

JAMES E. CLYBURN
CHAIRMAN
MAXINE WATERS
CAROLYN B. MALONEY
NYDIA M. VELÁZQUEZ
BILL FOSTER
JAMIE RASKIN
ANDY KIM

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

STEVE SCALISE
RANKING MEMBER
JIM JORDAN
BLAINE LUETKEMEYER
JACKIE WALORSKI
MARK E. GREEN, M.D.

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

PHONE (202) 225-4400

<https://coronavirus.house.gov>

September 14, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dr. Robert R. Redfield
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
395 E Street, S.W., Suite 9100
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar and Director Redfield:

We write to request transcribed interviews and documents regarding efforts by political appointees at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to block the publication of accurate scientific reports by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) during the coronavirus crisis.¹

With nearly 200,000 Americans killed and hundreds more dying each day from the coronavirus pandemic, the public needs and deserves truthful scientific information so they can keep themselves and their families healthy. Yet in discussing the coronavirus outbreak in March 2020, President Trump admitted, “I wanted to always play it down” and, “I still like playing it down.”² We are gravely concerned by reports showing that the President’s political appointees at HHS have sought to help him downplay the risks of the coronavirus crisis by attempting to alter, delay, and block critical scientific reports from CDC.

Trump Administration officials reportedly began seeking to influence CDC reports, published in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), after a May 2020 report on the coronavirus accurately described the “rapid acceleration of transmission during March” and warned that “a large proportion of the population remains susceptible” and “the potential for

¹ *Trump Officials Interfered with CDC Reports on Covid-19*, Politico (Sept. 12, 2020) (online at www.politico.com/news/2020/09/11/exclusive-trump-officials-interfered-with-cdc-reports-on-covid-19-412809).

² *‘Play It Down’: Trump Admits to Concealing the True Threat of Coronavirus in New Woodward Book*, CNN (Sept. 9, 2020) (online at www.cnn.com/2020/09/09/politics/bob-woodward-rage-book-trump-coronavirus/index.html).

future acceleration remains.”³ Secretary Azar and other officials were apparently concerned this report “was implying that the Trump administration moved too slowly to respond to the outbreak.”⁴

Political appointees at HHS, including Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Michael Caputo and senior advisor Paul Alexander, have reportedly been especially focused on suppressing truthful CDC reports on risks to children,⁵ even though more than half a million American children have tested positive for the coronavirus,⁶ at least 100 have died from the virus,⁷ and older children have been shown to transmit the virus as efficiently as adults.⁸

According to *Politico*, Administration appointees were upset that CDC published a report on August 7, 2020, showing hundreds of children and adults were infected in a coronavirus outbreak at a Georgia summer camp.⁹ CDC’s report concluded, “This investigation adds to the body of evidence demonstrating that children of all ages are susceptible to SARS-CoV-2 infection and, contrary to early reports, might play an important role in transmission.”¹⁰

In an email excerpt published by *Politico*, Dr. Alexander called for CDC to alter a report explaining that children can transmit the coronavirus and, if the agency refused, to “pull it down and stop all reports immediately.” He wrote that CDC’s report “will impact school re-opening” and claimed, “This is designed to hurt this Presidnet [sic] for their reasons which I am not interested in.” He concluded: “They CDC [sic], work for him.”¹¹

³ Dr. Anne Schuchat, Principal Deputy Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Public Health Response to the Initiation and Spread of Pandemic COVID-19 in the United States, February 24–April 21, 2020*, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (May 8, 2020) (online at www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6918e2.htm).

⁴ *Trump Officials Interfered with CDC Reports on Covid-19*, *Politico* (Sept. 12, 2020) (online at www.politico.com/news/2020/09/11/exclusive-trump-officials-interfered-with-cdc-reports-on-covid-19-412809).

⁵ *Political Appointees Meddled in C.D.C.’s ‘Holiest of the Holy’ Health Reports*, *New York Times* (Sept. 12, 2020) (online at www.nytimes.com/2020/09/12/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-politics-cdc.html).

⁶ American Academy of Pediatrics, *Children and COVID-19: State-Level Data Report* (Sept. 8, 2020) (online at services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/children-and-covid-19-state-level-data-report/) (513,415 total child coronavirus cases reported in the United States, totaling 9.8 percent of all cases).

