

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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April 9, 2024

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Secretary Vilsack:

I write to request additional information regarding a 2018 grant proposal led by EcoHealth Alliance known as the DEFUSE project. The grant proposal was submitted to the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) under the PREventing Emerging Pathogenic Threats (PREEMPT) program.

On January 30, 2018, DARPA hosted a “PREEMPT Proposers Day” meeting where potential applicants presented proposals to representatives of numerous federal agencies. During this event, Peter Daszak of EcoHealth Alliance pitched the DEFUSE project which sought federal funds to “manipulate known viruses with spike proteins of novel viral strains.” EcoHealth Alliance’s listed partners for the DEFUSE project were University of North Carolina Baric Lab, Columbia University Lipkin Lab, NIH Rocky Mountain Lab, Wuhan Institute of Virology, and Duke-NUS.

I recently obtained documents indicating the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) was one of several federal agencies that participated in the PREEMPT Proposers Day on January 30, 2018, where the DEFUSE project was presented. Even though at least 15 federal agencies had knowledge of DEFUSE in 2018, its existence was not revealed to the public until 2021. Moreover, the involvement of NIH Rocky Mountain Lab in the initial DEFUSE proposal has never been previously disclosed. USDA’s failure to disclose its awareness of the risky research proposed in the DEFUSE project in the last six years raises serious concerns.

For this reason, I respectfully request you provide my office the following information no later than 5:00PM on April 23rd, 2024:

1. All records relating to the PREEMPT Program including, but not limited to, records related to the January 30, 2018, PREEMPT Proposers Day and any subsequent meetings/events;

2. The names and titles of the individuals who attended the January 30, 2018, PREEMPT Proposers Day on behalf of USDA;
3. All records relating to the DEFUSE project including, but not limited to, any subsequent related proposal;
4. All communications relating to the PREEMPT program;
5. All communications relating to the DEFUSE project including, but not limited to, any subsequent related proposal;
6. A list of all DARPA Proposers Day events related to infectious disease where the USDA was represented from 2016 to present.

I appreciate your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rand Paul". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rand Paul, M.D.
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs