank you, and I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Dr. Bera from California for five minutes of questions.

Dr. BERA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First off, Dr. Garry, Dr. Andersen, thank you for being here. I'm a physician, a faculty member at UC Davis, was an associate dean there. And I appreciate—you didn't sign up for this—but I appreciate that you're here. And for all the scientists, doctors, and others that worked through this pandemic, you know, some of the abuse, challenges that they've had to face, again, I apologize for that.

You know, as someone who has spent most of my time in Congress thinking about pandemic preparedness and global health security on national commissions, putting recommendations in place, traveling to Sierra Leone post the Ebola epidemic to try to get there, I understand how important this work is.

I'm going to limit my comments to the topic today, which is proximal origin. You know, if I go back to, you know, January 2020 when we first started talking about—this Congress had its first briefing, I think, in the third week of January in the CVC auditorium. At that point, I raised—and again, Dr. Fauci was one of the briefers—the importance of getting to the hot zone, getting our scientists, the best in the world, to Wuhan and to the hot zone to understand proximal origins. Obviously, that did not happen. So, you know, there was appropriate criticism of how the Chinese were handling the early days of that pandemic.

The scientific community did the best that they could to try to understand the origins. And, you know, I appreciate the work that was published in your paper. I appreciate the openness to thinking about, you know, whether origins were from a lab leak versus, you know, a wet market. We continue to explore that.

To my colleague, Dr. Miller-Meeks, I agree with a lot of what she said. It is important for us to understand and continue to try to gather information to understand that—given that we may never reach a conclusion, I also want to be forward-looking.

I think it's appropriate for this Committee because it is a vehicle we have as Congress to look at lab security and lab safety and, you know, to think about recommendations, working with the scientific community. Because, you know, this type of research is going to continue. And it's important for us to understand and prepare not just for future pandemics, because we will see those pandemics in

the future, but also, there are bio threats around the world. There are bad actors around the world. And we have to be doing that research, so we have appropriate countermeasures and the like.

In addition, though, we shouldn't discount the theory that this emerged from a wet market, because we should also explore and work with the international community to prevent that type of leak from animals to humans. Because we also know zoonotic transmission of viruses is bound to happen and is the origin of many new novel pandemics. Would both of you agree that we should be thinking about both of these. Dr. Andersen?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Yes, I agree. I think it's important that, you know, there are several different objectives here. One is the scientific question of the origin. But, of course, given what we have learned about coronaviruses, including the one causing the pandemic, but also all the related ones that have since been discovered, I do think we need to reconsider our lab safety practices around these viruses, specifically. And that's because of what we have learned during the pandemic. And that's an important discussion, too, that I totally agree with.

Dr. BERA. Dr. Garry?

Dr. GARRY. Well, we certainly, as virologists, take lab safety very seriously. The very lives of my students and myself and others working around the laboratory depends on taking those issues very seriously. And there are very good guidelines in place. I agree with Dr. Andersen that we need to rethink some of those, given, you know, the potential threat of wild coronaviruses coming over. We should probably do all those studies at biosafety level 3 instead of lower biosafety levels. But those are logical things that the scientific community will put in place.

Dr. BERA. Great. And, again, I think that's where Congress should work with the science community and take guidance from science community as opposed to nonscientists in Congress dictating what might happen and what lab safety should look like.

I also just in the few minutes that I have, I would hate for this Committee or Congress to conclude that we shouldn't be collaborating with the international community, having labs around the world. Because if we want to prevent pandemics, we have to go out there where the pandemics are originating and work with those scientists around the world. And it would be a dangerous conclusion for this Committee to say we shouldn't be working with labs around the world. We absolutely have to work with those labs. Thank you. And I'm out of time.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mrs. Lesko from Arizona for five minutes of questions.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you both of you for being here to testify. I'm first going to ask—I'm going to ask the same question first of Dr. Garry. In your documented emails to both—or to Dr. Fauci and others dated before or around the same time as the February 1 conference call, both of you seemed absolutely convinced that COVID-19 was not from nature.

In fact, Dr. Andersen, when you spoke to Committee staff when they interviewed you, you were very concerned about the origin of COVID-19 and wondered if you should contact the FBI or CIA about your concern. Yet, on February 4, 2020, which was three

days after the conference call, Dr. Jeremy Farrar sent an email to Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins. It says, "Please treat in confidence a very rough first draft from Eddie and team. They will send on the edited cleaner version later, pushing WHO again today."

Dr. Garry, is this the very rough first draft referring to the Proximal Origin paper?

Dr. GARRY. It was a report that was going to go back to the original people on the teleconference. You know, were there elements in that report that we eventually incorporated into Proximal Origin? Yes. But it wasn't a draft of that paper per se. We hadn't even decided whether we were going to write one or not.

Mrs. LESKO. Dr. Garry, how much of that original draft do you think was included in the published Proximal Origin paper?

Dr. GARRY. I haven't sat down and compared the two documents, so I don't really know how to answer that.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you. Dr. Andersen, I have the same question for you. Was that first draft of the Proximal Origin paper on February 4?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think it's important to understand what our conclusions were in the——

Mrs. LESKO. Sir, could you answer the question?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Is that we—what you see——

Mrs. LESKO. Was it your understanding that it's the Proximal Origin paper?

Dr. ANDERSEN. This is not the Proximal Origin paper as Dr. Garry stated. This is draft report based on our discussions so far. And we conclude that we believe deliberate engineering can be ruled out with a high degree of confidence. But we also state that——

Mrs. LESKO. That was on February 4.

Dr. ANDERSEN. This is on February 4.

Mrs. LESKO. Fourth——

Dr. ANDERSEN. Correct.

Mrs. LESKO. You thought that it could be ruled out.

Dr. ANDERSEN. Deliberate—no.

Mrs. LESKO. Oh, deliberate——

Dr. ANDERSEN. No. Importantly, we talk about deliberate engineering. However——

Mrs. LESKO. Got it.

Dr. ANDERSEN. I want to point out that we also specifically mentioned that the current data are consistent with all three, meaning the three scenarios——

Mrs. LESKO. All right.

Dr. ANDERSEN [continuing]. Described in the final paper.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you. Dr. Garry, my next question. You told Congresswoman Malliotakis that there was new evidence. And she said in the three days before your scientist team sent an initial draft of Proximal Origin, you said that that was not really the original draft but had pieces of it. Is it normal for a scientist to totally change? Because I read your email from, I think, it was February 1. You know, it said, you know, this can't be nature. This is, you know, basically—I'm paraphrasing—too coincidental. This couldn't all line up together. To change in three days, is that normal?

Dr. GARRY. So, I think we need to step back a little bit from that one email. That was one email that I sent, you know, amongst literally hundreds of communications amongst—with my coauthors with other scientists, other people I was talking to about the origins.

And in that particular email that you were talking about, I was doing what scientists very often do, and that is, you know, take a devil's advocate position. So, the questions that we were trying to answer is, you know, could have come from a laboratory? And I was taking that position, well—

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you, sir. I have 42—

Dr. GARRY. OK. Sure.

Mrs. LESKO [continuing]. Seconds left. I have a very important question for both of you that I'm trying to understand. So, Dr. Redfield told us in March 2023 this year that the—either the Wuhan Institute of Virology or China itself deleted the COVID sequence in September 2019.

He also said that they turned over control of the WIV in September 2019 to the military—Chinese military. He also said that the WIV changed the ventilation at their lab in the fall of 2019. If China wasn't trying to cover up something, why would they do this? Both of you.

Dr. GARRY. You know, I'm not a member of the Intelligence Committee. I don't have privileged information in terms of what was going on there. I really don't have any basis to answer that question.

Mrs. LESKO. But you don't think it's unusual for China to cover up things if nothing happened, if it was all natural?

Dr. GARRY. Well, I'm also not an expert on Chinese politics, so I really don't have a professional answer for you there.

Mrs. LESKO. Dr. Andersen?

Dr. ANDERSEN. All of this seems routine to me. The fact that you have a BSL-4 laboratory getting their air condition units upgraded, for example, seems unrelated, as the intelligence community has also concluded is that that is unrelated to the later emergence of the virus.

Mrs. LESKO. How about turning over to military control or to delete the COVID sequence, is that just normal? Normal procedure?

Dr. ANDERSEN. So, I have no comment on the first. I think it's important to understand that the deletion you're talking about is specifically about a data base, not actually the SARS-2 sequence itself.

And that data base has been on and off and seems to finally be taken offline in February 2020 and not actually in September 2019. Also, we know that this pandemic very likely started in the mid to late November 2019. So, I think with certain—quite a lot of certainty we can say that these events are unrelated.

Mrs. LESKO. Well, that seems very unusual to me, and I yield back. Thank you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mr. Mfume from Maryland for five minutes of questions.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you and the Ranking Member. I want to thank our witnesses who have endured us for the last couple of hours.

And I certainly want to thank the Members of this Committee who continue to try to make sure that we stay within our own guidelines in terms of what we're approaching and how we're approaching it and what we, of course, hope to achieve.

I've used this microphone in other occasions during this hearing to argue that we went through COVID-19 in real time. Every day was different, every week was different, every month was different, and unfortunately every year was different. And so there was a constant building process with building blocks about what we knew and what we didn't know; what we should do, or what we should never do.

And we came through that better as a Nation because of the science which so many of us relied on and the data and the approach that the healthcare industry took, particularly, doctors and physicians over and over again while many of us were free of that exposure in that sense.

And so, what we seem to do here is retrospective investigation, which I'm not necessarily opposed to, but I get the sense we do it with a vendetta. Like, I think this was wrong, and you were the one that did it.

Or I think this was wrong, and you conspired to do this. That's not going to get us very far. Not at all. Given the critical role that science plays in advancing our understanding of emerging viruses, I'm appalled every time I hear some of my colleagues turn to politicizing and vilifying the researchers.

Somebody had to do the research. Somebody had to come up with conclusions. Somebody had to follow the data. Somebody had to make an assessment. And so, it's a little strange to me that we will vilify the people who did that at the time when we needed them the most, because now we're operating in retrospective lens.