⁷ American Academy of Pediatrics & Children’s Hospital Association, *Children and COVID-19: State Data Report* (Sept. 3, 2020) (online at downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/AAP%20and%20CHA%20-%20Children%20and%20COVID-19%20State%20Data%20Report%209.3.20%20FINAL.pdf).

⁸ *Older Children Spread the Coronavirus Just as Much as Adults, Large Study Finds*, *New York Times* (July 30, 2020) (online at www.nytimes.com/2020/07/18/health/coronavirus-children-schools.html).

⁹ *Trump Officials Interfered with CDC Reports on Covid-19*, *Politico* (Sept. 12, 2020) (online at www.politico.com/news/2020/09/11/exclusive-trump-officials-interfered-with-cdc-reports-on-covid-19-412809).

¹⁰ Christine M. Szablewski, et al., *SARS-CoV-2 Transmission and Infection Among Attendees of an Overnight Camp — Georgia, June 2020*, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (Aug. 7, 2020) (online at www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6931e1.htm).

¹¹ *Trump Officials Interfered with CDC Reports on Covid-19*, *Politico* (Sept. 12, 2020) (online at www.politico.com/news/2020/09/11/exclusive-trump-officials-interfered-with-cdc-reports-on-covid-19-412809).

Administration officials also reportedly delayed by a month a CDC report warning about the dangers of using hydroxychloroquine to treat the coronavirus—a remedy that had been promoted by President Trump despite a lack of evidence about its efficacy. CDC’s report concluded, “the potential benefits of these drugs do not outweigh their risks.”¹²

Political appointees’ attempts to interfere with CDC’s scientific reports, or MMWRs, risk undermining the scientific integrity of these reports and of the CDC itself. MMWRs are drafted by career scientists and disseminate important information to physicians and public health officials around the country.¹³ During the pandemic, experts have relied on these reports to determine how the virus spreads and who is at greatest risk. Yet HHS officials apparently viewed these scientific reports as opportunities for political manipulation.

After these efforts to stifle CDC reports became public, Mr. Caputo acknowledged the Administration had sought to control the reports and attempted to justify these actions by blaming “ulterior deep state motives in the bowels of CDC” and claiming without evidence: “Most often, the MMWRs are [issued] for purely scientific reasons. But in an election year, and in the time of covid-19, it’s no longer unanimously scientific. There’s political content.”¹⁴ However, scientists and public health experts have stated that interference by political officials has led them to lose trust in information published by CDC. Some experts have concluded that the agency—for decades among the most respected voices in infection control worldwide—can no longer be trusted.¹⁵ In July 2020, four former CDC directors—who served under both Republican and Democratic presidents—wrote, “We cannot recall over our collective tenure a single time when political pressure led to a change in the interpretation of scientific evidence.”¹⁶

Blatant political interference in CDC’s reports on the coronavirus outbreak appears to be just one element in the Trump Administration’s all-out strategy to, in the President’s words, “play it down.” The Administration has refused to allow CDC experts to provide public briefings about the coronavirus.¹⁷ In July 2020, HHS abruptly took over the collection of crucial

¹² *Id.*; Laura Bull-Otterson, et al., *Hydroxychloroquine and Chloroquine Prescribing Patterns by Provider Specialty Following Initial Reports of Potential Benefit for COVID-19 Treatment — United States, January–June 2020*, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (Sept. 4, 2020) (online at www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6935a4.htm).

¹³ *Public Health Specialists Criticize Trump Administration over Reports It Interfered with CDC Studies*, CNBC (Sept. 12, 2020) (online at www.cnbc.com/2020/09/12/health-experts-criticize-trump-over-reports-of-cdc-interference.html).

¹⁴ *Id.*; *Trump Officials Seek Greater Control over CDC Reports on Coronavirus*, Washington Post (Sept. 12, 2020) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/09/12/trump-control-over-cdc-reports/).

¹⁵ *It Has Come to This: Ignore the C.D.C.*, New York Times (Aug. 31, 2020) (online at www.nytimes.com/2020/08/31/opinion/cdc-testing-coronavirus.html).

¹⁶ *We Ran the CDC. No President Ever Politicized Its Science the Way Trump Has*, Washington Post (July 14, 2020) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/07/14/cdc-directors-trump-politics/).

