

CHARLES E. GRASSLEY, IOWA, CHAIRMAN

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ORRIN G. HATCH, UTAH | DIANNE FEINSTEIN, CALIFORNIA |
| LINDSEY O. GRAHAM, SOUTH CAROLINA | PATRICK J. LEAHY, VERMONT |
| JOHN CORNYN, TEXAS | RICHARD J. DURBIN, ILLINOIS |
| MICHAEL S. LEE, UTAH | SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, RHODE ISLAND |
| TED CRUZ, TEXAS | AMY KLOBUCHAR, MINNESOTA |
| BEN SASSE, NEBRASKA | CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, DELAWARE |
| JEFF FLAKE, ARIZONA | RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, CONNECTICUT |
| MIKE CRAPO, IDAHO | MAZIE HIRONO, HAWAII |
| THOM TILLIS, NORTH CAROLINA | CORY A. BOOKER, NEW JERSEY |
| JOHN KENNEDY, LOUISIANA | KAMALA D. HARRIS, CALIFORNIA |

KOLAN L. DAVIS, *Chief Counsel and Staff Director*
JENNIFER DUCK, *Democratic Chief Counsel and Staff Director*

United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

May 16, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Dr. Francis Collins
Director
National Institutes of Health

Dear Dr. Collins:

According to a New York Times article published on March 17, 2018, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) is currently conducting a 10 year governmental trial focused on the effects of daily alcohol consumption, and this study is in large part funded by alcohol companies including Anheuser Busch InBev and Heineken. The article detailed disturbing allegations that the institute worked aggressively to secure funding from the alcohol industry and that documents acquired from the New York Times “show that the institute waged a vigorous campaign to court the alcohol industry, paying for scientists to travel to meetings with executives, where they gave talks strongly suggesting that the study’s results would endorse moderate drinking as healthy” well in advance of the study having even begun.¹ The article also states that “the fundraising may have violated [National Institutes of Health] policy, which prohibits employees from soliciting or suggesting donations, funds or other resources intended to support activities.”² At the very least, the appearance of a conflict of interest has made the scientific integrity of the trial suspect.

I was pleased to see in a subsequent New York Times article published on March 20, 2018, that the NIH will be conducting an investigation to determine whether health officials violated federal policy with these fundraising efforts.³ Given the ongoing investigation that your office is conducting, and the concerning nature of the allegations against the NIAAA, I request that your office provide a briefing to my staff, as well as provide written responses to the following questions no later than May 30, 2018:

¹ Roni Caryn Rabin, *Federal Agency Courted Alcohol Industry to Fund Study on Benefits of Moderate Drinking* (March 17, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/health/nih-alcohol-study-liquor-industry.html>

² *Id.*

³ Roni Caryn Rabin, *N.I.H. to Investigate Outreach to Alcohol Companies* (March 20, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/20/health/mukamal-alcohol-nih-funding.html>

1. What are the current findings of the investigation into the solicitation of donations?
2. Are the scientists leading the study the same people who conducted the fundraising efforts?
3. If the fundraising efforts did violate federal policy, what will be done with the ongoing clinical trial?
4. How does the NIAAA plan to ensure scientific integrity and independence of the trial, in the face of such widespread public controversy?

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to these matters. Should you have any questions, please contact Josh Flynn-Brown of my Judiciary Committee staff at (202) 224-5225.

Sincerely,

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

Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary