



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1403

March 29, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
United States State Department
2100 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

I am writing you with regards to recent statements that you have made indicating that you will not seek punitive measures with regards to China over its role in covering up—and thus facilitating—the COVID-19 pandemic. I appreciate your statements criticizing the World Health Organization (WHO) investigations into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic and your concerns regarding China's role in helping write the WHO's upcoming report.¹ However, as you know, when dealing with China words are not enough. Unfortunately, in the short time you have been Secretary, whether on China, Russia, Iran, or other threats we face, there has been a disturbing trend of tough talk, followed by little or no action.

On March 28th, 2021, on CNN's *State of the Union*, you repeatedly dodged questions about holding China accountable for its role in the pandemic and stated that while you did agree there needed to be accountability for China's past actions "our focus needs to be on building a stronger system for the future" and "doing everything possible to prevent another pandemic."² Preventing another pandemic is a goal that we all share, but giving China a slap on the wrist after it continued to lie to the world and heightened the severity of the current pandemic is only going to make that goal harder to achieve. As I have stated previously, had China's leaders not covered up the pandemic, the world may have had a better chance to prepare for it or contain it.³

¹ Javier C. Hernández, "The U.S. Is Concerned about China's Influence over a Report on the Pandemic's Origins.," The New York Times, March 29, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/29/world/the-us-is-concerned-about-chinas-influence-over-a-report-on-the-pandemics-origins.html>.

² Evan Semones, "Blinken Punts on Punishing China for Coronavirus Outbreak," Politico, March 28, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/03/28/blinken-punish-china-coronavirus-outbreak-478263>.

³ Adam-Kredo, "Rep. Banks: U.S. Should Bring China to U.N. Court Over Coronavirus Cover Up," Washington Free Beacon (Washington Free Beacon, April 9, 2020), <https://freebeacon.com/national-security/rep-banks-u-s-should-bring-china-to-u-n-court-over-coronavirus-cover-up/>.

Your conciliatory approach to seeking reforms to the WHO, particularly regarding its bias toward China, is similarly discouraging. Just last week former Center for Disease Control Director Robert Redfield, stated that he believed that the virus causing COVID-19 accidentally escaped from a Chinese lab.⁴ Yet, according to the *Associated Press*, the upcoming WHO report on the origins of the pandemic largely dismisses the lab leak theory and proposes further research into every theory except the lab leak hypothesis.⁵ Regardless of whether or not the virus escaped from the lab, the report's credibility is unquestionably tainted because, as you acknowledge, China helped the WHO write it. You have stated that you believe that rejoining the WHO—without achieving a single reform—helped counter China by pressing for reforms from within. This is clearly not the case.⁶

As I first stated over a year ago, China must pay the burden and the cost endured by Americans because of their role in this pandemic.⁷ I have also previously called for the United States to bring a case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to seek damages from China for its role in the pandemic.⁸ I would appreciate a response to the following questions:

- (1) Why do you not commit to punishing China for its role in the pandemic?
- (2) Will the State Department seek reparations from China for its role in the pandemic, including through bringing a case before the ICJ holding China accountable? If not, why not?
- (3) Does the State Department or Department of the Treasury believe that Chinese officials responsible for the killing of Dr. Li Wenliang, the doctor in Wuhan who first blew the whistle on the spread of the pandemic, meet the criteria for sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Act? Does the State Department intend to seek to identify the Chinese officials responsible for this murder? If not, why not?
- (4) Does the State Department intend to recommend that the Department of the Treasury place Chinese government and Chinese Communist Party officials responsible for the coverup of the pandemic or for spreading harmful disinformation regarding the pandemic on the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons list of the Office of Foreign Asset Control of the Department of the Treasury?
- (5) Does the State Department agree with the assessment that the Department itself released on January 15th 2021, under former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, which stated there was reason to believe that the SARS-CoV-2 virus may have escaped from a lab in China based upon declassified intelligence? If not, what is the State Department's preferred theory of origin?

⁴ "Former CDC Chief Says He Thinks Virus Came from Wuhan Lab," MSN. March 27, 2021, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/health/medical/former-cdc-chief-says-he-thinks-coronavirus-came-from-wuhan-lab/ar-BB1eZXDk?ocid=uxbndlbing>.

⁵ Ken Moritsugu, "AP Exclusive: WHO Report Says Animals Likely Source of COVID," Associated Press. March 29, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/who-report-animals-source-covid-19-coronavirus-8a839c179c330c56fa46a763b7286a7f>.

⁷ Bleau, Hannah. "Rep. Jim Banks: 'Demand Reparations' from China for Coronavirus." Breitbart, March 17, 2020. <https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2020/03/17/rep-jim-banks-demand-reparations-communist-china-coronavirus/>.

⁸ Ibid.

- (6) On March 29th, 2021 Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian asked, “When will Fort Detrick be opened for international experts to visit, investigate or study?” again spreading disinformation that the virus originated in a U.S. military base. Will the State Department and the Department of the Treasury impose sanctions on Mr. Lijian for his spread of harmful disinformation with regards to the origin of the pandemic?
- (7) How has rejoining the WHO helped in reforming the organization and holding China accountable when you yourself have admitted that China helped the WHO write the report into the origins of the pandemic?

Thank you very much and I appreciate your response,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim Banks". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Rep. Jim Banks (IN-03)

Chairman, Republican Study Committee

Cc: Janet Yellin, Secretary of the Treasury