

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

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July 26, 2021

Dr. Anne Schuchat
Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Dr. Schuchat:

The Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis has been conducting investigations into the federal government's response to the coronavirus pandemic. We have sought to better understand what went wrong, identify ways to improve the country's response, and determine what corrective steps are necessary 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 As the second-highest ranking official at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) during the height of the pandemic, you have important insight into a host of critical decisions made by the federal government in response to the virus.² Accordingly, we write today to request a transcribed interview regarding these issues.

The Select Subcommittee's investigations have detailed a series of critical failures by the Trump Administration that undermined the nation's ability to respond effectively to the pandemic. These missteps include failing to take sufficient action in the early months of 2020 to prepare for and respond to the coronavirus, designing and initially distributing a flawed coronavirus test, refusing to develop a coordinated national plan to contain the virus, and pursuing a haphazard and ineffective approach to procuring personal protective equipment and testing supplies.³ One of the most consequential failings of the Trump Administration's response

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 CDC's *Second-in-Command Anne Schuchat to Step Down*, Politico (May 17, 2021) (online at www.politico.com/news/2021/05/17/cdc-schuchat-steps-down-489077).

³ See Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, *Inefficient, Ineffective, and Inequitable: The Trump*

was the repeated overruling and sidelining of top scientists and undermining of Americans' health for political purposes. 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. These incidents 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.⁴

Evidence previously uncovered by the Select Subcommittee and other sources shows that Trump Administration officials sought to suppress accurate scientific information and attempted to retaliate against officials, such as yourself, who provided truthful information to the public.⁵ For instance, officials in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), including former HHS Secretary Alex Azar, apparently believed your May 2020 Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)—which accurately described the “rapid acceleration of transmission during March” and acknowledged that “limited testing” contributed to the virus's spread—implied that the Trump Administration responded too slowly to the initial virus outbreak.⁶ Trump Administration political appointees subsequently criticized you for providing accurate information about the worsening state of the coronavirus pandemic in a June 2020 interview, made a series of unfounded attacks against you, and may have sought to have you fired.⁷

Administration's Failed Response to the Coronavirus Crisis (Oct. 2020) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/InterimStaffReport10.30.20.pdf>); Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, *Hearing on Accountability in Crisis: GAO's Recommendations to Improve the Federal Coronavirus Response*, 116th Cong. (June 26, 2020) (online at <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/VC/VC00/20200626/110831/HHRG-116-VC00-Transcript-20200626.pdf>).

⁴ 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>).

⁵ See, e.g., Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, to Secretary Alex M. Azar, 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); Memorandum from Majority Staff to Members, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Supplemental Memorandum on Investigation into Political Interference with Coronavirus Response (Dec. 16, 2020) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/Staff%20Report%20re%20Political%20Messaging%20and%20Herd%20Immunity.pdf>).

⁶ *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); 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).

⁷ See, e.g., Email from Senior Advisor Paul Alexander, Department of Health and Human Services, to Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Michael Caputo, Department of Health and Human Services, et al. (July 1, 2020) (SSCC-0006774 – 78) (online at https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2020.07.01%20SSCC-0006774_Redacted.pdf); *Emails Detail Effort to Silence C.D.C. and Question Its Science*, New York Times (Sept.

The Select Subcommittee has also obtained new documents regarding your role in other 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.⁸ During a December 7, 2020, transcribed interview of Dr. Charlotte 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.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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.”¹¹ As a member of the Office of the Director leadership team and a recipient of this email, you appear likely 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.

According to reports, you also played a key role in events during the early response to the coronavirus outbreak that the Select Subcommittee is investigating, including decisions regarding initial testing guidelines, repatriation of Americans abroad, issuance of CDC’s no-sail order, coronavirus data collected from hospitals, and CDC’s ability to reliably track critical metrics on coronavirus cases and hospitalizations.¹² You recently acknowledged that the initial

18, 2020) (online at www.nytimes.com/2020/09/18/us/politics/trump-cdc-coronavirus.html); *Inside the Fall of the CDC*, Pro Publica (Oct. 15, 2020) (online at www.propublica.org/article/inside-the-fall-of-the-cdc).

⁸ 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>).

⁹ 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>).

¹⁰ 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).

¹¹ 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>).

¹² *Inside the Fall of the CDC*, Pro Publica (Oct. 15, 2020) (online at www.propublica.org/article/inside-the-fall-of-the-cdc); *Can the C.D.C. Be Fixed?*, New York Times Magazine (June 25, 2021) (online at

response to the pandemic “wasn’t a good performance” and have offered recommendations on how the country can ensure it is better prepared for the next pandemic—an objective that drives all of the Select Subcommittee’s investigations.¹³

Given the senior position you held at CDC and your involvement in key areas of the pandemic response, you likely have material information relevant to the Select Subcommittee’s investigation. This may include, but may not be limited to, information on the early monitoring of and response to the coronavirus; the factors causing CDC’s early coronavirus tests to fail; federal public health policies developed in response to the coronavirus; coronavirus testing, treatments, or vaccines; 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.

For all of these reasons, we request your participation in a transcribed interview on Friday, September 3, 2021, at 9:00 am ET.

This request is 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.”¹⁴

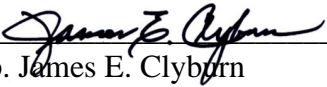
Please confirm by August 2, 2021, that you have received our letter and will comply with this request. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Select Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-4400.

www.nytimes.com/2021/06/16/magazine/cdc-covid-response.html); *Special Report: How U.S. CDC Missed Chances to Spot COVID's Silent Spread*, Reuters (Jan. 22, 2021) (online at www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-cdc-response-speci/special-report-how-u-s-cdc-missed-chances-to-spot-covids-silent-spread-idUSKBN29R1E7).


¹³ Anne Schuchat, *What I Learned in 33 Years at the C.D.C.*, New York Times (June 10, 2021) (online at www.nytimes.com/2021/06/10/opinion/anne-schuchat-cdc-retirement.html); *The CDC’s No. 2 Official Says the U.S. Isn’t Ready for Another Pandemic*, National Public Radio (June 4, 2021) (online at www.npr.org/2021/06/04/1003172065/anne-schuchat-discusses-her-time-as-the-cdcs-principal-deputy-director).

¹⁴ H.Res. 8, sec. 4(f), 117th Cong. (2021); H.Res. 935, 116th Cong. (2020).

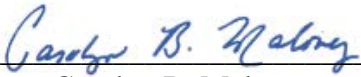
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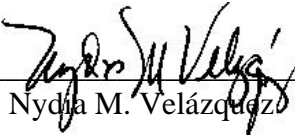
Rep. James E. Clyburn
Chairman



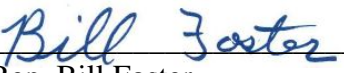
Rep. Maxine Waters



Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney



Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez



Rep. Bill Foster



Rep. Jamie Raskin



Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi

cc: The Honorable Steve Scalise, Ranking Member