

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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April 14, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express our grave concerns about your decision this evening to immediately suspend U.S. funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) in the midst of the global coronavirus pandemic and we are stunned and embarrassed by the reasoning your Administration has offered for doing so.

While we may agree that the WHO has shortcomings that must be corrected, your attack on the global health organization can easily be seen as a deliberate but transparent effort to deflect responsibility for your own failures onto others. Meanwhile, your attempt to blame the WHO for trusting China reflects an astonishing level of hypocrisy given your own fawning and widely publicized praise of President Xi Jinping and his government for their handling of this crisis.

During your press conference this evening, you claimed that you are suspending U.S. funding to the WHO because it was overly reliant on representations from China relating to the scope and severity of the crisis. You stated: “The WHO willingly took China’s assurances at face value, and they took it just at face value and defended the actions of the Chinese government, even praising China for its so-called transparency.” You observed, “It would have been so easy to be truthful.”¹

Yet, you not only took China at face value, but you went further and repeatedly heaped praise on China and its President for their handling of the crisis in terms few other world leaders matched:

- On January 24, 2020, you tweeted: “China has been working very hard to contain the Coronavirus. The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and

¹ The White House, *Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in Press Briefing* (Apr. 14, 2020).

transparency. It will all work out well. In particular, on behalf of the American People, I want to thank President Xi!”²

- On February 7, 2020, you tweeted: “Just had a long and very good conversation by phone with President Xi of China. He is strong, sharp and powerfully focused on leading the counterattack on the Coronavirus. He feels they are doing very well, even building hospitals in a matter of only days. Nothing is easy, but he will be successful, especially as the weather starts to warm & the virus hopefully becomes weaker, and then gone. Great discipline is taking place in China, as President Xi strongly leads what will be a very successful operation. We are working closely with China to help!”³
- On February 13, 2020, when asked whether you think China had told the truth about the coronavirus, you stated: “Well, you never know. I think they want to put the best face on it. So you know, I mean, if somebody—if you were running it, you’d probably—you wouldn’t want to run out to the world and go crazy and start saying whatever it is because you don’t want to create a panic. But, no, I think they’ve handled it professionally and I think they’re extremely capable and I think President Xi is extremely capable and I hope that it’s going to be resolved.”⁴
- On February 23, 2020, you told reporters: “I think President Xi is working very, very hard. I spoke to him. He’s working very hard. I think he’s doing a very good job. It’s a big problem. But President Xi loves his country. He’s working very hard to solve the problem and he will solve the problem.”⁵
- On March 13, 2020, you stated: “We’ve been working very much with China. I’ve spoken, as you know, with President Xi. They went through hell, and their numbers are starting to look very good. They’re really—they’re really looking very good. We’re very happy about that. We are sharing data, yes. In fact, we’re sharing quite a bit of data, including the fact that some of our pharmaceutical companies are working over there right now with large groups of people.”⁶

The WHO plays a vital role in promoting global health security and identifying and responding to emerging infectious diseases, especially in developing countries that are

² Donald J. Trump, *Twitter* (Jan. 24, 2020) (online at twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1220818115354923009).

³ Donald J. Trump, *Twitter* (Feb. 7, 2020) (online at twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1225728755248828416).

⁴ *Geraldo in Cleveland*, WTAM 1100 (Feb. 13, 2020) (online at factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-interview-geraldo-rivera-february-13-2020).

⁵ The White House, *Remarks by President Trump Before Marine One Departure* (Feb. 23, 2020) (online at www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-marine-one-departure-83/).

⁶ The White House, *Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in Press Conference* (Mar. 13, 2020) (online at www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-conference-3/).

particularly susceptible to the coronavirus. Your own Secretary of Health and Human Services, Alex Azar, praised the WHO's "impressive legacy fighting diseases" and argued before the World Health Assembly that its contributions to global health have made us all "much safer from the perpetual threat of infectious diseases."⁷

Even though the WHO's medical and scientific experts were not admitted entry into China until mid-February, they established an Incident Management Support Team one day after learning about a "pneumonia of unknown cause" originating in Wuhan City on December 31, 2020.⁸

Ten days later, the WHO "issued a comprehensive package of technical guidance online with advice to all countries on how to detect, test and manage potential cases, based on what was known about the virus at the time."⁹ Their testing guidance was more expansive than your Administration's own criteria, which for weeks restricted testing to "only people who had recently traveled to China or had been in contact with someone who had the virus."¹⁰

Although you claimed that the WHO failed to accurately represent the seriousness of the coronavirus threat, the WHO declared the coronavirus a "Public Health Emergency of International Concern" on January 30, 2020.¹¹ In contrast, as late as March 9, 2020, you continued to downplay the coronavirus threat, tweeting:

So last year 37,000 Americans died from the common Flu. It averages between 27,000 and 70,000 per year. Nothing is shut down, life & the economy go on. At this moment there are 546 confirmed cases of CoronaVirus, with 22 deaths. Think about that!¹²

⁷ *Remarks to the Pan American Health Organization*, Department of Health and Human Services (Sept. 23, 2018) (online at www.hhs.gov/about/leadership/secretary/speeches/2018-speeches/remarks-to-the-pan-american-health-organization.html); *Plenary Statement 72nd World Health Assembly*, Department of Health and Human Services (May 20, 2019) (online at www.hhs.gov/about/leadership/secretary/speeches/2019-speeches/plenary-statement-72nd-world-health-assembly.html).

⁸ World Health Organization, *Pneumonia of Unknown Cause—China* (Jan. 5, 2020) (online at www.who.int/csr/don/05-january-2020-pneumonia-of-unknown-cause-china/en/); World Health Organization, *WHO Timeline—COVID-19* (Apr. 8, 2020) (online at www.who.int/news-room/detail/08-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19).

⁹ World Health Organization, *WHO Timeline—COVID-19* (Apr. 8, 2020) (online at www.who.int/news-room/detail/08-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19).

¹⁰ World Health Organization, *Surveillance Case Definitions for Human Infection with Novel Coronavirus (nCoV): Interim Guidance v1* (Jan. 11, 2020) (online at <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/330376/WHO-2019-nCoV-Surveillance-v2020.1-eng.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y>); *The Lost Month: How a Failure to Test Blinded the U.S. to COVID-19*, New York Times (Mar. 28, 2020) (online at www.nytimes.com/2020/03/28/us/testing-coronavirus-pandemic.html).

¹¹ World Health Organization, *Statement on the Second Meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee Regarding the Outbreak of Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)* (Jan. 30, 2020) (online at [www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-01-2020-statement-on-the-second-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-\(2005\)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)](http://www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-01-2020-statement-on-the-second-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov))).

¹² Donald J. Trump, *Twitter* (Mar. 9, 2020) (online at twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1237027356314869761).

The provision of U.S. assistance should be determined by science, facts, and the best interests of the American people—not politics.

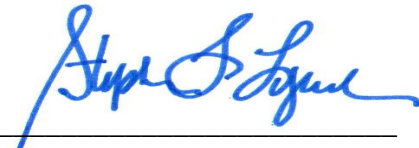
While the WHO may have made mistakes in its response to this crisis, it was certainly not alone, and it defies logic to withhold support from the WHO at this pivotal moment—at the height of a global pandemic—when promoting the health of nations around the world is essential to protecting our own population and rebuilding our own economy.

For these reasons, we urge you to immediately reverse your decision to withhold funding from the WHO and instead work with our allies and partners to combat the coronavirus and promote global public health.

Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Stephen F. Lynch
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security
Committee on Oversight and Reform