We in this Subcommittee, Mr. Chairman, have attacked physicians; we've attacked labor unions; we've attacked public health officials; we've attacked teachers; we've attacked healthcare workers; we've really attacked the CDC and the NIH; we've attacked, as you've heard today, Dr. Fauci, Dr. Collins, previously Dr. Walensky; we've attacked Joe Biden.

We're in an attack mode instead of what I thought would be a real fact-finding mode about what do we do to get ready for the next novel virus, which could be set upon us at any time? And so, in the six months that this Committee has operated, I don't think that we've got an answer. I haven't seen what our steps are, if that's the case, how do we proceed? And if that is the case, we've got to rely on researchers and physicians all over again.

And I think it poisons the water if we have already sort of predisposed the—who we think they are, why they are operating, what's wrong with them. The basic claims in the scientific article that we've talked about was developed to suppress the lab leak theory. It was somehow demanded by the U.S. Government or else.

That's an incredible disservice, in my opinion. We don't want to frighten off the very processes, the people, the industries, or anything else that will help us if and when something like this happens again.

So, I did not mean to get on a soapbox and make a speech. I actually have a few questions. I'll submit those in writing, if you

would, Mr. Chair? But I just want to thank these two persons before us today and the others who have come before us and have had to feel like the weight of the world's been on their shoulders when all they really did was what they were supposed to do based on their profession, based on their desire to save lives.

And as has been mentioned before, we followed other routines articulated by Dr. Birx, who was with Mr. Trump at the time, who said we've lost millions of lives by doing the wrong thing like recommending bleach and telling the American public, don't worry, come Easter we'll all be in church together. And we were not in church together for another three Easters after that.

I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Dr. Joyce from Pennsylvania for five minutes of questions.

Dr. JOYCE. Thank you, Chairman Wenstrup, and Ranking Member Ruiz for holding today's hearing. And thank you to both Dr. Andersen and Dr. Garry for testifying before this Committee today.

This Committee has worked tirelessly peeling back the layers on the events that transpired amidst the devastating coronavirus pandemic. The Members of this Committee have been charged with a great responsibility by the American people. Our job is to shine a spotlight on the public health officials and agencies for their mishandlings and to hold them accountable.

We are tasked with analyzing their misguided, their ambiguous, and their flawed policies so that we can learn how to better prepare and address any potential public health emergencies in the future. Further, this Committee's investigations will finally expose the true origins of this deadly virus that destroyed millions of lives and livelihoods across the globe.

In April, just a few short months ago, this Committee held a hearing where the former director of the National Intelligence Agency, John Ratcliffe testified. In that testimony, Director Ratcliffe said, and I quote, "If our intelligence and evidence supporting a lab leak theory was placed side by side with our intelligence and evidence pointing to a naturally occurring spillover theory, the lab leak side of the ledger would be long and overwhelming, while the spillover side would be nearly empty." Nearly empty.

Dr. Andersen, this quote came from the former director of National Intelligence and someone who has access to the most sensitive information provided by our intelligence community. If this is the case, can you explain how the Proximal Origins piece of which you are an author totally contradicts that information from our intelligence community?

Dr. ANDERSEN. The Proximal Origins paper is the result of scientific work by international well-known experts. I think it's important to realize that if you look at the recent report from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence community is that one of their conclusions is that there's no indication that there is pre-pandemic research holdings, including—

Dr. JOYCE. Please allow me to address what information we had in front of us. I'm addressing what we heard Ratcliffe tell this—to tell us as a Committee that that wasn't the case. That overwhelmingly the information at hand provided by the intelligence

communities showed that this was not a naturally occurring process.

Dr. Andersen, in your testimony, you said the recently declassified report from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence does, as you said, conclude that there is no evidence to suggest this virus came from the lab. However, the ODNI also states in their reports the Department of Energy and the Federal Bureau of Investigation assessed that a laboratory-associated incident was the most likely cause of the first human infection of SARS-CoV-2.

Dr. Andersen, you also said in your testimony we do not believe that any type of laboratory-based scenario is plausible. And yet the conclusions by the Department of Energy and the FBI directly contradict your position. How do you bring that together?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think you can say that our conclusions completely contradict their conclusions, too. I think it's important to understand that we're looking at different things here. You're talking about the intelligence community. If you look at the scientific literature, the scientific evidence for this pointing to a single market in the middle of Wuhan is overwhelming. There is—

Dr. JOYCE. But the Intelligence Committee had access to both scientific and the investigative reports. They had that overview. And their conclusions strongly contradict what your single conclusion projects.

And we as a Committee have heard this repeatedly that the overview from both the FBI and the Department of Energy support that there was a lab leak, support that the most likely cause of the first human infection of SARS-CoV-2 was a laboratory incident. We've recognized how that occurred.

We as a Committee have formed what we feel is most important and understanding all the information that's brought forward to us, and that information points directly to a lab leak.

My time has expired, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Ms. Dingell from Michigan for five minutes of questions. I'm sorry, Ms. Tokuda from Hawaii.

Ms. TOKUDA. Thank you very much, Chair. Once again, we find ourselves being faced by our Republican colleagues that have convened another hearing under the guise of investigating the pandemic's origins to advance their extreme conspiratorial narrative against Dr. Fauci, Dr. Collins, and our Nation's scientists and public health experts. I'd like to take a bit of a moment during my time to set the record straight about a number of things that have been said today.

First of all, one of the things we heard earlier was that scientists don't flip-flop. No. Scientists focus on facts and the data before them, which can change in a matter of 72 hours or, yes, even 45 days between the time of discussion and the time of report, especially when we were dealing with a virus we know very little about that even until this day is rapidly changing and evolving.

So, I ask both of you to assert coercion or political persuasion as the result of why that change took place during the 72 hours. Is this, in fact, a false statement when we're considering just the way that the scientific process works and the rapidly evolving changing—the rapid evolving information that we're having at that time took place?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think again it's important to understand that it's our thinking that is evolving. We're talking about the change from early hypotheses to realize that a subset of those can, in our opinion, be discarded with a relatively high degree of confidence. And that happens within just a few days when we are specifically talking about a purposefully manipulated virus.

That's an evolution of our thinking. It is not a flip-flop. It is an early hypothesis which ends up being unsupported followed by other hypotheses that are still on the table.

Ms. TOKUDA. And so, isn't it important that we, in fact, support this evolution of our thinking and our research in order for us to more quickly be able to really ascertain the proximal origins of things like the COVID-19 virus to start to really begin to save lives?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think it's important that we continue to consider any and all evidence known and potentially to come in future. And that is exactly what we are doing as the scientific community, which may end up with previous hypotheses all of a sudden being no longer supported, for example. This is not a flip-flop. This is simply the scientific process.

Ms. TOKUDA. See, one of my concerns is when politicians start throwing around words like flip-flop, we are actually creating a very chilling effect on the scientific process on our scientific community. I share the concerns that have been raised in this hearing by our Ranking Member, by the good gentleman from Maryland that we're poisoning the water when it comes to active research in science that is looking at saving lives, taking care of our people.

I worry that politicians continue to overreach and quite frankly weaponization of the discussions around the origin of COVID-19 will, in fact, heighten this chilling effect on the ability for our scientists and public health officials to thoroughly investigate and study future disease outbreaks, public health crises, and be able to meaningfully connect that and convey to the public.

Dr. Garry and Dr. Andersen, do you think political weaponization of the origins of COVID-19 will have a chilling effect on scientific research, international collaborations going forward, and quite frankly result in lives lost; our inability to really respond to public health crisis when it arises?

Dr. GARRY. You know, I'm a scientist. I try not to let all the din of the politics around me influence my analyses, my experiments, the choices that I make, when I you know, work together with other scientists to write a publication. So, you know, I understand what you're saying about the politics being influenced.

But I can tell you that we did not let those factors influence our writing of the Proximal Origins paper or any of the other, you know, papers in Science and PNAS and any other journals that we've written that influence our thinking about the origins of SARS-CoV-2 in any way.

Ms. TOKUDA. Dr. Andersen, did you want to respond?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think the whole reason I'm here today is because it's been politicized. The title is the Proximal Origin of a Cover Up. I think there's no question that why—whereas the science itself is a scientific process focused on evidence analyses and then publications and peer reviewed journals, which is exactly

what we have been doing. People are free to disagree with that, whether it's the intelligence community or other scientists. That's why we published the papers.

I think, again, the reason why I'm here today is because of that politicization of that whole process, and I think it is deeply damaging. I think there's a need to rebuild trust. I think it's important to understand that scientists and politicians need to work together. And I think the way to do that, I think, is just focus on the facts and focus on the actual evidence.

Ms. TOKUDA. Thank you. I think we absolutely do have to focus on the facts. I think that for researchers like yourself and others going forward have to double think what they put on their Slack messages and channels and their emails and their text threads and instead not be distracted from the actual work of the research. What will end up is lives lost. It will cost us time to actually getting to what the origins of these disease and public health crises are. So, we have stop the weaponization of the origins of COVID-19 discussion.

Thank you, Chair. I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mr. Cloud from Texas for five minutes of questions.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, Chairman. Dr. Garry, how many years have you spent in the field of immunology?

Dr. GARRY. I'm a virologist. OK.

Mr. CLOUD. Virology. Sorry.

Dr. GARRY. About 45.

Mr. CLOUD. Forty-five, that is significant, no doubt. I think—I'm not a scientist and don't pretend to be. But I think it's hard sometimes for the American people when we go through things, and we read things like where two days prior to a draft being released you are saying literally I really can't think of a plausible natural scenario where you get from a bat virus to one very similar to it to COVID.

You said, I just can't figure out how this gets accomplished in nature. It's stunning. And then two days later while it wasn't the Proximal Origins paper, it was basically the conclusion that you had out-ruled that as a hypothesis.

And you said, you know, what new data came available. We imagine it took—you know, there's two days between that and February 4. Your statement—I assume it took a day to write the draft, and so that's one heck of a data dump in one single day that would change 42 years of experience that led to this previous hypothesis—45 years, I believe. Was it? You said it was because of some new data that became available on the pangolin.

And, Dr. Andersen, you agreed with this in an interview in The New York Times. You said, "For example, we looked at data from COVID being found in other species such as bats, pangolins, which demonstrated that other features first appeared unique to COVID were in fact in other related diseases."

But during the peer review part, you said that was not data that was included; that the pangolin information had no leaning into the conclusions you made. Is that correct?

Dr. ANDERSEN. So, the timeline keeps changing here. First, it's two days, it's three days, it's four days. It's actually 45 days when we're talking about the——

Mr. CLOUD. It's 45 days before the draft was published. I think there was a peer review period, and within two days the conclusion had changed from, oh, this is not going to-to oh, it's impossible that this could have happened. So that is true. And then you spent some time actually drafting Proximal Origins, and then you had it peer reviewed. During the peer review process, they brought up—there was questions asked to you, and you said there is no evidence on present data that pangolin COVID are directly related to COVID-19, in spite of the fact that a year later you said the opposite of that on national TV.

And so that's concerning to me. You also said that anyone believes anything contrary to, you know, the wet market theory is a conspiracy theorist. And then you corrected that statement, but you certainly said that those of us in the Majority, that's not a scientific statement, that's a political statement.

You've also said the only scientific data that is correct points to proximal origins, to natural origins. Yet we have the FBI, the DOE, we have a number of other scientists who have worked in this field for decades also pointing to this. Are you concerned that the lab in China deleted information?

Dr. ANDERSEN. So, I think there's a lot of questions in there. There's a lot of words at least. But I think the important thing is, again, if you look at the intelligence community, for example, the majority of them believe this is natural, right? If you look at the recent report, it says almost all agencies agree that SARS-CoV-2 was not genetically engineered. That's one of our main conclusions in the Proximal Origin——

Mr. CLOUD. And in the origin information, they're changing their viewpoint. That was originally, and new information has come out. Do you have access to classified information?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I do not. I think it's important to realize, though, that——

Mr. CLOUD. Do you think that the CCP is a trusted partner?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I don't think the CCP is a trusted partner, no.

Mr. CLOUD. OK. You said you based your conclusions a lot on the publicly available data coming out of the lab. That publicly available data is what China has made available to the public. And at the meantime we see them destroying data. We see them not allowing us access to the lab to research anything.

And then we also see scientists disappearing who worked in China. You don't find that concerning, and that doesn't cause any sort of suspicion?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think it's important to understand that the conclusions are based in part on evidence from China. Of course, the pandemic started in China, so necessarily early data on cases and what happens at the market will necessarily have to be from China itself. However, several of our conclusions do not rely on evidence from China.

For example, the majority of the conclusions in Proximal Origin are based on publicly available data, which is not just from China,

that's from elsewhere as well. In later papers, a lot of our conclusions can be replicated using data that is from outside of China.

So, there's no specific reliance on any single data set. There's also not—importantly, there's not one single piece of data that would convince me it's this or it's that. And I think the pangolins, which continue to be misrepresented of what we actually mean, is an important point of that. The reviewer said that based on the pangolin data, you can just reject any potential lab leak origin.

And we say you can't do that. The pangolin data itself is insufficient to do that. You need look at the confluence of evidence, and you need to look at all the evidence in concert. And that's exactly what we are doing in Proximal Origin.

And that is also one of the reasons why our thinking on this particular question evolved over time from early hypotheses to later conclusions published in the peer review.

Mr. CLOUD. Can you not acknowledge that there are qualified scientists in this field who disagree with you?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Absolutely.

Mr. CLOUD. Are they conspiracy theorists?

Dr. ANDERSEN. They are not conspiracy theorists. And I think it's important to have scientific—

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you. My time's up. I yield back.

Dr. ANDERSEN [continuing]. Debate and disagreement debate.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Ms. Greene from Georgia for five minutes of questions.

Mr. GREENE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In 2012, six miners working in a bat-infested mine in southern China caught a coronavirus, had symptoms like COVID-19, and three died. But we didn't see a worldwide pandemic. We didn't see millions of people die. We didn't see governments shut down their economies, take away freedoms such as speech, freedom of religion, freedom basically to work a job and support our families.

After that, samples of that virus were taken to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. The only biosafety level 4 lab in China. The Wuhan Institute of Virology did gain-of-function research on these samples and other samples of coronaviruses. In autumn of 2019, the SARS-CoV-2 virus appeared in Wuhan. The closest known relative to the virus extracted from the miners held at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Even early in the outbreak, the virus was well adapted to human-to-human transmission. Wuhan authorities worked to silence dissenters and those affiliated in the Wuhan Institute of Virology. The CCP authorities lobbied the WHO to announce an international emergency and blocked scientific investigations access into the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Here's what's interesting. Chinese military Major General Chin Way was put in charge of containment of COVID-19. He is the CCP's top biological weapons expert and raises questions about Chinese military involvement at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Dr. Garry, Dr. Andersen, I'll ask each of you one at a time. Why would they put the top biological weapons expert in charge of containment of a virus, a virus that was very similar to the one that a few miners caught in 2012, that by the way didn't turn into a

pandemic? Why would China put their top biological weapons expert in charge instead of just another virologist? Dr. Garry.

Dr. GARRY. Representative Greene, I don't have any idea. I have no idea.

Mr. GREENE. OK. Dr. Andersen?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I can't comment on that. I think it's important to realize—I assume you're referring to the virus RaTG13? And what is very clear is that RaTG13 cannot have led to SARS-CoV-2. These are very unrelated viruses.

Ms. GREENE. Well, it's interesting, though, that you all wrote a paper claiming to know exactly the origins of COVID-19, but China put their top biological weapons expert in charge of containment.

On January 15, 2021, the Department of State released a fact sheet entitled: Activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. It discussed three primary areas of concern. First one, illnesses inside the Wuhan Institute of Virology. The U.S. Government believes several researchers inside the lab became sick in the fall of 2019 before the CCP first reported cases of COVID-19. That was in the lab.

The CCP prevented journalists, investigators, and global health authorities from accessing the lab, including interviewing the researchers that fell sick in 2019. It sounds like they were concerned about so-called conspiracy theories just like you are.

Ms. GREENE. There was also research at the lab, starting in at least 2016. The Wuhan Institute of Virology was researching RaTG13 just as you mentioned, the bat coronavirus, with the closest relationship to SARS-CoV-2, 96.2 percent similar.

The Wuhan Institute of Virology has published record of dangerous gain-of-function research, gain-of-function like our government has funded with grants through EcoHealth. I'm sure you're familiar.

There's secret military activity at the lab. The U.S. Government determined that the lab collaborated on publications and secret projects with the CCP Military since at least 2017. Perhaps that's why they put their top biological weapons expert in charge of containment because they were very aware of the type of research that was going on at the lab, where people that worked at the lab got sick with COVID-19 first.

But you guys think this came from nature. Do you still believe it came from nature, Dr. Garry, Dr. Andersen?

Dr. GARRY. Yes. I do believe that the natural origin, via the wild-life trade, is the most likely origin based on all the science, all the data that we've analyzed.

Ms. GREENE. Dr. Andersen?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I do. And I think it's important to—you mentioned the sick researchers here. In the recent report again, the IC continues to assess that this information neither support nor refutes either hypothesis of the pandemic's origin because the researchers' symptoms could've been caused by a number of diseases such as in the middle of the flu—

Ms. GREENE. Actually, Dr. Andersen—I'll reclaim my time—the IC believes that the origin of COVID-19 is from the lab. Most of the intelligence community believes that, and they've stated so. So

has the Energy Department, and so do many other doctors and researchers believe that it came from the lab.

And from all of this evidence, it's very clear that China also believed it came from the lab. But it's unfortunate that you all are speaking the same pro-China talking points as some of our colleagues on our Committee. And I think it's more important to really recognize it probably came from the lab.

I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Dr. Jackson from Texas for five minutes of questions.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Andersen, and Dr. Garry—Dr. Andersen in particular here—I just wanted to address one thing here to start with. I know this has been mentioned again, but I just wanted to reiterate this. You emailed Dr. Fauci prior to the February 1 call, and you said, “the unusual features of the virus make up a really small part of the genome.”

And then you went on to say, after discussions earlier today, Eddie, Bob, Mike, and myself all find the genome inconsistent with expectations from evolutionary theory.

Later on in the phone call, the phone call that followed, Dr. Farzan said, so I think it becomes a question of how do you put all this together, whether you believe this is a series of coincidences, what you know of the lab in Wuhan, how much could be in nature, accidental release or nature event. I am 70/30.

Dr. Garry, you stated, I really can't think of a plausible natural scenario where you get from the bat virus to one very similar to it to where you insert exactly four amino acids, 12 nucleotides that all have to be added at the exact same time to gain this function. I just can't figure out how this gets accomplished in nature. It's stunning, you said.

Nevertheless, three days later—and I cleared this up in the hearing, so thank you. I thought this was the initial release of the Proximal Origins, but it wasn't, but nevertheless four days later, I have this email here, and it's been mentioned already by one of my colleagues here, but I just want to reiterate it again. This is an email on February the 4th that was initiated, at least what I have here, by Dr. Holmes, who I wish was here so he could answer a couple of questions I have about this email.

But it says, it's addressed to Jeremy Farrar, and it says, here is a summary so far. Will be edited further. It's fundamental science and completely neutral as written. Did not mention other anomalies as this will make us look like loons.

I have no idea what that means. I'd love to find out, but he's not here to answer that question.

It was replied to by Dr. Farrar who also cc'd Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins and said, please treat in confidence, a very rough first draft from Eddie and the team. They will send an edited, cleaner version later.

Dr. Francis Collins replied, very thoughtful analysis, and then Dr. Jeremy Farrar replied with something which I don't know what it is because the vast majority—every bit of his response is redacted out. So, I don't know exactly what that was.

