

# **ETSO Subcommittee Hearing: Revisiting Gain of Function Research: What the Pandemic Taught Us and Where Do We Go From Here?**

*August 3, 2022*

## **Opening Statement of Ranking Member Paul**

Good afternoon and welcome to each of our panelists. Thank you for joining us.

The purpose of this hearing by the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Spending Oversight is to discuss, as our name implies, the emerging threat posed by gain of function research.

We will hear from a panel of three witnesses, all of whom are extraordinarily accomplished experts in the scientific community. We are grateful for that work, and we are grateful to each of you for taking the time to appear here with us this afternoon.

Gain of function research is a controversial scientific research method involving the manipulation of pathogens to give them a new aspect or ability, such as making viruses more transmissible or dangerous to humans. Despite all we have learned about the potential risks of this particular method of research, this is the first congressional hearing on the subject.

Today we will discuss 1.) what gain of function research entails, 2.) how gain of function research is defined, and 3.) whether the definition of gain of function research is applied consistently by the Department of Health and Human Services P3CO review committee, which is responsible for evaluating the risks & benefits of such research.

We'll also discuss how this P3CO committee operates. The P3CO approves or denies projects from receiving federal funding based on whether the pathogen is considered to be a "credible source of a potential future human pandemic," and if "the potential risks as compared to the potential benefits to society are justified." In other words, a project is not gain of function if the review committee is unsure if a recombinant virus will create a future pandemic. Such broad criterion gives one sole committee, comprised of an unknown group of bureaucrats, the power to spend millions of taxpayer dollars on a single preemptive guess – with potentially devastating consequences.

Today we will also consider whether gain of function research was being performed at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. First, no one – not myself or anyone I'm aware of – argues that a recombinant super-virus that has been published in scientific journals is COVID-19 or a close relative. If COVID-19 leaked from the Wuhan lab, it would be a laboratory-created virus that the Wuhan scientists have not yet, and are unlikely ever, to reveal.

I maintain that the techniques that the NIH funded in Wuhan to create enhanced pathogens may also have been used to create COVID-19. The American people deserve to know how this pandemic started, and to know if the NIH funded research that may have caused this pandemic.

Gain of function research has the potential to unleash a global pandemic that threatens the lives of millions, yet this is only the first time the issue has been discussed in a Congressional committee. I am sure each member of this committee as well as the full Senate can agree that we need stronger government oversight of how our tax dollars are being used to finance experimenting with mutating fatal diseases with outstandingly high mortality rates.

Again, I thank each of our distinguished witnesses for being here today, and I thank Senator Hassan for working with me to convene this hearing.