

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

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July 26, 2021

Dr. Nancy Messonnier
Decatur, Georgia

Dear Dr. Messonnier:

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 a senior official who helped to lead the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) pandemic response, 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

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 Reassigns Official Who Drew Spotlight for Pandemic Warning, Politico (Apr. 22, 2021) (online at www.politico.com/news/2021/04/22/messonnier-reassigned-covid-task-force-484307).

testing supplies.³ One of the most consequential failings of the Trump Administration's response 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, President Trump reportedly threatened to fire you in February 2020 after you accurately warned about the risk posed by the coronavirus and that the American public should “prepare with the expectation that this could be bad.”⁶ Trump Administration officials subsequently canceled your telephone briefings, claiming they were not needed, while the former President publicly contradicted your warnings about the potential severity of the virus.⁷

³ See Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, *Inefficient, Ineffective, and Inequitable: The Trump Administration's Failed Response to the Coronavirus Crisis*, Appendix B (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 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); 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 *Health Officials Warn Americans to Plan for the Spread of Coronavirus in U.S.*, National Public Radio (Feb. 25, 2020) (online at www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/02/25/809318447/health-officials-warn-americans-to-start-planning-for-spread-of-coronavirus-in-u); *Health Chief's Early Missteps Set Back Coronavirus Response*, Wall Street Journal (Apr. 22, 2020) (online at www.wsj.com/articles/health-chiefs-early-missteps-set-back-coronavirus-response-11587570514).

⁷ “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); *As Trump Played Down Virus, Health Experts' Alarm Grew*, Associated Press (Sept. 13, 2020) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/public-health-pandemics-donald-trump-virus-outbreak-michael-pence-48f77170558376db143da5f0a3f2b3e8>); “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-age-book-trump-coronavirus/index.html).

Following a March 9, 2020, briefing at which you warned that the coronavirus would spread rapidly in the United States, CDC stopped providing public briefings on the pandemic for more than two months.⁸

According to reports, you participated in some of the earliest discussions within CDC about how to plan for and respond to the coronavirus, including playing a leading role in attempting to contain the initial outbreak of the virus, examining the possibility of asymptomatic transmission, and addressing problems with the first coronavirus testing kits.⁹ You also led CDC's early planning for vaccine distribution and coordinated efforts with states to facilitate vaccine administration.¹⁰

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 Wednesday, September 8, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. E.T.

⁸ Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, *Inefficient, Ineffective, and Inequitable: The Trump Administration's Failed Response to the Coronavirus Crisis*, Appendix B (Oct. 2020) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/InterimStaffReport10.30.20.pdf>).

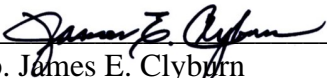
⁹ See, e.g., *Inside the Fall of the CDC*, Pro Publica (Oct. 15, 2020) (online at www.propublica.org/article/inside-the-fall-of-the-cdc); *CDC's Early Face of the Pandemic Resigns*, Medpage Today (May 7, 2021) (online at www.medpagetoday.com/infectiousdisease/covid19/92483); *First U.S. Coronavirus Transmission; WHO Declares a PHEIC*, Medpage Today (Jan. 30, 2020) (online at www.medpagetoday.com/infectiousdisease/publichealth/84636).


¹⁰ *Messonnier: The Slow Vaccine Rollout Should Speed Up "Pretty Massively" in Coming Weeks*, Stat News (Jan. 5, 2021) (online at www.statnews.com/2021/01/05/nancy-messonnier-stat-interview/); *CDC Reassigns Official Who Drew Spotlight for Pandemic Warning*, Politico (Apr. 22, 2021) (online at www.politico.com/news/2021/04/22/messonnier-reassigned-covid-task-force-484307).

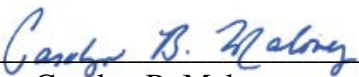
This request is consistent with the House of Representatives' authorization of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis "to conduct a full and complete investigation" of "issues related to the coronavirus crisis," including the "preparedness for and response to the coronavirus crisis" and "executive branch policies, deliberations, decisions, activities, and internal and external communications related to the coronavirus crisis."¹¹

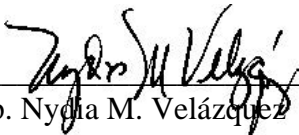
Please confirm by August 2, 2021, that you have received our letter and will comply with this request. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Select Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-4400.

Sincerely,


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

¹¹ H.Res. 8, sec. 4(f), 117th Cong. (2021); H.Res. 935, 116th Cong. (2020).