But my question was, is it during—you've cleared up that this was not the initial draft of Proximal Origin, that this was a response email or a followup draft report, whatever you want to call it, in response to the phone call that took place on February the 1.

My question for both of you is, at that particular point when this information, this draft summary, was forwarded to Dr. Collins and Dr. Fauci, referencing the phone call that you'd had days earlier, were your conclusions changed, had your hypothesis changed at that particular point?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I can take that. I think, let me just go back to the original email because there's—there's other sentences in that email that I think is important to—first of all, I say, we have a good team lined up to look very critically at this, so we should know much more at the end of the weekend.

I also say, but we have to look at this much more closely, and there's still further analyses to be done, so those opinions could change.

When you're looking at our February 4 summary, which is the one that you're referring to here, our main conclusion is that we believe deliberate engineering can be ruled out with a high degree of confidence.

However, referring to both lab leaks, specifically the tissue culture hypothesis that we describe in Proximal Origin, our conclusion at the time of February 4, is that current data are consistent with all three. It is currently impossible to prove or disprove either.

Dr. JACKSON. OK. Dr. Garry, what about you, because you specifically said—I mean, Dr. Andersen said he doesn't believe it was engineered, but he said he hadn't ruled out a lab leak in that particular thing.

Dr. Garry, you specifically said that, you know, you find it completely stunning and implausible that, you know, that you insert four amino acids and 12 nucleotides all that have to be at the exact same time to gain this function. That sounds like engineering to me.

Dr. GARRY. Well, again, Representative Jackson, I think I started to, or I tried to address this before. That was a single email out of a lot of communications that I was having with people like Dr. Andersen and others.

And in that particular email, I was, you know, raising my concern about this one feature of the virus—

Dr. JACKSON. Let me ask you this question because you it—you did explain that.

Dr. GARRY. Yes.

Dr. JACKSON. Let me just ask you guys real quick. So, you're telling me that, like, you know, and this was the actual first publication of Proximal Origin was published on February 16, 2020. It was posted in the—on the website Virological.

So, from February 1 to February 16, are you telling me that you gathered all of this additional information? Because we know what your initial hypothesis was, or your initial conclusions were to start with before—you gathered every bit of this new additional information which we don't know exactly what it was or where it came from, you completely changed your hypothesis, you collaborated

with your co-authors, and you wrote the Proximal Origin paper all in that period of time?

I just want to know—my time is up, but I just want you to know that sounds completely ridiculous to the American people, and it's completely in step with what a lot of people think is going on here, is that Dr. Anthony Fauci and Francis Collins realized that they had been implicated in the production or in the creation of this virus, and they were doing everything they could, including get at both of you to come on board as tools, or vehicles, to undermine that theory.

Thank you. My time is up.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Dr. McCormick from Georgia for five minutes of questions.

Dr. MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I totally agree that early hypotheses change. As for the politization of this and the accusations made that this is entirely political, I think we do have something to learn about finding out the true origins of this disease.

It's interesting that when they talk about censoring and politization of something, only one side that I remember was ever censored, and it was our side. And when I say "our side," I mean the fact it was a lab leak.

I was censored as the emergency physician who treated thousands of patients and who has a background taught by an equally adept professor in virology, at medical school that taught us diseases propagate.

One of things I thought was interesting, I think it's very wise of you to admit that there is many possibilities, and just to lay it out in front of the people, since I'm the summary—summary person today, it's interesting that any other crossover virus, or any virus that's ever really existed for the most part still exists in society today.

It's very hard to get rid of an entire subset of viruses by itself. We still have the common cold, for example. We still have Avian flu. We still have swine flu. And those still propagate in those species because they don't just go away. They continue to get switched around, and it still exists in society today.

What I think is interesting is that I haven't seen any evidence—and I read your papers, by the way. I love reading and learning, and I consider myself a student of the game—and I saw how we talked about the raccoon dogs and the civet cat having DNA and RNA in the same place where they found the vast preponderance of the coronavirus in that market.

However, what we didn't see is that there was any immune response by those animals to this virus that supposedly can propagate inside of that species also, which would be a natural way to propagate a virus by virology standards, which you have to admit, if exists in the species, it has to be able to propagate and continue. It doesn't just go away.

It's not just found in the same proximity of a species but inside the species with antibodies and resistance. To say that it's just because it's in the same area somewhere that a dog was found or a cat was found or a pang—whatever you want to say, is for me just

like smear some COVID on this wood and say, look, it came from this wood.

To give our people who are watching this, who are maybe not medical background to understand, that's obviously impossible. Just like it's impossible to have a virus that exists inside of an animal species go away or not have any sort of immune response or any propagation if that's where it came from in the beginning.

And that's where I find a huge hole in your theory. As scientists—I love science—I'm trying to follow your science, and I don't get it. I just don't get it.

It doesn't matter if it's found in the same area. Did it continue to live in that species? Is it still—I know for a fact China has looked for it hard and killed lots of animals trying to find it and cannot find this natural immune response and this natural propagation inside of these species.

So therefore, my natural conclusion is, it didn't come from there. What I do know, if I use just logical thinking—and I've heard your responses, so I get it, and I don't really have too many questions because I've heard your responses over and over again.

But I just want, from a scientific standpoint, I want to summarize this for folks who aren't scientists. I just explained the science behind this, that if you can't find it, you can't find the immune response, you can't find the disease propagating inside of a species, then it really never existed in that species, and, therefore, that's not scientific.

And likewise, if you have a science lab talking about actually developing something and wanting funding for it, in other words, gain-of-function, and then it centers around that same lab that asked for it, I agree with your initial assumption, Dr. Garry, that most likely it came from a lab, and I think that's where the evidence has continued to point.

Ironically when it got politicized it was myself and others that believe like me in the science that got censored. That's the irony of this. And yet I'm accused of politicizing this.

I just want to make it very clear for those people who are watching who are not scientists, that this is a scientific discussion, but it's also a political discussion because we have to figure out where it came from in order to deal with the next pandemic.

And if we're going to tie—to assume that we're going to stop the evolution of viruses in the wild, that's not something we can really do much for. We can prepare for it, but we can't stop that.

But we can stop gain-of-function research when we admit that that's where the disease came from. And I think that's what this discussion is about, and that's why it's important to actually combine the science with common sense, and we come to a natural conclusion.

And with that, I yield.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mrs. Dingell from Michigan for five minutes of questions.

Mrs. DINGELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to say to my colleagues, we all want the facts. We need the facts because we have an enormous responsibility as Members of this Committee to make sure we are ready for the next pan-

demic, which you all are—got a lot more doctors' degrees on your side. I'm not one, but it's coming.

And not one person over here has said, and the Intelligence Committees have said, we don't know where the leak has come from. Could have been a lab leak, could've been other ways, we're studying it, we want the facts.

The Select Subcommittee's purported investigations into the origins of the coronavirus, which for five months has largely focused on the publication of this paper, has included a number—and I am so offended by some of the things I've heard today—of baseless allegations against our Nation's scientists, our public health experts, including Dr. Fauci and Collins. And instead of being on a mission to destroy two people, I wish we were on a mission to get the facts.

So, I'd like to address them, starting with the egregious claim that Dr. Fauci bribed Dr. Andersen and other authors of the Proximal Origin paper to suppress the lab leak theory with a \$9 million Federal grant.

Dr. Andersen, in your written testimony, you describe these allegations as, "absurd and false," and explain that key funding decisions for this grant, including its scoring and review by independent experts, was made even before the first outbreak of COVID-19.

Dr. Andersen, would you please reiterate for the Select Subcommittee why my Republican colleagues' allegations that Dr. Fauci bribed you and your co-authors with Federal grant funding are categorically false?

Dr. ANDERSEN. They are categorically false.

Mrs. DINGELL. In fact, the information Dr. Andersen laid out is publicly available for everyone, those watching, get the facts, including my Republican colleagues, to see online at NIH's website.

We have a picture here to make sure everyone is absolutely clear on this. Let's take a look at this ourselves. As you can see here, NIH's grant data base plainly notes—plainly—fact, facts, I like facts—that this grant passed through the NIH's scientific merit review in November 2019.

Dr. Andersen, if the grant were scored and reviewed as part of the NIH's transparent—transparent—merit-based process in November 2019, is there any way that the awarding of the grant could've been used as a bribe during the February 1, 2020 conference call?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Excluding the possibility that somebody is a time traveler, no, that is just not possible given the timeline.

Mrs. DINGELL. Dr. Garry, do you agree?

Dr. GARRY. I agree.

Mrs. DINGELL. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to submit a copy of the funding information for Dr. Andersen's grant which lays out the timeline of its NIH review for the record.

With my remaining time, I'd like to—

Dr. WENSTRUP. Without objection.

Mrs. DINGELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

—I'd like to address the broader allegation that Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins were involved in any sort of campaign to suppress the lab leak theory through the publication of Proximal Origin.

Dr. Andersen and Dr. Garry, you sat for nearly 20 hours of transcribed interviews with Select Subcommittee staff. During those interviews you were asked questions about Dr. Fauci's and Dr. Collins' involvement with the paper.

Dr. Garry, in your interview, you told the Select Subcommittee that Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins never contacted you or gave you advice about writing that paper.

In fact, you stated that neither Dr. Fauci, nor Dr. Collins, quote, did anything really to influence the paper in any way.

Dr. Garry, is that correct?

Dr. GARRY. That's correct.

Mrs. DINGELL. And Dr. Andersen, in your interview, you refuted the idea that Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins sought to suppress scientific inquiry into the origins of COVID-19. You told the Select Subcommittee staff, quote, not only did they not do that, they encouraged scientific inquiry into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Andersen, is there anything you want to add regarding that statement?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That statement is correct. That was exactly what they did.

Mrs. DINGELL. The suggestion, my friends, that Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins were engaged in some sort of intricate cover-up to suppress the lab leak theory and bribe researchers is reckless, irresponsible, and grossly inaccurate.

