

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927

Minority (202) 225-3641

April 22, 2020

The Honorable Russell T. Vought
Acting Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Acting Director Vought:

We write to express serious concerns about President Trump's decision to suspend funding for the World Health Organization (WHO), an agency of the United Nations that coordinates international public health work and a key ally of the United States and countries around the world in the fight against the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). In addition to undermining congressional authority, the President's unilateral decision to halt funding for WHO during the most severe public health crisis in a century is dangerous and irresponsible.¹ It is also a blatant attempt to scapegoat WHO for the Trump Administration's own failures in its response to the global pandemic.

Since its founding in 1948, WHO has been a critical partner in the federal government's efforts to promote public health and protect the world from major health threats.² As the world confronts the COVID-19 pandemic, WHO is serving as a central coordinating entity, bringing together public health experts from around the world to identify and accelerate priority research and response efforts.³ Additionally, WHO has provided nearly 1.5 million COVID-19 tests to 120 countries as of March 16, 2020,⁴ and it has shipped nearly 2 million items of personal

¹ See American Medical Association, *AMA Statement on Halting World Health Organization Funding* (Apr. 14, 2020).

² World Health Organization, *History of WHO* (accessed Apr. 21, 2020) (www.who.int/about/who-we-are/history); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *CDC Works 24/7 Around the World to Keep Americans Healthy, Safe, and Secure* (accessed Apr. 21, 2020) (www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/partnerships.htm).

³ World Health Organization, *World Experts and Funders Set Priorities for COVID-19 Research* (Feb. 12, 2020).

⁴ Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Ph.D., *WHO Director General's Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19* (Mar. 16, 2020).

protective equipment (PPE) to 74 countries.⁵ Just last week, the Director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recognized WHO as a “longstanding partner for CDC” in the fight against “health crises all around the world,” including the current efforts to combat COVID-19.⁶ Until recently, President Trump had also commended this partnership, tweeting on February 24, 2020, that “CDC & World Health have been working hard and very smart” in response to the coronavirus.⁷

As criticism of the Trump Administration’s COVID-19 response mounted, however, the President changed his approach. Earlier this month, the President began deflecting blame for the shortcomings in his Administration’s COVID-19 response toward WHO—labeling it as “very China centric” and criticizing its coronavirus guidance as “faulty.”⁸ On April 14, 2020, President Trump announced he was suspending U.S. funding for WHO while his Administration conducted a “review” of WHO’s purportedly mismanaged global response to COVID-19.⁹ The President has since continued his attacks against WHO, suggesting its guidance had “failed” to control the spread of COVID-19¹⁰ and alleging that WHO had engaged in a “cover up for China.”¹¹

There is no justification for suspending funding for WHO in the midst of a pandemic. In fact, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has determined that the President’s decision is “not in U.S. interests,”¹² and the American Medical Association has called the President’s decision “a dangerous move at a precarious moment for the world.”¹³ Given the unprecedented public health challenges we are currently facing, the Trump Administration must explain how its decision to halt funding of WHO at this particular moment furthers U.S. public health interests.

⁵ *WHO: The Chronic, Global Shortage of PPE ‘Is One of the Most Urgent Threats to Our Collective Ability to Save Lives’*, Business Insider (Mar. 27, 2020).

⁶ *CDC Director: WHO Remains ‘A Great Partner for Us’ Despite Trump’s Funding Cuts*, Politico (Apr. 15, 2020).

⁷ Tweet from President Donald J. Trump (Feb. 24, 2020).

⁸ *Trump Announces, Then Reverses, Freeze on Funding for World Health Organization*, Politico (Apr. 7, 2020).

⁹ *Criticized for Pandemic Response, Trump Tries Shifting Blame to the W.H.O.*, New York Times (Apr. 14, 2020).

¹⁰ Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in Press Briefing (Apr. 15, 2020).

¹¹ Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in Press Briefing (Apr. 20, 2020).

¹² *US Chamber Criticizes Trump Decision on WHO*, The Hill (Apr. 15, 2020).

¹³ American Medical Association, *AMA Statement on Halting World Health Organization Funding* (Apr. 14, 2020).

Given these concerns, to better understand the process by which the Administration decided to suspend U.S. funding for WHO and to assess the potential public health impact of the President's decision, please provide the following no later than May 6, 2020:

1. Were key U.S. public health agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), National Institutes of Health, CDC, or Department of State, consulted prior to making the decision to suspend WHO funding? If so, please describe this consultation process and identify whether each agency consulted by the White House agreed with the President's decision. Please also provide a list of any members of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, HHS officials, or credentialed public health experts who were consulted by the White House prior to the President's decision to suspend WHO funding and the content of their recommendations.
2. A complete description of the legal authority pursuant to which the Administration intends to execute the WHO funding suspension.
3. A complete description of when the WHO funding suspension took or will take effect, and the amount of funding to be withheld as a result of the suspension.
4. Copies of any assessments conducted regarding the potential impact of the WHO funding suspension on both the global and U.S. responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the implications for longstanding relationships and coordination between WHO and U.S. agencies.
5. The Administration's policy rationale for instituting the WHO funding suspension during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, including how the decision and its timing are necessary to achieve the Administration's "reopening" plan goals.
6. A complete description of the process by which the Administration will conduct its review of WHO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including which federal departments, agencies, or offices will be involved; whether any contract consultants or non-governmental entities will be involved and, if so, whom; the criteria for assessment; and who will make final decisions based on the review's findings and recommendations.

The Honorable Russell T. Vought

April 22, 2020

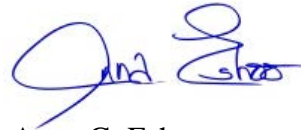
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Thank you for your attention to this timely matter. For questions regarding these requests, please contact Peter Rechter and Kevin Barstow of the Committee Staff at (202) 225-2927.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman



Anna G. Eshoo
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Health



Diana DeGette
Chair
Subcommittee on Oversight
and Investigations