

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

Phone (202) 225-4400
<https://coronavirus.house.gov>

July 26, 2021

Kyle McGowan
Ascendant Strategic Partners
143 Norcross St.
Roswell, GA 30075

Dear Mr. McGowan:

The Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis is conducting several ongoing investigations into the federal government's response to the coronavirus pandemic to better understand what went wrong, identify ways to improve the country's response, and determine how to ensure our nation is better prepared for any future public health crisis. These investigations have revealed, among other failures, that Trump Administration officials engaged in a persistent pattern of political interference in the nation's pandemic response—overruling and bullying our nation's scientists and making decisions that allowed the virus to spread more rapidly in an attempt to advance former President Trump's electoral prospects.¹ In light of the senior position you held at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and your involvement in key events under investigation by the Select Subcommittee, we write today to request documents and a transcribed interview regarding these issues.²

To date, the Select Subcommittee has identified at least 88 instances in which Trump Administration officials injected politics into public health decisions—including attempting to alter, delay, or block the release of scientific reports and guidance on the coronavirus, pressuring public health experts to adopt politically motivated talking points that downplayed the threat of the virus and conflicted with science, and seeking to retaliate against CDC officials who provided truthful information to the public. For instance, the Select Subcommittee has obtained

¹ See, e.g., Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, to Chief of Staff Ronald A. Klain, White House (Feb. 8, 2021) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2021-02-08.Clyburn%20to%20Klain%20re%20WH%20Failures%20on%20Pandemic%20.pdf>); Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, to Secretary Alex M. Azar II, Department of Health and Human Services and Director Robert R. Redfield, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Dec. 21, 2020) (online at https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2020-12-21.Clyburn%20to%20Redfield%20and%20Azar%20re%20Subpoena%20FINAL%20_0.pdf); Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, to Secretary Alex M. Azar II, Department of Health and Human Services and Director Robert R. Redfield, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Dec. 10, 2020) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2020-12-10.Clyburn%20to%20HHS%20re%20Redfield%20%281%29.pdf>).

² Select Subcommittee staff have repeatedly attempted to reach you by email and phone, but they have not received any response from you to date.

evidence showing that Trump Administration officials promoted policies that would purposely allow the virus to spread in a dangerous attempt to achieve herd immunity without a vaccine, changed the CDC's testing guidance for the explicit purpose of minimizing the number of cases detected while reopening the country, and pursued questionable coronavirus treatments over the objections of scientists. These incidents—many of which occurred while you were at CDC—degraded every major facet of the prior Administration's public health response and severely hindered the country's ability to respond effectively to the pandemic.³

You have spoken publicly about the political interference you saw as Chief of Staff to former CDC Director Robert Redfield. After resigning from CDC in August 2020, you recounted in an appearance on *Meet the Press* that, “in the spring and summer [2020], we saw more and more the Administration wanting a larger say in the messaging that was coming out of the CDC,” and that eventually, “the meddling that was coming out of, out of the Administration, we were, you know, not able to do the job that we were sent there for.”⁴ You told the *New York Times* that officials in the Trump White House and political appointees in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) “sidelined” CDC and interfered in public health guidance for the former President's political benefit, stating: “Every time that the science clashed with the messaging, messaging won.”⁵ You also confirmed to *Politico* that Trump Administration political appointees “absolutely put pressure on the CDC on different guidance documents” and on Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) articles, noting that this political interference “delayed guidance, delayed MMWRs from getting them out as quickly as possible to be effective.”⁶

The Select Subcommittee has also obtained new documents regarding your role in specific events actively under investigation. For example, a recently obtained document indicates that you and other top CDC officials—including then-CDC Director Redfield and Dr. Michael Iademarco, Director of CDC's Center for Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services—were contacted by a CDC employee to discuss how to address an email sent by former HHS Senior Advisor Paul Alexander, in which Dr. Alexander called for an “immediate stop on all CDC MMWR reports” to allow him to review and make changes to articles prior to publication.⁷ During a December 7, 2020, transcribed interview of Dr. Charlotte

³ Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, *The Trump Administration's Pattern of Political Interference in the Nation's Coronavirus Response* (July 26, 2021) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/7.26.2021%20Timeline%20of%20Political%20Interference%20-%20final.pdf>).

⁴ *Meet the Press*, NBC (Dec. 20, 2020) (online at www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/meet-press-december-20-2020-n1251854).

⁵ *'Like a Hand Grasping': Trump Appointees Describe the Crushing of the C.D.C.*, *New York Times* (Jan. 15, 2021) (online at www.nytimes.com/2020/12/16/us/politics/cdc-trump.html).

⁶ *'We Want Them Infected': Trump Appointee Demanded 'Herd Immunity' Strategy, Emails Reveal*, *Politico* (Dec. 16, 2020) (online at www.politico.com/news/2020/12/16/trump-appointee-demanded-herd-immunity-strategy-446408).

