

TODD YOUNG
INDIANA

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1407

COMMITTEES
FINANCE
FOREIGN RELATIONS
COMMERCE
SMALL BUSINESS

April 8, 2020

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director General
World Health Organization
20 Avenue Appia
1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland

Dear Director General Tedros:

I write as Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations' Subcommittee On Multilateral Institutions. In that capacity, I am responsible for oversight over America's participation in international organizations. My Subcommittee's oversight role is particularly relevant given President Trump's comments on April 7, 2020 that he will be examining the suspension of United States' assistance to the World Health Organization (WHO).

I acknowledge the profound challenge this global health crisis poses for your organization and its member states, and deeply appreciate the assistance the WHO technicians have provided to public health systems around the world in response to novel coronavirus. However, I am deeply concerned about the WHO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you are well aware, among the WHO's critical functions is "providing reliable information on risks and responses; ensuring that information is available to health actors; recognizing that the timely dissemination of accurate information about an event to the public is critical to managing outbreaks and emergencies."ⁱ Unfortunately, the WHO failed to carry out this critical function. I am now left with deep skepticism about the WHO's role in the global response to COVID-19, and fear that China's influence in the organization has had overwhelming and dangerous consequences.

From the earliest stages, the leadership of the Chinese government sought to hide the truth of the disease from international observers and its own people. In response to this obfuscation, your organization chose to not condemn and push for greater access, but rather to congratulate China, stating, "Preliminary identification of a novel virus in a short period of time is a notable achievement and demonstrates China's increased capacity to manage new outbreaks." This statement was not accompanied by *any* recommendations regarding restrictions to travel.

On January 14, 2020, the WHO's official Twitter account posted the following: "Preliminary investigations conducted by the Chinese authorities have found no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of the novel coronavirus (2019-nCov) identified in Wuhan, China." The population data of confirmed cases available at the time, and the experience of cities like New York and Milan show this to be a blatant falsehood by the Chinese government. Tragically, it was credulously accepted and amplified by the WHO.

Hindsight is not a factor in this situation either. It is now abundantly clear that other states than China were active and forthcoming about the real dangers of this novel coronavirus. Taiwan made repeated efforts to inform the WHO about the highly transmittable nature of COVID-19, and was repeatedly rebuffed; in spite of its geographical proximity and significant transportation links to China and its early, proactive response to the virus, Taiwan was not permitted to participate in the now fateful January 22 meeting of the WHO in which the decision to declare a global health emergency was delayed. As you know, in the early stages of any disaster, hours and days are of the utmost importance and no place for politics. Nonetheless, a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) was not declared for another *eight days*, on January 30.

Finally, the severe deficiencies in the World Health Organization's efforts to discover real, verifiable data about the number and nature of the China's COVID-19 cases continues to affect the global fight against this disease. Local, regional, and national public health systems around the world are working against the clock to better understand COVID-19. Their efforts would be greatly helped if access to data from the diseases early stages would be accurate acquired and disseminated. The Chinese government's systematic failure, a failure verified by our intelligence community, to accurately report the number of cases is damaging our epidemiological knowledge of COVID-19.

Rather than publicly and forcefully combat this obstruction, the WHO has assisted. Unfortunately, this pattern rises even to the leadership of the organization. Even as little information was exiting China, and much of what did get out was contrary to the government's claims, you praised the Chinese government for its transparency in its response. Additionally, after Chinese authorities implausibly claimed on March 19 that no new cases of COVID-19 had been detected, you publicly praised China for this "amazing achievement." These comments have been repeated tirelessly by Chinese individuals responsible for disinformation.

I appreciate the immense pressure the Chinese government places on leaders of international organizations. However, accuracy and effort will go a long way in our fight against COVID-19, and this is most necessary at the WHO. As the largest single contributor to the World Health Organization's budget, American taxpayers deserve to know the truth about the WHO's response to COVID-19, so that the world may learn from its mistakes.

Therefore, as the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Multilateral Institutions, I will be convening a Subcommittee hearing once it is safe to meet to examine the WHO's response to novel coronavirus, examine questions about how American taxpayers will be

funding this organization in the future, and will be inviting you to attend as a witness before the panel. A formal hearing notice and invitation will be forthcoming at a later date.

Sincerely,



Todd Young
United States Senator

ⁱ <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/the-world-health-organization-and-pandemic-protection-in-a-globalized-world-062017>