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**United States Senate**

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

May 14, 2021

**VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION**

Antony Blinken  
Secretary  
United States Department of State

Dear Secretary Blinken:

As a result of Operation Warp Speed, the United States is ahead of most of the world in the development and distribution of safe and effective vaccines for COVID-19. We now have a tremendous opportunity to bring our success to other countries in particular need of effective vaccines in a way that maximizes global impact and is aligned with our national interests. The Biden administration has made the decision to join COVAX, a global collaborative effort designed to accelerate the development of COVID-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines, co-led by CEPI, Gavi, and the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>1</sup> On February 18, 2021, the White House released a statement regarding the U.S.'s commitment to not only provide funding to, but a commitment to assume a leadership role in "galvanizing further global contributions to COVAX. . ."<sup>2</sup> On May 7, 2021, the WHO granted emergency use authorization for the Chinese-made Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine.<sup>3</sup> It's currently unclear why WHO made the decision to streamline Sinopharm's vaccine, or whether the U.S. had any input or advanced warning of WHO's decision to approve a seemingly ineffective vaccine for immediate use.

This decision by WHO to grant the emergency use authorization raises the question how WHO, despite the reported ineffectiveness of Sinopharm's COVID-19 vaccine, came to the decision to grant this emergency use.<sup>4</sup> I am concerned that while the U.S. may be "galvanizing"

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<sup>1</sup> See Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance, What is COVAX?, <https://www.gavi.org/covax-facility#what>; World Health Organization, Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax>.

<sup>2</sup> Press Release, Office of the White House, Fact Sheet: President Biden to Take Action on Global Health through Support of COVAX and Calling for Health Security Financing (Feb. 18, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/18/fact-sheet-president-biden-to-take-action-on-global-health-through-support-of-covax-and-calling-for-health-security-financing/>.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Taylor, *WHO grants emergency use authorization for Chinese-made Sinopharm coronavirus vaccine*, THE WASHINGTON POST (May 7, 2021), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/07/who-sinopharm-emergency-use/>.

<sup>4</sup> See Gerry Shih, *Effectiveness of Chinese vaccines 'not high' and needs improvement*, top health official says, THE WASHINGTON POST (Apr. 11, 2021), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/china-vaccine-efficacy-not-high-gao/2021/04/11/dafe3ab6-9a8f-11eb-8f0a-3384cf4fb399\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-vaccine-efficacy-not-high-gao/2021/04/11/dafe3ab6-9a8f-11eb-8f0a-3384cf4fb399_story.html); Daily Chart, *In clinical and real world trials, China's Sinovac underperforms*, THE ECONOMIST (Apr. 15, 2021), <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/04/15/in-clinical-and-real-world-trials-chinas-sinovac-underperforms>.

new donor efforts to procure COVAX facilities, it may not be “galvanizing” as zealously to protect the best interests of the United States and our allies with respect to building coalitions designed to not just diminish, but eliminate Chinese influence on the international stage, and more importantly, aid in global efforts to combat COVID-19 with safe and effective vaccines.

Earlier this year, I wrote to President Biden expressing concerns about how the U.S. was ceding leadership opportunities by not keeping U.S. Executive Directors at several international financial institutions, solely because they were appointed by former President Trump, and how a lack of continuity at international institutions was a recipe for Chinese influence to fill the vacuum of leadership voluntarily vacated by President Biden’s decisions.<sup>5</sup> WHO’s May 7, 2021, decision is a perfect example of America’s seemingly diminishing role and influence within international bodies. With President Biden reinstating U.S. contributions to WHO, the U.S. is, by far, WHO’s largest donor, despite WHO’s mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic at its onset and apparent ongoing deference to Chinese influence.<sup>6</sup>

On April 9, 2020, I wrote to the World Health Organization expressing deep concerns about potential Chinese influence on WHO’s decision-making processes.<sup>7</sup> In that letter, I asked several questions – which remain unanswered – surrounding WHO’s initial messaging on the spread of COVID-19, and whether WHO was acting on independently verifiable information, or if WHO acted on information provided from the Chinese Communist Party. As I am sure you are aware, in April 2020, both WHO and the United States were racing against the clock to determine COVID-19’s impact on the health of not only U.S. citizens, but the global population at large. WHO continued to backtrack or even reverse course on several of its initial messages about how it believed COVID-19 spread as well as the veracity of the data it was reporting out of China.

On April 15, 2021, Avril Haines, the Director of National Intelligence, testified before the House Intelligence Committee that U.S. intelligence has seen “indications that China is trying to influence the World Health Organization’s efforts” with respect to WHO’s assessment about the origins of the coronavirus.<sup>8</sup> This was not a surprise to me, as I raised these very concerns, along with others, in my letter from April of the previous year. It is no surprise that the Chinese Communist Party has continued to not only seek to use COVID-19 as a method of asserting influence on the global stage, but that it is actively trying to cover its tracks with respect to just how bad the COVID-19 outbreak was in China. It is unclear just how many lives were lost in China because of inaccurate data that was continually fed to global partners and then

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<sup>5</sup> Ranking Member Charles E. Grassley, Sen. Comm. on the Judiciary, to President Joseph R. Biden, The White House (March 10, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> KFF, The U.S. Government and the World Health Organization, Key Facts, <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/fact-sheet/the-u-s-government-and-the-world-health-organization/#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20including%20assessed%20and,contributions%2C%20the%20maximum%20allowed%20rate>.

