

Opening Statement of Chairman Rand Paul
July 29, 2026

One million Americans died from COVID 19. Some estimate as many as 15 million people died worldwide from COVID 19. Publicly Anthony Fauci promoted the theory that the virus arose naturally while privately he was well aware of a mountain of evidence suggesting the virus originated in a lab.

The American people deserve answers. The American people deserve to know why dangerous research was funded by NIAID in a totalitarian country, in a lab that lacked acceptable safety standards.

The decision to fund dangerous, gain-of-function research in Wuhan, China will likely go down in history as perhaps one of the worst public health decisions.

Frankly, the American people deserve an apology. I hope today, Dr. Fauci, you will come clean, admit that it was a mistake to fund dangerous research in China, admit that the risks of this dangerous research exceeded any possible benefits. Ask forgiveness and pledge to help our government devise safeguards so a man-made pandemic never happens again.

Instead of an apology, you have for years avoided responsibility.

Regarding the lockdowns, you argue that you did not personally issue every lockdown order, close every school, or impose every mandate. But officials across the country invoked your authority to justify those decisions, and you presented your recommendations not as judgments open to debate, but as the dictates of science itself.

Your own words demonstrate that you understood the influence you exercised. On March 14, 2020, you wrote that the task-force recommendations were “driven by me and Deb and CDC.” The next day, you wrote that you had “convinced” Mayor Bill de Blasio to close New York City’s schools. That same night, Governor Gavin Newsom’s chief of staff told you that the Governor had decided to close California’s schools, bars, and restaurants after watching you on television.

Presidents, governors, mayors, school boards, corporations, and Congress all bear responsibility for the decisions they made. The COVID lockdown, however, could never have been inflicted without you aiding and abetting the crime.

Children lost years of education. Small businesses built over a lifetime disappeared. Patients delayed cancer screenings and other medical care. Families were separated from dying relatives. Workers were ordered to accept a medical procedure or lose their jobs. Worship, assembly, employment, education, and travel were restricted in the name of science.

While you did not impose every restriction, you used your public authority to justify them.

While you concluded publicly that COVID occurred naturally, your private record tells a very different story.

In early 2020, your hand-picked virologists warned that the virus appeared to have been manipulated in a lab. In a conference call concerning the origin of the virus, all but two participants believed deliberate insertion was possible.

Your concern was not merely theoretical. That same weekend, you led an urgent effort to determine whether your own agency had funded research related to the experiments now under suspicion.

Hours later, your assistant reported that the Wuhan experiments had been reviewed and approved by NIH.

Those were not the actions of officials who believed a research-related origin was an absurd conspiracy theory. They were the actions of officials urgently trying to determine whether their agency's funding was connected to the research under discussion.

You could not hide that your agency had funded the Wuhan-research. Or your long history of defending gain-of-function research. The only alternative left was to argue that COVID-19 did not originate in the Wuhan lab.

You were not a detached observer. You had an institutional interest in the public believing that federally funded research had nothing to do with the pandemic.

The authors of "The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2" privately had serious doubts about a natural origin. Within days, they flipped and wrote in Proximal Origin that the virus was almost certainly not a laboratory construct. That paper was then used by the government and the media to discredit Americans who were asking the same questions that you and the authors had asked privately.

You cited Proximal Origin from the White House podium. You held it out as evidence that the virus could not have been engineered. But you did not disclose your role in the discussions that preceded it. You did not disclose the authors' original concerns. You did not disclose that you had immediately investigated whether NIAID funding might be connected to the research at issue.

You did not tell the American people the full story.

Newly released private messages indicate that the doubts did not disappear after publication. The authors, privately continued to assign a meaningful probability to a laboratory origin. Some of

the same scientists discussed avoiding email and carefully managing communications that might eventually be obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

The pattern is straightforward: private alarm, an immediate inquiry into NIAID's possible exposure, a rapid public declaration of certainty, continued private doubt, and years of resistance to disclosure.

The question is why? The only logical answer is that your primary concern was avoiding culpability. Your primary concern was hiding the fact that you had approved the funding for this dangerous research.

Your support of gain-of-function research is extensive and longstanding. In 2011, your agency funded Ron Fouchier's laboratory when it mutated H5N1 avian influenza until it could spread through the air between ferrets. The federal government's own biosecurity board recommended withholding methodological details because of the danger the research posed. You sided with Fouchier and argued that the benefits of publishing the research "far outweigh" the risks.

You defended the H5N1 transmissibility experiments as critical research. You wrote that even if a scientist became infected and triggered a pandemic, the benefits of gain-of-function experiments outweighed the risk.

In 2014, NIAID began funding the Wuhan bat-coronavirus work. In 2015, Ralph Baric and Shi Zhengli published NIAID-supported research combining a bat-coronavirus spike protein with a SARS backbone. The resulting virus could infect human-airway cells: it gained transmissibility. It gained function.

In 2018, EcoHealth, Baric, Shi, and their collaborators submitted the DEFUSE proposal which involved the insertion of a furin cleavage site into a coronavirus. DARPA rejected it as too dangerous.

When COVID-19 was sequenced, though, scientists discovered it had a novel furin cleavage site just as had been proposed in the DEFUSE project.

This was either an extraordinary coincidence or a smoking gun, evidence that the Chinese had created COVID-19. It made the laboratory-origin question more legitimate. And it made your categorical public denials indefensible.

On May 11, 2021, you told the Senate: "The NIH has not ever and does not now fund gain-of-function research in the Wuhan Institute of Virology."

When I gave you the opportunity to reconsider that statement, you responded that you had "never lied before the Congress."

We were then told that only the government's narrowest regulatory definition counted. But the American people were not asking for a semantics debate. They wanted to know whether their money funded experiments in Wuhan that made bat coronaviruses better able to infect mammals.

The answer is yes.

They wanted to know whether NIAID adequately supervised that work.

The answer is no.

When you defended this research, you described its benefits in the broadest possible terms. When Congress demanded accountability, you hid behind the narrowest possible definition.

You cannot have it both ways.

Your conduct concerning federal records raises further questions. It is a crime to destroy federal records, yet our investigation reveals your assistant diligently reporting that she deleted tons of emails.

In 2024, you testified that you did not delete federal records. Who is telling the truth you or your assistant?

This Committee has obtained repeated instructions from you telling federal officials to delete communications. On February 2, 2020—one day after the origins call—you told Francis Collins: "Please delete this e-mail after you read it."

This Committee asked for your voluntary cooperation. Your appearance today had to be compelled by subpoena. President Biden issued you a sweeping pardon extending back to 2014. The same pardon he gave his son Hunter.

A pardon may protect a person from criminal prosecution. It does not rewrite history. It does not erase documents. It does not convert a misleading statement into a truthful one. And it does not prevent Congress from establishing what happened.

There will be another pandemic. There will be another crisis. And there will again be officials who insist that uncertainty must be hidden for the public's own good. They will demand obedience. They will invoke science as though it were a commandment. They will argue that government officials cannot be questioned because questioning them would undermine public trust.

They have it backward.

It is secrecy that destroys trust. It is arrogance that destroys trust. It is censorship that destroys trust. And it is the refusal to admit error that destroys trust.

That loss of trust may be your most damaging legacy.

Trust cannot be ordered. It has to be earned.

No scientist is above scrutiny. No government official is beyond accountability. And no public servant has the right to treat the suffering of millions of Americans as a footnote to his preferred version of history.