⁷ Email from Staff, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to Director Robert R. Redfield, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, et al. (Aug. 9, 2020) (SSCC-0022285 – 86) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/Link%201%20-%20New%20CDC%20Email%20to%20Redfield.pdf>).

Kent, Chief of the Scientific Publications Branch and Editor-in-Chief of CDC's MMWR series, Dr. Kent stated that she was instructed to delete this email, and that she understood the direction came from Director Redfield.⁸

Specifically, in her interview, Dr. Kent stated that she received the instruction to delete Dr. Alexander's email on Sunday, August 9, 2020, after Director Redfield and Dr. Iademarco discussed the email earlier that day.⁹ Consistent with Dr. Kent's statements, early in the morning on Sunday, August 9, a CDC official forwarded Dr. Alexander's email to you, Director Redfield, Dr. Iademarco, and other CDC officials, offering "to discuss next steps with you and OD [Office of the Director] leadership (copied) in the morning."¹⁰ As a member of the Office of the Director leadership team and a recipient of this email, you appear to have firsthand knowledge of this troubling incident, including who may have participated in relevant conversations, whether Director Redfield may have told CDC staff to delete this email, and what steps may have been taken to effectuate such an instruction.

Given the senior position you held at CDC and your active involvement in matters under investigation by the Select Subcommittee, you likely possess material information relevant to the Select Subcommittee's investigations. This may include, but may not be limited to, information on the Trump Administration's early monitoring of and response to the coronavirus; coronavirus testing, treatments, or vaccines; the public health policies pursued by the Trump Administration to combat the coronavirus; consideration of a herd immunity strategy or allowing the virus to spread among any portion of the U.S. population prior to the development and distribution of a vaccine; public messaging related to the coronavirus; the extent and impact of the political interference in public health agencies' work; any effort to delete, conceal, or withhold information, documents, or testimony; data collection practices; or any adverse employment action taken or considered against any employee, official, or contractor of the federal government for actions taken in the course of their employment related to the coronavirus.

* * *

Our public health institutions must never again be compromised by decision makers more concerned with politics than keeping Americans safe. It is therefore imperative that the Select Subcommittee's investigations into the prior Administration's response to the pandemic provide full accountings of what occurred. The Select Subcommittee's investigations have raised

⁸ See Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, to Secretary Alex M. Azar II, Department of Health and Human Services and Director Robert R. Redfield, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Dec. 10, 2020) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2020-12-10.Clyburn%20to%20HHS%20re%20Redfield%20%281%29.pdf>).

⁹ Transcribed Interview of Dr. Charlotte Kent at 70:1716-72:1763, 74:1811-75:1833 (Dec. 7, 2020) (online at https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/Kent%20Transcript_Redacted.pdf).

¹⁰ Email from Staff, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to Director Robert R. Redfield, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, et al. (Aug. 9, 2020) (SSCC-0022285 – 86) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/Link%201%20-%20New%20CDC%20Email%20to%20Redfield.pdf>).

Mr. Kyle McGowan

Page 4

concerns that Trump Administration officials may have communicated about key elements of the coronavirus response on personal accounts or private devices.¹¹

For all of these reasons, please produce by August 16, 2021, all documents and communications in your possession, custody, or control related to your involvement in the federal government's response to the coronavirus. We also request your participation in a transcribed interview on Wednesday, August 25, 2021, at 9:00 am ET.

In responding to this request, responsive communications should include, but not be limited to, electronic messages sent to or from your government-issued or personal email account(s); voicemails, text messages, or instant messages on mobile applications on your government-issued or personal cell phone(s); and data located on any other messaging applications, software, hard drive, or in any other form, including but not limited to instant messages, encrypted messages, and social media accounts.

These requests are consistent with the House of Representatives' authorization of 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."¹²

Please confirm by August 2, 2021, that you have received our letter and will comply with these requests. 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,

Rep. James E. Clyburn
Chairman

Rep. Maxine Waters

¹¹ See, e.g., Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, to Paul E. Alexander, Assistant Professor, McMaster University (Apr. 9, 2021) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2021-04-08.Clyburn%20to%20Alexander%20re%20COVID%20Response%20.pdf>); *Kushner Coronavirus Team Sparks Confusion, Plaudits Inside White House Response Efforts*, Washington Post (Mar. 18, 2020) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/politics/kushner-coronavirus-team-sparks-confusion-plaudits-inside-white-house-response-efforts/2020/03/18/02038a16-6874-11ea-9923-57073adce27c_story.html); see also *But Their Emails: Seven Members of Trump's Team Have Used Unofficial Communication Tools*, Washington Post (Mar. 21, 2019) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/03/21/their-emails-seven-members-trumps-team-have-used-unofficial-communications-tools/).

¹² H.Res. 8, sec. 4(f), 117th Cong. (2021); H.Res. 935, 116th Cong. (2020).

Mr. Kyle McGowan
Page 5

Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney

Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez

Rep. Bill Foster

Rep. Jamie Raskin

Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Steve Scalise, Ranking Member