

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic Members

**FROM:** Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic Majority Staff

**DATE:** March 5, 2023

**RE:** New Evidence Resulting from the Select Subcommittee’s Investigation into the Origins of COVID-19 – “The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2”

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On February 1, 2020, Dr. Anthony Fauci, Dr. Francis Collins, and at least eleven other scientists convened a conference call to discuss COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> It was on this conference call that Drs. Fauci and Collins were first warned that COVID-19 may have leaked from a lab in Wuhan, China and, further, may have been intentionally genetically manipulated.<sup>2</sup>

Only three days later, on February 4, 2020, four participants of the conference call authored a paper entitled “The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2” (Proximal Origin) and sent a draft to Drs. Fauci and Collins.<sup>3</sup> Prior to final publication in *Nature Medicine*, the paper was sent to Dr. Fauci for editing and approval.<sup>4</sup>

On April 16, 2020, slightly more than two months after the original conference call, Dr. Collins emailed Dr. Fauci expressing dismay that Proximal Origin—which they saw prior to publication and were given the opportunity to edit—did not squash the lab leak hypothesis and asks if the NIH can do more to “put down” the lab leak hypothesis.<sup>5</sup> The next day—after Dr. Collins explicitly asked for more public pressure—Dr. Fauci cited Proximal Origin from the White House podium when asked if COVID-19 leaked from a lab.<sup>6</sup>

**New evidence released by the Select Subcommittee today suggests that Dr. Fauci “prompted” the drafting of a publication that would “disprove” the lab leak theory, the authors of this paper skewed available evidence to achieve that goal, and Dr. Jeremy Farrar went uncredited despite significant involvement.**

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<sup>1</sup> E-Mail from Jeremy Farrar to Anthony Fauci, et. al. (Feb. 1, 2020) (On file with Comm. Staff).

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Hon. James Comer, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight & Reform, & Hon. Jim Jordan, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, to Hon. Xavier Becerra, Sec’y, U.S. Dep’t of Health & Human Servs. (Jan. 11, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> E-Mail from Jeremy Farrar to Anthony Fauci & Francis Collins (Feb. 4, 2020) (On file with Comm. Staff)

<sup>4</sup> E-Mail from Kristian Andersen to Anthony Fauci, Francis Collins, & Jeremy Farrar (Mar. 6, 2020) (On file with Comm. staff).

<sup>5</sup> E-Mail from Francis Collins to Anthony Fauci, et. al. (Apr. 16, 2020) (On file with Comm. Staff).

<sup>6</sup> John Haltiwanger, *Dr. Fauci throws cold water on conspiracy theory that coronavirus was created in a Chinese lab*, BLOOMBERG (Apr. 18, 2020).

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**New Evidence:**  
**The Drafting and Publication of “The Proximal Origins of SARS-CoV-2”**

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**I. “Prompted by...Tony Fauci”**

The evidence available to the Select Subcommittee suggests that Dr. Anthony Fauci “prompted” Dr. Kristian Andersen, Professor, Scripps Research (Scripps), to write Proximal Origin and that the goal was to “disprove” any lab leak theory.

On August 18, 2021, Scripps responded to then-Committee on Oversight and Reform Ranking Member, James Comer, and then-Committee on the Judiciary Ranking Member, Jim Jordan’s, July 29, 2021, letter to Dr. Andersen.<sup>7</sup> In this letter, Scripps asserts that Dr. Andersen “objectively” investigated the origins and that Dr. Anthony Fauci did not attempt to influence his work.<sup>8</sup> Both statements do not appear to be supported by the available evidence.

***The Goal of Proximal Origin Was to “Disprove” A Lab Theory***

In Scripps’ August 18 letter, on behalf of Dr. Andersen, it stated:

In January 2020, Dr. Andersen began investigating the origins of SARS-CoV-2. At every point, ***Dr. Andersen has objectively weighed all of the evidence available to him...***Dr. Andersen’s view evolved consistent with the evidence at his disposal...Scientists must make conclusions supported by the available evidence, even when it conflicts with earlier assessments.<sup>9</sup>

According to previously released e-mails, this assertion is also demonstrably false. On February 8, 2020, Dr. Andersen stated:

Our main work over the last couple of weeks has been focused on ***trying to disprove any type of lab theory...***<sup>10</sup>

This e-mail directly contradicts Scripps’ earlier statement that Dr. Andersen “objectively” weighed all the evidence regarding the origins of COVID-19. Instead, it appears that Dr. Andersen was given direction and sought to formulate a paper, regardless of available evidence, that would disprove a lab leak.

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<sup>7</sup> Letter from Hon. James Comer, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight & Reform, & Hon. Jim Jordan, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, to Kristian Andersen, Professor, Scripps Research (July 29, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Counsel for Scripps Research, to Hon. James Comer, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight & Reform, & Hon. Jim Jordan, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on the Judiciary (Aug. 18, 2021) (emphasis added).

<sup>9</sup> *Id* (emphasis added).

<sup>10</sup> E-Mail from Kristian Andersen, Professor, Scripps Research, to Christian Drosten, et. al., Professor, German Cent. For Infection Research (Feb. 8, 2020) (emphasis added).

## ***Dr. Anthony Fauci “Prompted” the Drafting of “The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2”***

In Scripps’ August 18 letter, on behalf of Dr. Andersen, it stated:

As for the conference call of February 1, ***Dr. Fauci did not, in Dr. Andersen’s view, attempt to influence Dr. Andersen*** or any other member of the *ad hoc* working group of international subject matter experts with respect to any aspect of the discussion.<sup>11</sup>

According to new evidence obtained by the Select Subcommittee, this assertion is demonstrably false. On February 12, 2020, Dr. Andersen wrote to *Nature* to request the publication of what would become Proximal Origin. In this e-mail, Dr. Andersen wrote:

There has been a lot of speculation, fear mongering, and conspiracies put forward in this space and we thought that bringing some clarity to this discussion might be of interest to Nature [sic].

***Prompted by Jeremy Farrah [sic], Tony Fauci, and Francis Collins***, Eddie Holmes, Andrew Rambaut, Bob Garry, Ian Lipkin, and myself have been working through much of the (primarily) genetic data to provide agnostic and scientifically informed hypothesis around the origins of the virus.<sup>12</sup>

This e-mail directly contradicts Scripps’ earlier statement that Dr. Fauci did not influence Dr. Andersen.

## **II. The False Narrative of the Pangolin Sequences**

It remains unclear what science changed, or new evidence was discovered to change the minds of the authors of Proximal Origin between the February 1 conference call and the February 4 draft. In a July 14, 2021 interview with *The New York Times*, Dr. Andersen was asked about how his view changed from possible lab leak to definitely zoonotic, “[c]an you explain how the research changed your view?” He replied:

The features in SARS-CoV-2 that initially suggested possible engineering were identified in related coronaviruses, meaning that features that initially looked unusual to us weren’t...Yet more extensive analyses, significant additional data and thorough investigations to compare genetic diversity more broadly across coronaviruses led to the peer-reviewed study published in *Nature Medicine* [sic]. ***For example, we looked at data from coronaviruses found in other species, such as bats and pangolins,***

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Counsel for Scripps Research, *supra* note 8 (emphasis added).

<sup>12</sup> E-Mail from Kristian Andersen, Professor, Scripps Research, to Claire Thomas, Team Manager, *Nature* (Feb. 12, 2020) (emphasis added) (On file with Select Subcomm. Staff).

*which demonstrated that the features that first appeared unique to SARS-CoV-2 were in fact found in other, related viruses.*<sup>13</sup>

According to new evidence obtained by the Select Subcommittee, while Proximal Origin was going through peer review with *Nature Medicine* more than a year earlier, Dr. Andersen actually did not find the pangolin data compelling.

The first referee asked:

There are two recent reports about coronaviruses in pangolins. The authors might want to comment on these.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Andersen replied:

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.<sup>15</sup>

The second referee asked:

The paper itself is interesting, but unnecessarily speculative. It's not clear why the authors do not refute a hypothetical lab origin in their coming publication on the ancestors of SARS-CoV-2 in bats and pangolins...Once the authors publish their new pangolin sequences, a lab origin will be extremely unlikely. It is not clear why the authors rush with a speculative perspective if their central hypothesis can be supported by their own data. Please explain.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Andersen replied:

Our manuscript is written to explore the potential origin of SARS-CoV-2. We do not believe it is speculative...*Unfortunately, the newly available pangolin sequences do not elucidate the origin of SARS-CoV-2 or refute a lab origin.* Hence, the reviewer is incorrect on this point...[T]here is no evidence on present data

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<sup>13</sup> James Gorman & Carl Zimmer, *Scientist Opens Up About His Early Email to Fauci on Virus Origins*, THE N.Y. TIMES (June 14, 2021) (emphasis added).

<sup>14</sup> Referee #1 Document (Feb. 21, 2020) (On file with Select Subcomm. Staff).

<sup>15</sup> *Id* (emphasis added).

<sup>16</sup> Referee #2 Document (Feb. 21, 2020) (On file with Select Subcomm. Staff).

*that the pangolin CoVs are directly related to the COVID-19 epidemic.*<sup>17</sup>

Privately, Dr. Andersen did not believe the pangolin data disproved a lab leak theory despite saying so publicly. It is still unclear what intervening event changed the minds of the authors of Proximal Origin in such a short period of time. Based on this new evidence, the pangolin data was not the compelling factor; to this day, the only known intervening event was the February 1 conference call with Dr. Fauci.

### III. Uncredited Involvement of Dr. Jeremy Farrar

The evidence available to the Select Subcommittee suggests that Dr. Farrar, the former Director of the Wellcome Trust and current Chief Scientist at the World Health Organization, was more involved in the drafting and publication of Proximal Origin than previously known.