These baseless attacks on our Nation's scientists and public officials need to stop. I want to get to the origin of what happened. I may even in my heart wonder with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. But we're not going to get to it making reckless statements.

Thank you, and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Mr. Jordan from Ohio for five minutes of questions.

Mr. JORDAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Andersen, should we be doing gain-of-function research?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think fundamental virology research which includes gain-of-function research is important. However, such research should, of course, be done safely.

Mr. JORDAN. Was gain-of-function research being done, Dr. Garry, at the lab in Wuhan, China?

Dr. GARRY. I have not reviewed all of the research that was being done at the Wuhan Institute, so I don't really have a professional opinion on—

Mr. JORDAN. Do you have a professional opinion, Dr. Andersen?

Dr. ANDERSEN. To my knowledge—

Mr. JORDAN. I know you got professional opinions about lots of things, but do you have one on that?

Dr. ANDERSEN. To my knowledge, there is no gain-of-function research. Although there is work involving chimeric viruses, for example, as we discuss in our Proximal Origin paper.

Mr. JORDAN. Was the lab in China up to the code for doing the kind of research that you just described, Dr. Andersen?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I don't know about any of their codes, anything going on at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Mr. JORDAN. Would it be up to—would it be—my understanding is, it wasn't. Do you think it was up to the code necessary to do the kind of research that you think they were doing there?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Again, I can't talk to the code of the lab itself. I think what is clear from the published research from the Wuhan Institute of Virology was that a lot of this research was done at biosafety level 2, which I considered at the time to be insufficient and today, especially given the diversity of related viruses that were found—

Mr. JORDAN. So just to be clear, you guys don't know whether they were doing gain-of-function research or not. You think they weren't. I think they were. You think they weren't. But regardless of that, what they were doing there, the biosafety level at that lab wasn't up to the code it should've been for the research they were doing?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Doing this type of research at BSL-2 using bat coronaviruses is commonly done at BSL-2. The lab work being—or the animal work, I should say, is done in BSL-3. Again, this is all—

Mr. JORDAN. What level lab would you want? If you're doing the research, Dr. Andersen or Dr. Garry, what level would you want—2 or 3?

Dr. ANDERSEN. This would, again, typically be—this would typically be approved at biosafety level 2. However, as I said have from the beginning, is that I believe, especially given everything we know, based on how many of these coronaviruses we have, that this kind of work should, in future, via international regulations be done at BSL-3.

Mr. JORDAN. It should be done at a higher level than it was done there—

Dr. ANDERSEN. Correct.

Mr. JORDAN [continuing]. Is what you're saying? Got it. All right. And should it go through—we have this process, Dr. Garry, this P3 process, this approval process for this type of grant money to be used and this type of work to be done. Should it go through that process before it's approved?

Dr. GARRY. I mean, in your hypothetical, yes, I mean, of course, we should follow the regulations.

Mr. JORDAN. OK. So, my understanding is American tax dollars went to this lab in China. Is that right, Dr. Garry?

Dr. GARRY. I don't know what—I don't have any information myself about—

Mr. JORDAN. It's been commonly reported that EcoHealth—EcoHealth sent the money there. American tax dollars were used in the Wuhan lab, this lab we've been talking about.

Dr. GARRY. Again, I haven't reviewed the financial transactions between NIH and EcoHealth Alliance.

Mr. JORDAN. OK. Dr. Andersen, just real quick—and I know you touched on this earlier—so on January 31, the now email that—you know, somewhat famous email that you sent, virus looks engineered, virus not consistent with evolutionary theory, you know, I think that was part of that email and comments Dr. Garry made was what prompted the conference call.

And then four days later you come back and basically say, if you believe it came from a lab, then you're some—it's some crackpot theory. And what happened in that—I mean, that's a pretty dramatic change in four days, and I know you've talked about it before, but that's what I think I find so concerning is, you went from virus looks engineered, not consistent with evolutionary theory, to, you're crazy if you think it all came from a lab, and that all happened in four days.

Dr. ANDERSEN. So that is a misrepresentation of what the email actually says. Let me just read that sentence because I say, the main crackpot theories going around at the moment related to this virus being somehow engineered with intent, and that is demonstrably not the case.

I'm very specifically referring to the fact that this is engineered with intent, i.e., a bioweapon. At the time I still believed—

Mr. JORDAN. OK. Fair enough. So, you're saying there wasn't an intention to have it, this, you know, done in a lab, but—so you're not saying it couldn't have come from a lab?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct. At that time of writing this email, in fact, I thought the plausibility of this being a lab-cultured virus was still high. I kept that belief until mid to late February.

Mr. JORDAN. Do you think that—you know, you've been strong on the zoonotic theory. Do you think it could've come from a lab, even today as you sit here?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Not as I sit here today, no, I think the plausibility of this having come from the lab, given the evidence, I don't find that plausible at all.

Mr. JORDAN. The FBI is wrong? People who dis—people think it came from a lab is wrong? The fact that American tax dollars went to a lab in China, a lab that wasn't up to code, should've been level 3, even based on what you guys say, wasn't up to code, doing I think potentially gain-of-function research, and it breaks out in that town in China, but somehow, no, it can't even be possible that it came from a lab? It has to be the zoonotic approach.

Dr. ANDERSEN. It is possible. As I'm saying, I don't find it plausible, or maybe I should say probable, given the evidence that we have available to us.

Again, anything is possible, and as we are saying in the Proximal Origin paper, and also in later papers, is that it is currently impossible to prove or disprove any version of the origin, whether lab or not.

Mr. JORDAN. OK. Thank you.

I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize Majority staff for 15 minutes of questions.

Mr. BENZINE. Dr. Garry, Dr. Andersen, it's good to see you again. Mitch Benzine, I'm the staff director for the Majority staff. I have a couple follow-up questions based off your responses to the Members and want to start with, Dr. Andersen, something you just said, that intentionally engineering is equivalent to a bioweapon. Do researchers not intentionally modify viruses that don't turn into bio-weapons?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Again, I think that the unfortunate fact here is that the words used here early on are confusing. When I'm saying,

“engineered with intent,” what I specifically mean is that you engineer the virus with the intent of creating something like SARS-CoV-2. For example, something that is highly transmissible between humans, binds well to the ACE-2 receptor, and that requires the intent of people to create that virus specifically.

At the time of writing the email, the crackpot theory which—and I should say I use “crackpot” because I thought several people thought I was a crackpot at the time—is that I’m specifically referring to the call from the National Academy of Sciences which was specifically based on the idea of a bioweapon.

So, that’s what I’m referring to there, but of course the intention to engineer any virus, any kind of engineering, would be intentional, right? But specifically, what I am referring to here is the idea that the intention of creating this virus.

Mr. BENZINE. OK. I want to ask some questions, just base knowledge while you were drafting Proximal Origin and go back and forth here. So, to both of you, Dr. Garry, Dr. Andersen, were you aware of all the research being conducted at the Wuhan Institute of Virology leading up to the drafting of Proximal Origin?

Dr. GARRY. No, I’m not—I don’t see how we could possibly be aware of all of it.

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct. I mean, I will say, we were, of course, well aware of what has been published, which is what raised their initial hypothesis which was that this could potentially have come from a lab was because we were aware of the type of research going on at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Mr. BENZINE. But not all the research?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Of course not, no.

Mr. BENZINE. I mean, you’ve testified—both of you testified previously that it’s maybe not common, but researchers don’t always publish everything, at least contemporaneously?

Dr. ANDERSEN. No, I don’t think most researchers publish their results contemporaneously.

Mr. BENZINE. Are you aware-Dr. Garry, Dr. Andersen, were you aware at the time that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was conducting research on pangolin viruses?

Dr. GARRY. I was not aware of it.

Dr. ANDERSEN. No.

Mr. BENZINE. Both of you, were you aware that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was conducting experiments that involved intentionally simulating natural recombination events?

Dr. GARRY. In a broad sense, I guess there had been some experiments that were published in the literature that involved, you know, making pseudo viruses and other things that would involve recombination, yes.

Dr. ANDERSEN. Yes, and I think both certainly were well aware of the chimeric viral work that they were doing, which is inserting spike proteins, for example, from one virus into another virus using well established backbones like BIV1. I was very aware of that work, yes.

Mr. BENZINE. Were you aware that the Wuhan Institute of Virology had the capability to conduct those experiments without leaving a trace?

Dr. ANDERSEN. It is well known that you can do cloning systems that leave no trace. However, if you look at published papers from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the vast majority of them do, in fact, leave traces.

But of course, the awareness was, I think we even discuss it in the Slack messages that you have, that, of course, it's possible to create recombinant viruses, for example, that don't leave a trace of the recombination itself.

Mr. BENZINE. I'm just wondering how you're able to take genetic engineering off the table so quickly when you don't have awareness of what the Wuhan Institute of Virology is doing, they can conduct experiments without a trace, and they were, in fact, doing research on bat and pangolin viruses?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Again, we're talking about intentional engineering here, and if you look at the virus itself, you look at the viral genome, talk about the furin cleavage site, for example, is that the furin cleavage site is suboptimal in the sense that this is a crap furin cleavage site.

Further, it appears to be inserted out of frame. These are the clear signatures of natural evolution because natural evolution is just good enough, whereas engineering typically we will be a precise insertion of something that will either be used before or certainly something that would've been optimal.

And this particular furin cleavage site, which has since evolved in the human population, is not an example of that.

Mr. BENZINE. But in Proximal Origin, you eliminate not just intentional engineering, also not a laboratory construct. How were you able to eliminate that, not knowing what was going on?

Dr. ANDERSEN. So, again, as I explained in my written statement, we are talking about the laboratory constructs, specifically referring to the well-known backbones being used and a purposefully manipulated virus, i.e., the virus with an intent.

We don't actually talk about engineering per se, because that's a broader term. So, we don't specifically say that the data eliminates that one, but I will say my personal opinion, as we also state, is that I don't find that particular version of events to be plausible.

Mr. BENZINE. Sitting here today, do you think the language, that language in Proximal Origin, is confusing or doesn't fulfill your intent?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think it's a scientific paper written for a scientific community. I think overall, given how fast that paper was written and given just everything going on at the time, I actually think the language is clear. Could it be clearer? Sure. Could have been better explanations? Sure.

It could've been longer, but we didn't have that ability to do that, but importantly, that's what we have continued to publish research on this particular question, where we can add additional evidence and analyses that adds to these early conclusions that we made in this particular paper. I think overall those conclusions are very clear.

Mr. BENZINE. Dr. Garry, do you think that could've been written more clear for the intentional engineering bioweapon language?

Dr. GARRY. Yes. I mean, you're always, you know, better prepared in hindsight, right? So, you know, I think the paper has

stood up very well to the scientific community and as a basis for, you know, moving forward with some of our other studies that we did, you know, looking into the origin of the virus.

Mr. BENZINE. Still regarding the experiments that were taking place at the Wuhan Institute, did either of you have any conversations with Peter Daszak about those experiments while drafting Proximal Origin?

Dr. ANDERSEN. We did not. I think, again, the type of experiments ongoing at the Wuhan Institute of Virology were well known based on the published literature, and again, this is why in the first place we raised the likely—what I thought was the likely hypothesis of a lab-associated virus.

And I think that is also the reason why some of the suggestions from our colleagues that we could just dismiss that hypothesis out of hand without any further analysis or even consideration of that particular theory or thought was wrong at the time, and that's because we were well aware of the type of work that was ongoing.

Mr. BENZINE. Dr. Garry, did you have any conversations with Dr. Daszak?

Dr. GARRY. I did not.

Mr. BENZINE. Dr. Andersen, you testified in response to Mrs. Lesko's questions that the Wuhan Institute's sequence data base was actually removed in February 2020, not in September 2019. Did you ever access it in that interim time?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I did not, no.

Mr. BENZINE. OK. Dr. Garry?

Dr. GARRY. No, I didn't.

Mr. BENZINE. I want to shift gears a little bit and go back to kind of the early days and the conference call. You've talked about this, so we can run through it briefly.

Dr. Andersen, did you have a call with Dr. Fauci on January 31, 2020?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I did.

Mr. BENZINE. Was anyone else on that call?

Dr. ANDERSEN. No.

Mr. BENZINE. And on that call, you testified here, and you testified in your interview that he suggested drafting a peer-reviewed paper about whether or not it came from a lab. Is that a fair characterization?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Again, the suggestions as I recall it, given that my initial hypothesis was that of a lab-associated virus, was that he said that if I thought this came from the lab, I should consider writing a paper on it.

Mr. BENZINE. And then you were both on the conference call on February 1, 2020, correct?

In earlier questions, in earlier testimony, you testified that Dr. Farrar set up the February 1 conference call, he was the organizer of the February 1 conference call. In the email from Dr. Fauci to you, Dr. Andersen, from January 31, memorializing your phone call with him, Dr. Fauci wrote, I told him—referencing you—that as soon as possible, you and Eddie Holmes should get a group of evolutionary biologists together to examine carefully the data to determine if your concerns are validated. Does that sound like setting up the conference call?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is not setting up the conference call. As I mentioned that conference call was set up by Dr. Farrar. In terms of who should be on the conference call, he conferred with Eddie and Eddie conferred with us for suggested names, for example.

Mr. BENZINE. How do you read that statement then? What did Dr. Fauci tell you about convening a group of evolutionary biologists?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Again, to my—I don't actually know what he's saying here, but, again, that process, as far as I remember, was already ongoing because Jeremy Farrar, himself, was going to organize this conference call.

Again, as far as I know, Dr. Fauci had no role in the conference call itself. That was fully Jeremy Farrar's, conceived from the emails.

Mr. BENZINE. And then you testified earlier today that Dr. Fauci reiterated maybe not the suggestion to draft a peer-reviewed paper but his support for a peer-reviewed paper on February 1 call? Is that correct?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I don't recall whether he specifically suggested a paper, but, yes, he was certainly supportive of us continuing to look into this particular question.

But as we have both mentioned is that we don't actually remember Dr. Fauci having any particular role in that conference call itself.

Mr. BENZINE. And then you had clarified in your transcribed interview that initially it wasn't about publishing, like, despite Dr. Fauci's suggestion for a peer-reviewed paper, your initial thought was more of an internal report back to the teleconference group, not necessarily publishing that? Is that correct?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct. I think at the time I just wanted to look at this more closely with a set of trusted colleagues and well-known experts and looking at these kinds of questions. Whether that would eventually result in a paper was, for me, too premature to even think about.

Mr. BENZINE. Did the initial drafts of that report provide a lot of the backbone for Proximal Origin?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I think that if you look at their—for example, the different scenarios that we are considering, there are scenarios that we eventually end up considering in Proximal Origin as well. So, did those early drafts and reports and summaries lay the basis for a later paper? Yes, of course.

However, that was, at the time, not for the purpose of specifically creating a paper.

Mr. BENZINE. So, would it be fair to characterize, since it laid the basis, that the February 1 conference call also laid the basis for Proximal Origin?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I wouldn't say so. I think scientists have discussions and conversations all the time that then later on end up in being actual papers. But, again, the conference call was not for the purpose of writing a paper. It was for the purpose of discussing the questions that I specifically had raised with Eddie Holmes first and then him with Jeremy Farrar.

Mr. BENZINE. Were drafts of Proximal Origin and/or the report sent to Dr. Collins and Dr. Fauci along the way?

Dr. ANDERSEN. There were—the summary drafts which you have seen, the actual drafts of the paper, I think we probably changed to a paper form maybe on February 8 or something like that, those were not shared with Dr. Fauci or Collins.

Mr. BENZINE. Either on any emails on it or on phone calls, did Dr. Fauci or Dr. Collins ever ask any questions about your analysis?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I don't recall. I mean, again, there is some questions, I believe from Dr. Fauci, for example, around ACE-2 mice, for example. So, I think he had questions like—like that, but whether there was any questions to the specific analyses or to our specific conclusions, no. My assumption is, he was probably relatively busy at the time.

Mr. BENZINE. Shifting gears again, Dr. Garry, and I think you might have corrected it in your verbal statement but not your written statement. In your written statement you state that in November 2022, you and your co-authors obtained access to large files containing the DNA and RNA sequences from the environmental samples taken from the Huanan Market, but the subsequent papers said that those samples were accessed in March. Was that a typo in your statement?

Dr. GARRY. Yes. That was my mistake.

Mr. BENZINE. OK.

Dr. GARRY. I take responsibility for that. It was March.

Mr. BENZINE. In both of your testimonies, you say Proximal Origin specifically do not rule out the lab origin—or a laboratory origin and say it's currently impossible to prove or disprove the other theories being discussed there.

On February 19, Dr. Daszak of EcoHealth cited your paper to support the statement, quote, overwhelmingly conclude that COVID-19 originated in wildlife. Did you know Dr. Daszak was going to use your paper that way?

Dr. ANDERSEN. It's common for other scientists to cite papers, so—

Mr. BENZINE. Do you agree that Proximal Origin overwhelmingly concluded that COVID-19 originated in wildlife?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That was our conclusion in Proximal Origin, yes.

Mr. BENZINE. In the press release, released by Scripps when the paper was published, Dr. Andersen, you were quoted as saying, we can firmly determine that COVID-19 originated through a natural process.

And a spokesman for Wellcome Trust, Dr. Farrar's former organization, who the minority laid out played a crucial role in Proximal Origin, said, quote, Proximal Origin concludes that COVID-19 is the product of natural evolution.

Were you involved in drafting that press release?

Dr. ANDERSEN. The one for Scripps Research?

Mr. BENZINE. Uh-huh.

Dr. ANDERSEN. Yes.

Mr. BENZINE. Do you agree with those two statements, that Proximal Origin concluded COVID-19 is the product of natural evolution?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I agree with those statements, yes.

Mr. BENZINE. How many scenarios in Proximal Origin were laid out?

Dr. ANDERSEN. There are three separate scenarios specifically laid out, but we considered many.

Mr. BENZINE. The press release from Scripps only lays out two. Was there a reason you left out serial passage?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Again, serial passage is not supported, and that's probably why it's left out. But, again, serial passage is clearly described in the paper itself, but as we say, our opinion is that we do not find that to be plausible.

Mr. BENZINE. In the discretion of the chair, I'd ask for about two more minutes.

Dr. WENSTRUP. So, ordered.

Mr. BENZINE. The minority report that was released this morning laid a lot of the responsibility on Dr. Farrar, that Dr. Farrar organized the conference call, Dr. Farrar prompted the paper, Dr. Farrar was involved in where it was published, Dr. Farrar made at least one edit to the paper.

Do you agree with the minority's characterization that Dr. Farrar was heavily involved in Proximal Origin?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I do not.

Mr. BENZINE. You testified in your transcribed interview, Dr. Andersen, that Farrar was the, quote, father figure of Proximal Origin. Can you explain what that means a little bit?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Dr. Farrar is a scientist with a lot of expertise in all kinds of different areas, not so much origins, but he has researched infectious diseases most of his life and understands a lot of what's going on out there, that we don't.

So, from that perspective, he was very encouraging us to look at this particular question but had no specific role in the process itself, did not influence the conclusions, did not influence the drafting, other than the single edit that you mentioned there.

He had several conversations with Eddie Holmes at the time, and I don't know what those conversations were about specifically, but that's why I describe him as a father figure because I think that captures it.

But, again, the specific role of him was not to lead the drafting of the paper, nor was it to lead the conclusions of the paper, for example.

Mr. BENZINE. And was that why he was not credited on the paper?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I believe that Eddie Holmes asked whether he wished to be credited, because, again, he did not add substantially to any of the science in the paper. I think that's why he is left uncredited.

Mr. BENZINE. All right. In my final seconds, I have one—or two questions for each of you.

Dr. Garry, are you aware or were involved in every communication that Dr. Farrar had with Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins?

Dr. GARRY. I was not.