¹⁷ *Hundreds of Health Groups Petition Against Trump*, Politico (July 7, 2020) (online at www.politico.com/news/2020/07/07/hundreds-health-groups-petition-trump-350154).

hospitalization data from CDC, causing alarm among public health experts.¹⁸ Shortly thereafter, Director Robert R. Redfield altered guidance on reopening schools after the President tweeted that CDC's previous guidelines were "very tough & expensive."¹⁹ Just last month, CDC weakened its guidance on testing of asymptomatic individuals who may have been exposed to the coronavirus, reportedly after pressure from political officials.²⁰

Given the crucial and pressing need for truthful scientific information during this ongoing public health crisis, the Select Subcommittee is seeking to determine the scope of political interference with CDC's scientific reports and other efforts to combat the pandemic, the impact of this interference on CDC's mission, whether this interference is continuing, and the steps that Congress may need to take to stop it before more Americans die needlessly. To that end, we request transcribed interviews with the following individuals by videoconference on the dates listed below:

- Anne Schuchat, Principal Deputy Director, CDC, September 22, 2020, 9:00 a.m.
- Charlotte Kent, MMWR Editor-in-Chief, CDC, September 22, 2020, 1:00 p.m.
- Nina Witkofsky, Acting Chief of Staff, CDC, September 23, 2020, 9:00 a.m.
- Trey Moeller, Acting Deputy Chief of Staff, CDC, September 23, 1:00 p.m.
- Kate Galatas, Acting Associate Director for Communication, CDC, September 24, 2020, 9:00 a.m.
- Paul Alexander, Senior Advisor, HHS, September 24, 2020, 1:00 p.m.
- Michael Caputo, Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, HHS, September 25, 2020, 9:00 a.m.

Please confirm by September 16, 2020, that these individuals will appear voluntarily for these interviews.

In addition, for the reasons described above, please produce the following documents by September 28, 2020, covering the period from January 1, 2020, to present:

¹⁸ *Trump Administration Strips C.D.C. of Control of Coronavirus Data*, New York Times (July 14, 2020) (online at www.nytimes.com/2020/07/14/us/politics/trump-cdc-coronavirus.html); *Out of View: After Public Outcry, CDC Adds Hospital Data Back to Its Website—for Now*, Pro Publica (July 16, 2020) (online at www.propublica.org/article/out-of-view-after-public-outcry-cdc-adds-hospital-data-back-to-its-website-for-now); *Coronavirus Data Has Already Disappeared After Trump Administration Shifted Control from CDC*, CNBC (July 17, 2020) (online at www.cnbc.com/2020/07/16/us-coronavirus-data-has-already-disappeared-after-trump-administration-shifted-control-from-cdc-to-hhs.html).

¹⁹ *CDC's Robert Redfield: After Pressure on School Reopenings from Donald Trump, Changes 'Not a Revision' of Guidelines*, USA Today (July 9, 2020) (online at www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2020/07/09/covid-cases-cdc-says-school-reopening-guidelines-wont-revised/5404983002/).

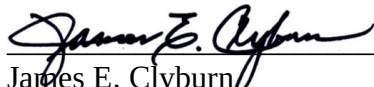
²⁰ *Local Health Departments Rebuke CDC's Softened Covid-19 Testing Guidelines*, Wall Street Journal (Aug. 28, 2020) (online at www.wsj.com/articles/local-health-departments-rebuke-cdcs-softened-covid-19-testing-guidelines-11598651097); *Updated CDC Guidelines Now Say People Exposed to Coronavirus May Not Need to Be Tested*, CNN (Aug. 26, 2020) (online at www.cnn.com/2020/08/26/health/cdc-guidelines-coronavirus-testing/index.html).

1. All communications sent or received by Director Redfield regarding Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports;
2. All communications sent or received by Secretary Azar, Michael Caputo, Brad Traverse, or Paul Alexander related to:
 - a. Any Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report or other CDC report;
 - b. Any public health guidance, recommendations, or reports related to the coronavirus;
 - c. The number of coronavirus deaths or infections in the United States;
 - d. The impact of the coronavirus on children; or
 - e. Hydroxychloroquine.
3. All documents and communications related to any effort by HHS political appointees to review, revise, edit, delay, or prohibit publication of any Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report or other CDC report, recommendation, or guidance related to the coronavirus.

