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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–3812

July 26, 2021

Dr. Francis Collins
Director, National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Dr. Collins:

We are writing to inquire about oversight of NIH-funded animal research in foreign countries.

NIH currently funds animal experiments domestically and abroad. While we support the NIH's mission of advancing our knowledge of biology to improve human health and believe it should enjoy Congressional support for funding, we have concerns about NIH-funded foreign research that is wasting taxpayer dollars and putting national security and human health at risk.

It is now well known that the NIH funded dangerous coronavirus "gain-of-function" experiments on animals at China's Wuhan Institute of Virology that some top experts believe caused the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the NIH website, the agency currently authorizes a total of 353 institutions in 57 countries to receive taxpayer funding specifically for animal research, including 31 facilities in Russia and China.[1] New reports indicate that the NIH is shipping millions of tax dollars to dozens of facilities overseas to fund questionable projects like addicting zebrafish to nicotine and getting mice drunk.[2]

We are concerned that taxpayers are funding such projects in the first place, but are especially troubled that NIH-funded animal research in foreign countries is not subject to the same oversight that Congress has established for domestic animal research.[3,4] Communist China's refusal to cooperate with investigations into whether an NIH-funded lab at the Wuhan Institute of Virology caused the pandemic underscores how foreign labs are escaping much-needed accountability.

Relatedly, the director of the Office of National Security at the Department of Health and Human Services has stated, "some foreign governments have initiated systematic programs to unduly influence and capitalize on U.S.–conducted research, including that funded by NIH."[5] As recently as December 2020, a Government Accountability Office audit reiterated these concerns and recommended reforms at that the NIH and other agencies to protect against foreign

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[1] HTTPS://OLAW.NIH.GOV/ASSURED/APP/INDEX.HTML#ALL
[2] HTTPS://DAILYCALLER.COM/2021/07/06/NIH-ANIMAL-TESTING-WUHAN-WHITE-COAT-WASTE/
[3] HTTPS://OLAW.NIH.GOV/RESOURCES/DOCUMENTS/FOREIGN.HTM
[4] HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.5406/JANIMALETHICS.8.2.0138
[5] HTTPS://WWW.NYTIMES.COM/2019/01/06/US/POLITICS/NIH-CHINA-BIOMEDICAL-RESEARCH.HTML

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interference in taxpayer-funded research.[6] While these concerns have mainly focused on research conducted at domestic institutions, the problems may be magnified at foreign labs, particularly those in adversarial nations, such as China and Russia..

In view of concerns about national security and wasteful spending, we respectfully request that you provide the following information:

1. How many foreign projects involving animal research is the NIH currently funding? Please list all projects, including: project title, project number, support year, project start and end date, institution name, country, FY19 and FY20 funding amounts and an explanation for why the research could not be conducted in the U.S.

2. How much taxpayer money, by fiscal year, has been spent on foreign animal research projects since FY10?

3. How does the NIH monitor foreign institutions' compliance with the NIH Grants Policy Statement, Public Health Service Policy and other applicable laws, regulations and policies governing animal research in their country of jurisdiction?

4. Does NIH visit foreign animal research sites before distributing taxpayer funds to the facility? Does NIH perform site visits after the distribution of grants to assess compliance?

5. Please list all misconduct complaints and animal research noncompliance reports received by NIH from foreign institutions since FY10.

6. How does the NIH monitor and investigate potential foreign interference in animal research it funds in other countries?

7. How often are financial audits of non-Federal entities performing NIH-funded animal research conducted per 45 CFR §75.501? Please list all audits of foreign animal research conducted since FY10 and the findings of these audits.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Fred Keller

Fred Keller
Member of Congress

Brian Mast
Member of Congress

[6] HTTPS://WWW.GAO.GOV/PRODUCTS/GAO-21-130

Louie Gohmert
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