Mr. BENZINE. Dr. Andersen, were you aware or involved in every conversation between Dr. Farrar and Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins?

Dr. ANDERSEN. I was not.

Mr. BENZINE. And then the final question, Dr. Garry, were you consulted by the intelligence community during their drafting and publication of their declassified assessment?

Dr. GARRY. The first Biden assessment?

Mr. BENZINE. Yes.

Dr. GARRY. I was.

Mr. BENZINE. Which agencies?

Dr. GARRY. The FBI and the CIA.

Mr. BENZINE. Dr. Andersen, those same two questions to you.

Dr. ANDERSEN. The same.

Mr. BENZINE. FBI and CIA?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Correct.

Mr. BENZINE. All right. Thank you.

My time is expired, and I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize the minority staff for 15 minutes of questions.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. Dr. Andersen, I just wanted to ask a couple of factual questions about some of the things we've discussed here today. The first is just on pangolins. We've talked a fair amount about pangolins. I wanted to clarify something.

Is it right that at the time that the paper was being written, there were two different things going on in terms of pangolins, right? There was, on the one hand, the fact that there was a pangolin coronavirus that had the six key amino acid residue mutations.

Separately from that, if I understand correctly, there were public reports, or somebody had said to you all, that there had been a discovery of a pangolin coronavirus that was a 99 percent match across its entire genome to SARS-CoV-2. Do I understand that basic situation correctly?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct, yes.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. OK. So, as you guys sort of grappled with the role that the pangolins were playing here, if I understand correctly, it turned out that the pangolin virus in question was not, in fact, a 99 percent match. What did it end up being, 90 or 91? Something like that?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Something like that, yes, correct.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. All right. So when the dust settled on the pangolin issue, is it right that the pangolin virus was important in the sense that this indicated to you that nature was capable of producing the key mutations that we were seeing in SARS-CoV-2, and that fact has obvious scientific significance, but the hunt for a Progenitor virus, with respect to SARS-CoV-2, remained unsolved, had to continue, and in that sense, the pangolin was not itself conclusive as to the origins of the virus? Is that a fair summary of the pangolin situation?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Yes, I think that it's a fair summary in the sense—and, in fact, I have an email to that effect where I say, I think, at least we need to wait until we hear about this potential 99 percent, because, of course, if we had a near identical virus in pangolins, that, in itself, would be critically important.

But that turned out just not to be correct. In fact, it was the receptor binding domain that was 99 percent identical. That, in itself,

is very important because it tells you that that particular receptor binding domain exists in nature.

Really importantly too is that it does not mean that pangolins themselves were necessarily involved in the recombination event of SARS-CoV-2, since we have seen in the Lara viruses, BANAL viruses for example. We have found receptor binding domains that are, in fact, as similar to SARS-CoV-2 as the ones that we find in the pangolins.

So, as I mentioned to Chairman Wenstrup's earlier questions, is that these recombination events do not require these two animals to be in close proximity. We believe that these recombination events happens in bats.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. And I think that that and the way you just described it is consistent with the way that you and your co-authors discussed pangolins in the final product of the Proximal Origin paper?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct. That is correct.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. One point of clarification with respect to the February 1 conference call—we spent a lot of time talking about that—I just want to clarify, zooming out from a factual point of view, because I think it's natural for us to think of it as an American call, but there were quite a number of people on that call. Just sort of starting at the center of it, it is correct to say that Dr. Farrar organized that call. Is that right?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct, and I don't think you can describe it as an American call because in terms of the scientists on the call, I believe it was probably only Dr. Garry and myself, and I'm not American. I'm actually Danish.

But the rest of the scientists that were involved—that were invited onto that call were primarily from Europe.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. That actually is what I sort of wanted to just clarify. There are some other folks on that call who we haven't talked about all that much today, but if I understand correctly, were significantly involved in the dialog on that call such as Eddie Holmes. Where is Dr. Holmes located?

Dr. ANDERSEN. He's in Sydney, Australia.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. What about Andrew Rambaut?

Dr. ANDERSEN. He's in Edinburgh, in Scotland.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. Ron Fouchier and Marion Koopmans?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Yes, they're in the Netherlands.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. And Stefan Pohlmann.

Dr. ANDERSEN. Germany, I believe.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. And Christian Drosten, where is he?

Dr. ANDERSEN. Also Germany.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. OK. So, I just wanted to sort of set a broader context in terms of what that call was and how it came about. And there's just one more discrete thing I wanted to ask about. There has been discussion about the extent to which, from your original point of view, when we talk about January 31 or February 1 of 2020, the extent to which two days later your views changed, or three days later your views changed.

My understanding, but I'd appreciate you confirming, is that the drafts of the report, at that point, I think, took the position that

the data was indistinguishable as far as lab serial passage or zoonotic origin. Is that right?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct. You can see those are the direct conclusions in those early summary statements, yes.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. And so, the work that you and your co-authors were doing and the input and the gathering of external information, if I understand, went on for the next three, four, or five weeks, ultimately culminating in the March final product. Is that right?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct. The final paper is published 45 days later after that conference call, and, of course, our thinking evolved over that time, so did the analyses, and also just the availability of data.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. I just wanted to ask a brief question. When we talk about the role of Dr. Farrar in the paper, I understand that as it relates to the direct drafting of the paper, his role was essentially limited to one particular ask for an edit, but when we talk about his role in the broader process of the paper, for example, Dr. Garry, there is an email from yourself, saying, Jeremy has been an amazing leader, should be an author.

I think you both, when we talked in our transcribed interview, confirmed that that general premise, the phrase father figure when we talk about navigating the paper process, talking about different publications that might make sense for the paper to go, that sort of role in the process is an accurate description of Dr. Farrar's role, I think. Either one of you can confirm that that's—

Dr. ANDERSEN. Yes, that is correct, and I think importantly too is that Dr. Farrar is on later papers. We have a paper in, I believe, in 2021 in the journal *Cell*, which is a review on the available evidence, and Dr. Farrar is an author on that particular paper.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. And when it comes to that sort of a role in the process of the Proximal Origin paper, you both confirmed in our interviews, but I just want to confirm one more time, neither Dr. Fauci, nor Dr. Collins played that type of role or really any role at all?

Dr. ANDERSEN. That is correct.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. Dr. Garry?

Dr. GARRY. That is correct.

Mr. PELLEGRINI. I have no more questions.

I yield back. Thank you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize the Ranking Member for any closing statement that we would like to make.

Dr. RUIZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Over the course of today's hearing, we have heard baseless allegation after baseless allegation and unsubstantiated claim after unsubstantiated claim about Drs. Fauci and Collins and their involvement with the Proximal Origin paper.

The Select Subcommittee has reviewed thousands of pages of internal documents and conducted transcribed interviews with authors of the paper which has only revealed that Drs. Fauci and Collins had little to no involvement in the drafting of and publication of the paper, findings that have only been confirmed, once again, by testimony in today's hearing.

Rather than following the facts of their own investigation, my Republican colleagues have only doubled down on their unproven, conspiratorial accusations using this Select Subcommittee's far-reaching platform to vilify our Nation's scientists and public health experts in the name of repairing trust after they have just manufactured distrust and destroyed it.

Every day Select Subcommittee Republicans spend on advancing this partisan narrative, the American people pay the price. How? Every hour in taxpayer dollar focusing and pushing this wrong, harmful, bias-centered narrative and political theater, instead of on investigating our experiences to garner forward-looking policy solutions to prevent and prepare for the next pandemic comes at the expense of the American people and our public health.

The fact is, the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic remain unknown. We have heard—this is very interesting—lab for the psychology of confirmation bias. Today I mean, we've seen it. We have heard, you know, when you have confirmation bias, you are set on your thinking, and now everything you do has to prove your narrative. So, you pick and choose evidence and data. That's one method of doing it.

The second method is, you take things out of context, or you misrepresent the data or things that were said, like putting it in places, in a piece of a puzzle to show your or prove your narrative.

The third is that there's a lot of disregard of evidence or the truth that is contrary to the narrative. So, in other words, if you say something confirming a truth, it's skipped over. It's disregarded. The truth just doesn't matter if it doesn't fit the narrative.

And we've even seen flat-out lying today—lying. For example, we have heard that the intelligence community strongly supports that this was a lab leak theory. The reality is that you have one agency with low confidence, you have another agency with moderate confidence that this was a lab leak theory. OK? Two out of the six so far, they do not strongly, with high confidence, say that this was a lab leak. But we heard that they do from the other side. That's a lie.

The data is there. That's not an opinion. Because the facts has been presented. They have been studied.

The next lie, flat out, was that most of the intelligence community agencies believe that this was a lab leak theory, declaring it as if it was true. Yet you have four agencies—it's math, guys—four agencies with low confidence, saying this was zoonotic. You have two agencies with low to moderate saying that with low and moderate confidence that this was a lab leak. Four is more than two. Four is more than two.

So, that statement that is aligned with their narrative was a flat-out lie, and in the absence of hard proof or access to information by the Chinese Communist Party, we may never know conclusively. I mean we've looked at the intelligence agencies, we've passed a bill in a bipartisan way to make them public and reveal. There is no smoking gun in the intelligence community. It is still low to moderate confidence, on either side, with the majority saying they still think it's zoonotic.

But that shouldn't stop us from considering both scenarios and working to keep us safer from the next deadly pandemic. We're—on this side of the aisle, we're committed to objectively looking at the data and taking what we have in order to create policies, whether it was a lab leak theory that's true or whether it was zoonotic. Well, let's do something about it that will actually result in saving lives.

So, we need to get unstuck from this partisan quicksand, as Ranking Member of this Select Subcommittee, I take seriously the charge of understanding the origins of the novel coronavirus.

And as a physician and public health expert, I know how this is crucial to our ability to better prevent and prepare for a future public health crisis.

Unfortunately, today's hearing brought us nowhere closer to that goal. It has only continued the partisan narrative, the confirmation bias, that has produced threats, intimidation, violent threats to our public health officials, the vilification of our Nation's scientists, and continued to manufacture distrust in our public health officials.