<sup>7</sup> Chairman Charles E. Grassley, U.S. Senate Comm. on Fin., to Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, World Health Organization (Apr. 9, 2020), <https://www.finance.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2020-04-09%20CEG%20letter%20to%20WHO.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Chuck Ross, *US Intel Chief: ‘Indications’ That China Is Attempting To Influence World Health Organization*, THE DAILY CALLER (Apr. 15, 2021), <https://dailycaller.com/2021/04/15/avril-haines-china-world-health-organization/>.

parroted, without question, by global media outlets. China is no friend to anyone on the world stage, and it remains its goal to establish dominance as a global superpower by any means.

Further, it appears that China is attempting to insert itself into multiple countries experiencing vaccine shortages around the globe.<sup>9</sup> Because of India's resurgence of COVID-19 cases, it has begun to limit exportation of its vaccine supply, paving the way for China to offer its supply of ineffective vaccines to even more countries in need. To make matters worse, China's Sinopharm vaccine is reportedly ineffective and inconsistent in its ability to properly vaccinate people.<sup>10</sup> Despite this ineffectiveness, China continues to push its vaccine in an effort to entice and secure deeper diplomatic relationships with various countries in need – an obvious effort to gain influence and usurp the United States on the world stage. In fact, it's been reported that China is seeking to use its vaccine supply to coerce in-need countries to support China's position on Taiwan.<sup>11</sup> China's effort to extort in-need countries in an effort to boost its position on the world stage is reprehensible and rightfully condemned.<sup>12</sup> On May 11, 2021, *The Washington Post* published an article in which the newly appointed head of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Samantha Power, was quoted as saying that "the biggest gains in influence will come by demonstrating its ability to deliver in many countries' hour of greatest need."<sup>13</sup> The U.S. must heed this advice, and restore its influence on the world stage. We cannot allow a foreign adversary to fill a void for those in need, giving a false sense of protection, when we have plentiful access to vaccines that have been proven effective.

To that end, I respectfully request that you provide answers to the following questions, no later than May 28, 2021.

1. To what extent was the United States consulted in WHO's decision to grant emergency use authorization to Chinese-made Sinopharm?
2. Does the Department of State have concerns regarding WHO's decision to grant emergency use authorization to a Chinese-made COVID-19 vaccine given

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<sup>9</sup> Arun Devnath, *China Vows to Step In as India Curbs Vaccine Supply to Neighbors*, BLOOMBERG (Apr. 27, 2021), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-04-27/china-vows-to-step-in-as-india-curbs-vaccine-supply-to-neighbors>.

<sup>10</sup> See Gerry Shih, *Effectiveness of Chinese vaccines 'not high' and needs improvement, top health official says*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Apr. 11, 2021), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/china-vaccine-efficacy-not-high-gao/2021/04/11/dafe3ab6-9a8f-11eb-8f0a-3384cf4fb399\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-vaccine-efficacy-not-high-gao/2021/04/11/dafe3ab6-9a8f-11eb-8f0a-3384cf4fb399_story.html); Daily Chart, *In clinical and real world trials, China's Sinovac underperforms*, THE ECONOMIST (Apr. 15, 2021), <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/04/15/in-clinical-and-real-world-trials-chinas-sinovac-underperforms>.

<sup>11</sup> Reuters Staff, *Taiwan says China seeking political gain with Honduras vaccine move*, REUTERS (May 12, 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-says-china-seeking-political-gain-with-honduras-vaccine-move-2021-05-12/>.

<sup>12</sup> See Michael Martina, *U.S. says condemns political use of vaccines after China-Taiwan tussle*, REUTERS (May 14, 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-condemns-political-use-vaccines-after-china-taiwan-tussle-2021-05-13/>.

<sup>13</sup> Karen DeYoung, *Samantha Power wants to restore U.S. prestige by getting American-made vaccines 'into arms' around the world*, THE WASHINGTON POST (May 11, 2021), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/samantha-power-usaid-vaccine-diplomacy/2021/05/10/69fd20d2-af7c-11eb-b476-c3b287e52a01\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/samantha-power-usaid-vaccine-diplomacy/2021/05/10/69fd20d2-af7c-11eb-b476-c3b287e52a01_story.html).

China's repeated concealment of health data surrounding both COVID-19 and its new Sinopharm vaccine? If so, has the Department of State relayed these concerns to COVAX?

3. Has the U.S. analyzed the science and efficacy of the Chinese-made Sinopharm to be able to take a position on the vaccine? Does the Department of State believe the WHO's emergency use authorization of Sinopharm was sufficiently scientifically grounded?
4. What actions, if any, has the Department of State taken with respect to combating Chinese influence at the WHO, specifically regarding WHO's decision-making surrounding COVID-19, including the promotion of Sinopharm?

I remain extremely concerned that U.S. taxpayer money continues to be poured into international organizations that routinely and continually bend the knee to Chinese influence on the international stage. It is high time that this administration take a stand to combat Chinese influence in international organizations and to build coalitions designed to do the same.

Should you have questions, please contact Quinton Brady of my Committee staff at (202) 224-5225. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley

Ranking Member

Committee on the Judiciary