These requests are consistent with House Resolution 935, which established the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis “to conduct a full and complete investigation” of “issues related to the coronavirus crisis,” including the “preparedness for and response to the coronavirus crisis” and “executive branch policies, deliberations, decisions, activities, and internal and external communications related to the coronavirus crisis.”

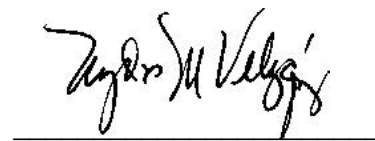
An attachment to this letter provides additional instructions for responding to the Select Subcommittee’s request. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Select Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-4400.

Sincerely,


James E. Clyburn
Chairman


Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney

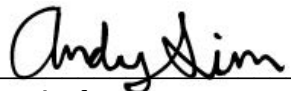

Rep. Maxine Waters


Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Dr. Robert R. Redfield
Page 6


Rep. Bill Foster


Rep. Jamie Raskin


Rep. Andy Kim

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Steve Scalise, Ranking Member

Responding to Oversight Committee Document Requests

1. In complying with this request, produce all responsive documents that are in your possession, custody, or control, whether held by you or your past or present agents, employees, and representatives acting on your behalf. Produce all documents that you have a legal right to obtain, that you have a right to copy, or to which you have access, as well as documents that you have placed in the temporary possession, custody, or control of any third party.
2. Requested documents, and all documents reasonably related to the requested documents, should not be destroyed, altered, removed, transferred, or otherwise made inaccessible to the Committee.
3. In the event that any entity, organization, or individual denoted in this request is or has been known by any name other than that herein denoted, the request shall be read also to include that alternative identification.
4. The Committee's preference is to receive documents in electronic form (i.e., CD, memory stick, thumb drive, or secure file transfer) in lieu of paper productions.
5. Documents produced in electronic format should be organized, identified, and indexed electronically.
6. Electronic document productions should be prepared according to the following standards:
 - a. The production should consist of single page Tagged Image File ("TIF"), files accompanied by a Concordance-format load file, an Opticon reference file, and a file defining the fields and character lengths of the load file.
 - b. Document numbers in the load file should match document Bates numbers and TIF file names.
 - c. If the production is completed through a series of multiple partial productions, field names and file order in all load files should match.
 - d. All electronic documents produced to the Committee should include the following fields of metadata specific to each document, and no modifications should be made to the original metadata:

BEGDOC, ENDDOC, TEXT, BEGATTACH, ENDATTACH, PAGECOUNT, CUSTODIAN, RECORDTYPE, DATE, TIME, SENTDATE, SENTTIME, BEGINDATE, BEGINTIME, ENDDATE, ENDTIME, AUTHOR, FROM, CC, TO, BCC, SUBJECT, TITLE, FILENAME, FILEEXT, FILESIZE, DATECREATED, TIMECREATED, DATELASTMOD, TIMELASTMOD,

INTMSGID, INTMSGHEADER, NATIVELINK, INTFILPATH, EXCEPTION,
BEGATTACH.

7. Documents produced to the Committee should include an index describing the contents of the production. To the extent more than one CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, zip file, box, or folder is produced, each should contain an index describing its contents.
8. Documents produced in response to this request shall be produced together with copies of file labels, dividers, or identifying markers with which they were associated when the request was served.
9. When you produce documents, you should identify the paragraph(s) or request(s) in the Committee's letter to which the documents respond.
10. The fact that any other person or entity also possesses non-identical or identical copies of the same documents shall not be a basis to withhold any information.
11. The pendency of or potential for litigation shall not be a basis to withhold any information.
12. In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(d), the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and any statutory exemptions to FOIA shall not be a basis for withholding any information.
13. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552a(b)(9), the Privacy Act shall not be a basis for withholding information.
14. If compliance with the request cannot be made in full by the specified return date, compliance shall be made to the extent possible by that date. An explanation of why full compliance is not possible shall be provided along with any partial production.
15. In the event that a document is withheld on the basis of privilege, provide a privilege log containing the following information concerning any such document: (a) every privilege asserted; (b) the type of document; (c) the general subject matter; (d) the date, author, addressee, and any other recipient(s); (e) the relationship of the author and addressee to each other; and (f) the basis for the privilege(s) asserted.
16. If any document responsive to this request was, but no longer is, in your possession, custody, or control, identify the document (by date, author, subject, and recipients), and explain the circumstances under which the document ceased to be in your possession, custody, or control.
17. If a date or other descriptive detail set forth in this request referring to a document is inaccurate, but the actual date or other descriptive detail is known to you or is otherwise apparent from the context of the request, produce all documents that would be responsive as if the date or other descriptive detail were correct.