This, at the end of the day, will only harm our ability to respond to future public health crises and cost more American lives in another pandemic.

I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. You know, as chairman of this Committee, I think on behalf of the Committee, we're working on behalf of the lives lost—lost or severely damaged, in America, and across the globe, by a deadly virus, a virus that should have united our country but instead divided our Nation and the world.

I've said since the beginning, this is an after-action review for lessons to be learned, so that we can provide a path forward, but we have to review the previous actions, or we learn no lessons.

I feel in talking to Dr. Garry for a moment beforehand, we can do better, and we have to do better going forward. This process that we have been through as a Nation is not it—as a Nation, as a world, is not it. And we can lead the way of doing better.

You know, our staff report that's been out investigates our government processes, exploring how decisions were or are made, revealing statements made in the process, such as those behind me here, statements made by those involved directly or indirectly.

Yes, we're exploring a potential cover-up. That is what we are doing. It's exploring. That requires investigation. To both of you, you received Federal dollars. We appropriate those. Congress appropriates those Federal dollars. We have a responsibility of oversight on behalf of our constituents and the very taxpayers that pay you.

Sorry about that, but it's our job, whether you like it or not. And I take it seriously.

We have discovered things like statements by Dr. Morens who works for NIAID, send things to my Gmail. I'm getting FOIA'd all the time—you both know what FOIA'd means, correct? Freedom of Information Act? OK—send things to my Gmail, and I'll delete anything I don't want The New York Times to see.

And then he criticizes reporters and scientists like Dr. Metzl and others, calls them names that I won't repeat. And aren't we proud? Aren't we proud?

Now, because of these revelations that we've uncovered, NARA, the National Archives and Records Administration is leading an investigation on Dr. Morens and his behavior. That is our responsibility as Congress.

So, you may call it going down a rabbit hole and trying to find vendettas, or somebody here might, but I do have a vendetta against dishonesty. And as a doctor, I'm against politically motivated science, which Dr. Andersen, you, yourself, said we had to. You hate to go down—let me see if I can find the quote, “you hate to go down a political path, but you had to.” And I'm paraphrasing there.

You know, in the staff reports that have come out, the minority's today, talking about political, our report zero times mentions Republicans or Democrats—zero times. Their report mentions Republicans or Democrats 38 times. Who's being political? Who's being political?

And when Dr. Collins sends an email to Dr. Fauci on April 15, saying, do more to squash the lab leak, which essentially is halting scientific debate, and Dr. Fauci goes out on the White House lawn the next day, quoting Proximal Origin, saying this came from Nature, as if definitive, I want to know why. I want to know why that is.

I'm a physician, I've served in public health. Science has always fascinated me.

Dr. WENSTRUP. We ask why. We ask how. Dr. Garry, I think I have your quote here where you cite—I'll put it in quotes. “The finding of SARS-CoV-like coronaviruses from pangolins with nearly identical RVDs, however, provides a much stronger and more parsimonious explanation of how SARS-CoV-2 acquired these recombination—via recombination or mutation.” I get that. I can see where you came up with that and wanted to know about that.

But as we've heard today and we've had testimony before, there were no pangolin viruses at the wet market or pangolins. They're 603 miles away. No evidence of a bat either. Yet, ODNI reports potentially epidemic viruses from pangolin samples are at the WIV and have been since 2019. That's not 603 miles away.

I recognize the dangers of a wet market. I recognize the dangers of gain-of-function research. Dr. Fauci was asked to recognize that in an article I read from 2012 in, I think, Weekend Australia. Dr. Fauci, on his gain-of-function research—and I'm paraphrasing here, so forgive me—he said, aren't you concerned that doing something like this might get out of a lab and create a pandemic? And his response was, basically, that the benefits outweigh the risks. Well, if this came from a lab, I certainly don't see how the benefits outweigh the risk.

In 2005, our own State Department talked about publicly how China is researching bioweapons. In 2015, they even published a book related to genetic bioweapons. I'm a soldier. I sit on the Intelligence Committee. I'm sorry, that matters to me, and it's not to be taken lightly. And when I look at some of the things—you know, I hear like things said, yes, certain intelligence agencies said low confidence, but it came from nature, and others said it came from a lab.

Well, I'm a physician that sits on the Intelligence Committee, and I've been looking at this since it came out at the very beginning. And when it comes to what the Intelligence Committee comes up with the 90-day commission, I want to know who they talked to because it matters. And I'll get into that in a minute. This is looking at everything. Not spouting about Republicans or Democrats. This is looking to what happened and what happened to this world and how did it happen, and let's have a scientific debate.

And when Dr. Collins suggests to Dr. Fauci that we squash one of the theories, that is stopping the debate. And that concerns me because we pay them. And I want to know why they wanted to do that. That's not a vendetta. That's fair.

It was important that that Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic hear directly from the authors of Proximal Origin; hear it from you to better understand how it was drafted and published and who was involved with this process.

I thank you for your transcribed interviews, and I thank you for being here today. I have no personal preferences to whether COVID-19 came from a lab or if it came from nature. In fact, in many ways, I wish it came from nature, or we can prove that. I would feel a whole lot better than feeling something this deadly, this lethal is being made in a lab, or held at a lab. But I do care deeply also about gathering as much information as possible so we can learn from the COVID-19 pandemic, so we can prevent one in the future.

I do care if science is tainted by politics, as the Proximal Origin authors wrote in their own emails. I didn't write that. We heard today that there are some in the intelligence community that have confidence that COVID-19 came from nature. But if those intelligence officials only spoke to those with views held by the Proximal Origin authors, then they haven't gathered all available evidence, have they?

I'm looking into that. And I have some impressions already, having the opportunity to sit on the Intelligence Committee and get some of those answers. And I will tell you, my impression—and this is an opinion and impression of what I have seen—the FBI did more work than the others, in my opinion. The Department of Energy has more scientists than any other agency. They have the national labs. It just so happens those are two entities that think this came from the lab, and that should be respected.

The Select Committee has gathered and continues to investigate information relating to the origins of COVID-19. The House and Senate unanimously passed a bill which the President signed to declassify intelligence relating to origins because it is that important for Americans to have all available facts and data on a pandemic that affected every single one of us.

And in some ways, I feel the Intelligence Committee in the House of Representatives has done more digging than the intelligence community. And that's important. And I want you to know what we know, because I worry when people don't know what they don't know but speak with authority.

The Select has continued to investigate this information. We passed that bill, but ODNI violated the law with the report that

they produced. I expected hundreds of pages. You probably have hundreds of pages—research, other things. I certainly do.

I expected hundreds of pages, and I expected answers to questions that Americans and those on the Select have asked, such as to who did the intelligence agency speak to in order to draw the conclusions. I think that's important. But we don't know that. I have some idea because the Director of National Intelligence is cooperating and trying to provide me with as much information as I can get.

What type of scientist, doctors or experts did they work with to reach the answers that we have received so far? See, transparency is nonnegotiable here. Honesty is nonnegotiable as well. In this case, lives depend on it. Americans should be confident in the conclusions reached.

But in order for them to be confident, they must be provided with facts. Gathering information and uncovering evidence is not a threat to science, it actually improves science. Calling those who believe in the plausibility of a lab leak conspiracy theorists does not lend credibility to vigorous scientific debate before producing a conclusion. In fact, it gives the appearance that the zoonotic theory was not only not rigorously tested, but the proximal origin was based on preconceived notions, and that evidence to the contrary was stifled.

Grin as you may, Dr. Andersen. Grin as you may.

As to the involvement of NIH and the proximal origin, we learned important information today with respect to the influence exerted by Drs. Collins and Fauci. We know that Drs. Fauci and Collins prompted the origin paper, and seemingly, maybe Dr. Farrar as well. We can get to the bottom of that.

We know that the February 5, 2020 draft sent to Drs. Fauci and Collins was used in the published Proximal Origin paper because portions of that draft appear verbatim in what Nature published. We have the email from Dr. Andersen, specifically, thanking Drs. Fauci and Collins for their advice and leadership as we have been working through the SARS-CoV-2 origins paper. You wrote that, Dr. Andersen. Not me.

And before it was finalized, Dr. Andersen sent an email to Drs. Fauci and Collins to ask if they had any comments, suggestions, or questions about the paper. That to me is pretty inclusive, about the paper at all. Dr. Andersen has raised the point that there is substantive difference between about the paper as opposed to on the paper.

But are we expected to believe this email was not a solicitation to provide input with respect to the substance of the paper on a paper they prompted? Prompted is not my word. Andersen's own words clearly demonstrate the close coordination that occurred from the inception of Proximal Origin to its publication between the authors and NIH leadership. We too want to take a complete look at all the facts; something that was not done when Proximal Origin was published.

We covered the reasons and motivations as to why debate and discourse were stifled today. If the breadcrumbs of the origin of COVID-19 lead us directly to the doorstep of a single wet market in central China, then we should start there and work backward

smartly. Large portions of the intel community, however, numerous experts, and the evidence gathered indicate confidence that the virus originated from a lab. Human-to-human transmission has been proven to be highly contagious.

And we still haven't found the alleged animal that started it all. But many people have died. And that's why we brought the authors of Proximal Origins here today on behalf of all those that have died or suffered otherwise or the unintentional consequences of lockdowns, school closures, et cetera. But many Americans have lost loved ones.

Millions across the globe have suffered from this pandemic. And we need to find out how COVID-19 originated so that we can prepare for a future pandemic. I believe that's in your hearts. But I don't think the process is right. We need to do this so that we make sure we base decisions off of sound science.

We don't have the luxury during a pandemic to protect feelings or push preferred narratives or play politics. We have a duty to find the truth and to push forward.

In closing, I do, I do truly want to thank our panelists once again for their important and insightful testimony. But with that and without objection, all Members will have five legislative days within which to submit materials and to submit additional written questions for the witnesses, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response. If there's no further business, without objection, the Select Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:17 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