#### *Dr. Eddie Holmes Sought Permission from Dr. Farrar to Involve Dr. W. Ian Lipkin*

Dr. Lipkin, Professor of Epidemiology, Columbia University, was not on the February 1 conference call and was not involved in the drafting of Proximal Origin in the early stages. However, on February 10, 2020, Dr. Holmes sent a draft of Proximal Origin to Dr. Lipkin for his review. Dr. Holmes stated:

Here's the document we wrote a few days ago. Things are moving so quickly that is hard [sic] to keep up. Comments welcome. I favour natural evolution myself, but the furin cleavage site is an issue. *I'll have a chat with Jeremy [Farrar] in a little while to see if can [sic] get you more directly involved.*<sup>18</sup>

Dr. Lipkin responded with his thoughts on the draft of Proximal Origin:

It's well reasoned and provides a plausible argument against genetic engineering. *It does not eliminate the possibility of inadvertent release following adaptation through selection in culture at the institute in Wuhan. Given the scale of the bat CoV research pursued there and the site of emergence of the first human cases we have a nightmare of circumstantial evidence to assess.*<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Holmes agreed with Dr. Lipkin's assessment of the possibility of a lab leak and reiterated that he was asking Dr. Farrar about including Dr. Lipkin in the drafting process:

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<sup>17</sup> *Id* (emphasis added).

<sup>18</sup> E-Mail from Edward Holmes, Professor, University of Sydney, to W. Ian Lipkin, Professor, University of Columbia (Feb. 10, 2020) (emphasis added) (On file with Select Subcomm. Staff).

<sup>19</sup> E-Mail from W. Ian Lipkin, Professor, University of Columbia, to Edward Holmes, Professor, University of Sydney (Feb. 11, 2020) (emphasis added) (On file with Select Subcomm. Staff).

I agree. *Talking to Jeremy (Farrar) in a few minutes and I'll get back in touch after.* It is indeed striking that this virus is so closely related to SARS yet is behaving so differently. *Seems to have been pre-adapted for human spread since the get go.* It's the epidemiology that I find most worrying.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Dr. Farrar Led the Drafting Process and Made At Least One Uncredited Direct Edit to Proximal Origin***

Dr. Farrar is not credited as having any involvement in the drafting and publication of Proximal Origin. According to new evidence obtained by the Select Subcommittee, Dr. Farrar led the drafting process and in fact made direct edits to the substance of the publication.

Right before publication, on February 17, 2020, Dr. Lipkin emails Dr. Farrar to thank him for leading the process of drafting Proximal Origin:

***Thanks for shepherding this paper.*** Rumors of bioweaponering are now circulating in China.<sup>21</sup>

Dr. Farrar responds, confirming and saying that he will pressure *Nature* to publish:

Yes I know and in US – why so keen to get out ASAP. ***I will push nature.***<sup>22</sup>

In addition to leading the drafting and publication process, Dr. Farrar made at least one direct edit to Proximal Origin. On February 17, 2020, the day Proximal Origin was first published publicly, Dr. Farrar made an edit to the draft:

***Sorry to micro-manage/microedit!*** But would you be willing to change one sentence?

From

***It is unlikely*** that SARS-CoV-2 emerged through laboratory manipulation of an existing SARS-related coronavirus.

To

***It is improbable*** that SARS-CoV-2 emerged through laboratory manipulation of an existing SARS-related coronavirus.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> E-Mail from Edward Holmes, Professor, University of Sydney, to W. Ian Lipkin, Professor, Columbia University (Feb. 10, 2020 (emphasis added) (On file with Select Subcomm. Staff).

<sup>21</sup> E-Mail from W. Ian Lipkin, Professor, Columbia University, to Jeremy Farrar, Dir., Wellcome Trust (Feb. 17, 2020) (emphasis added) (On file with Select Subcomm. Staff).

<sup>22</sup> E-Mail from Jeremy Farrar, Dir., Wellcome Trust, to W. Ian Lipkin, Professor, Columbia University (Feb. 17, 2020) (emphasis added) (On file with Select Subcomm. Staff).

To which, Dr. Andersen responds:

Sure, attached.<sup>24</sup>

This evidence suggests that Dr. Farrar was more involved in the drafting and publication of Proximal Origin than previously known and possibly should have been credited or acknowledged for this involvement.

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<sup>23</sup> E-Mail from Jeremy Farrar, Dir., Wellcome Trust, to Kristian Andersen, et. al., Professor, Scripps Research (Feb. 17, 2020) (On file with Select Subcomm. Staff).

<sup>24</sup> E-Mail from Kristian Andersen, Professor, Scripps Research, to Jeremy Farrar, Dir., Wellcome Trust (Feb. 17, 2020) (On file with Select Subcomm. Staff).