18. This request is continuing in nature and applies to any newly-discovered information. Any record, document, compilation of data, or information not produced because it has not been located or discovered by the return date shall be produced immediately upon subsequent location or discovery.
19. All documents shall be Bates-stamped sequentially and produced sequentially.
20. Two sets of each production shall be delivered, one set to the Majority Staff and one set to the Minority Staff. When documents are produced to the Committee, production sets shall be delivered to the Majority Staff in Room 2157 of the Rayburn House Office Building and the Minority Staff in Room 2105 of the Rayburn House Office Building.
21. Upon completion of the production, submit a written certification, signed by you or your counsel, stating that: (1) a diligent search has been completed of all documents in your possession, custody, or control that reasonably could contain responsive documents; and (2) all documents located during the search that are responsive have been produced to the Committee.

Definitions

1. The term “document” means any written, recorded, or graphic matter of any nature whatsoever, regardless of how recorded, and whether original or copy, including, but not limited to, the following: memoranda, reports, expense reports, books, manuals, instructions, financial reports, data, working papers, records, notes, letters, notices, confirmations, telegrams, receipts, appraisals, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, prospectuses, communications, electronic mail (email), contracts, cables, notations of any type of conversation, telephone call, meeting or other inter-office or intra-office communication, bulletins, printed matter, computer printouts, teletypes, invoices, transcripts, diaries, analyses, returns, summaries, minutes, bills, accounts, estimates, projections, comparisons, messages, correspondence, press releases, circulars, financial statements, reviews, opinions, offers, studies and investigations, questionnaires and surveys, and work sheets (and all drafts, preliminary versions, alterations, modifications, revisions, changes, and amendments of any of the foregoing, as well as any attachments or appendices thereto), and graphic or oral records or representations of any kind (including without limitation, photographs, charts, graphs, microfiche, microfilm, videotape, recordings and motion pictures), and electronic, mechanical, and electric records or representations of any kind (including, without limitation, tapes, cassettes, disks, and recordings) and other written, printed, typed, or other graphic or recorded matter of any kind or nature, however produced or reproduced, and whether preserved in writing, film, tape, disk, videotape, or otherwise. A document bearing any notation not a part of the original text is to be considered a separate document. A draft or non-identical copy is a separate document within the meaning of this term.
2. The term “communication” means each manner or means of disclosure or exchange of information, regardless of means utilized, whether oral, electronic, by document or otherwise, and whether in a meeting, by telephone, facsimile, mail, releases, electronic

message including email (desktop or mobile device), text message, instant message, MMS or SMS message, message application, or otherwise.

3. The terms “and” and “or” shall be construed broadly and either conjunctively or disjunctively to bring within the scope of this request any information that might otherwise be construed to be outside its scope. The singular includes plural number, and vice versa. The masculine includes the feminine and neutral genders.
4. The term “including” shall be construed broadly to mean “including, but not limited to.”
5. The term “Company” means the named legal entity as well as any units, firms, partnerships, associations, corporations, limited liability companies, trusts, subsidiaries, affiliates, divisions, departments, branches, joint ventures, proprietorships, syndicates, or other legal, business or government entities over which the named legal entity exercises control or in which the named entity has any ownership whatsoever.
6. The term “identify,” when used in a question about individuals, means to provide the following information: (a) the individual’s complete name and title; (b) the individual’s business or personal address and phone number; and (c) any and all known aliases.
7. The term “related to” or “referring or relating to,” with respect to any given subject, means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, reflects, identifies, states, refers to, deals with, or is pertinent to that subject in any manner whatsoever.
8. The term “employee” means any past or present agent, borrowed employee, casual employee, consultant, contractor, de facto employee, detailee, fellow, independent contractor, intern, joint adventurer, loaned employee, officer, part-time employee, permanent employee, provisional employee, special government employee, subcontractor, or any other type of service provider.
9. The term “individual” means all natural persons and all persons or entities acting on their behalf.