

White House replaces government COVID website with one promoting the Wuhan Lab Leak conspiracy

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On April 18, 2025, the Trump administration replaced the federal COVID-19 resource hub, COVID.gov, with a single-page platform titled, “Lab Leak: The True Origins of COVID-19.” The site erased critical public health resources—vaccine guidance, testing protocols, and Long COVID support. It replaced them with the anti-China, anti-science narrative developed by the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, the 21st century equivalent of the notorious House Un-American Activities Committee, which spearheaded the McCarthyite anticommunist witch-hunting of the 1950s.

The new site is dominated by a banner showing Donald Trump flanked by the words “Lab” and “Leak,” in a form that would seem cartoonish if not so sinister. It puts the full weight of the fascist president behind two equally bogus allegations: that the Chinese government deliberately created the SARS-CoV-2 virus which causes COVID-19, and that US scientists helped in the creation of the deadly virus and then sought to cover up the Chinese role.

The political purpose is clear. The US government seeks to blame Beijing for the global pandemic which has taken 30 million lives, thus providing a pretext for US economic and military warfare against China. And those scientists who played leading roles in fighting the virus and advocating for necessary public health measures are to be targeted as Chinese agents, the “enemy within.”

The taking down of the previous hub coincides with the abrupt shutdown of many other measures relating to COVID-19 and pandemic preparedness across the federal government. In effect, the Trump administration is carrying out a modern-day book-burning of scientific information, limited only by the efforts of scientists all around the world, who have been downloading and storing as much data as possible in anticipation of this deliberate attempt to replace science with blatant political propaganda.

Five lies about COVID

The new site promotes five long-discredited lies about COVID-19, the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and the origins of the pandemic. They read as follows:

- The virus possesses a biological characteristic that is not found in nature.
- Data shows that all COVID-19 cases stem from a single introduction into humans. This runs contrary to previous pandemics where there were multiple spillover events.
- Wuhan is home to China’s foremost SARS research lab, which has a

history of conducting gain-of-function research (gene altering and organism supercharging) at inadequate bio-safety levels.

- Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) researchers were sick with COVID-like symptoms in the fall of 2019, months before COVID-19 was discovered at the wet market.

- By nearly all measures of science, if there was evidence of a natural origin it would have already surfaced. But it hasn’t.

The *World Socialist Web Site* took up each of these claims when they appeared in the House subcommittee’s final report in December 2024. The WSWS has been at the forefront of warning of the dangers of the pandemic from its first emergence in January 2020, and has been an unparalleled resource for bringing together the work of principled scientists and the struggles of the international working class.

The new platform also perpetuates attacks on proven public health measures—such as masking, lockdowns, and social distancing—and vilifies prominent scientists like Dr. Peter Daszak, former CEO of EcoHealth Alliance, which conducted joint research at the Wuhan lab, and Dr. Anthony Fauci. These personal and political attacks aim to undermine trust in public health institutions, which have been handed over to anti-science quacks like Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and target scientists and clinicians who have dedicated their careers to research and evidence-based strategies to prevent pandemics and save lives.

Astoundingly, the site claims that in the past the federal government deliberately demonized alternative treatments, namely hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin, in an effort to “coerce and control” Americans’ health decisions. (Both drugs, which have legitimate uses but no effect on SARS-CoV-2, were promoted by Trump and his fascist associates). It also accused the World Health Organization (WHO) of capitulating to pressure from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and prioritizing China’s interests over its international obligations.

These are bald-faced lies, strung together in a chain of misinformation. Yet, this farcical and amateurishly designed webpage should not be dismissed outright. Its significance lies in the fact that such a bizarre, fascist, and disinformation-laden narrative now occupies a space on what was once the official U.S. government’s public health platform. It reads more like a reactionary blog post than a scientifically grounded source of information. It is an abject form of historical falsification.

In fact, since returning to office, the Trump administration has moved swiftly to erase the federal government’s role in tracking and responding to COVID-19. Now, by dismantling the COVID.gov public health site, gone are the resources that once guided Americans on where to find vaccines, tests, or treatments. Federal agencies were ordered to remove all COVID-related signage and guidance, and the CDC’s online information was either deleted or redirected, leaving the public without up-to-date, science-based advice as the virus continues to claim hundreds of lives

each week.

The administration's actions extend far beyond messaging. In March 2025, it withdrew \$11.4 billion in COVID-19 funding from state and local health agencies, ending support for testing, vaccination, and outreach programs, particularly those serving vulnerable communities. School vaccine mandates were effectively dismantled through an executive order that cut off federal funds to institutions requiring COVID-19 shots.

The administration also rescinded Biden-era executive orders on pandemic preparedness and shifted the official narrative to attack public health leaders and promote the lab leak theory. Public health experts warn that these sweeping changes leave the U.S. dangerously exposed to future COVID-19 surges and emerging variants, with the federal government now absent from the front lines of pandemic management. Even the CDC wastewater surveillance pages appear to have been tampered with, raising the possibility that the last major database that affords a glimpse of the ongoing COVID pandemic will be shut down.

The lab leak conspiracy theory, first promoted in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, served to deflect blame from the U.S. government's own public health failures. More broadly, it functioned as a tool to advance an aggressive foreign policy agenda against China.

The overhaul of the COVID website coincides with escalating U.S.-China trade tensions. Just days earlier, President Trump announced a dramatic increase in tariffs on Chinese imports, raising them to 145 percent, while at the same time pausing for 90 days the imposition of new tariffs on every other country in the world.

The tariff war is an expression, not of economic strength, but of the long-term decline of American capitalism. The United States faces a towering and "unsustainable" national debt—now exceeding \$36 trillion—and growing skepticism within international financial circles about the dollar's status as the global reserve currency. In such a climate of economic volatility and reactionary politics, the conditions are increasingly ripe for global military confrontation.

The administration has explicitly tied its aggressive trade policy to claims of China's responsibility for the pandemic, reframing COVID-19 as a "biosecurity failure" originating from "reckless labs" in Wuhan. In a press briefing, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt declared, "China's negligence cost American lives. Now, they'll pay."

The move fits squarely within a broader anti-China geopolitical strategy. A 2022 report by Air University warned of the high likelihood of a U.S.-China conflict, citing Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative and its militarization of the South China Sea. The report called for military preparedness during the 2025–2032 period. Echoing this alarm, in January 2023, four-star General Mike Minihan, head of the Air Force's Air Mobility Command, issued an internal memo predicting that war with China could break out as early as 2025. By weaponizing the lab leak theory, the current administration has effectively shifted attention away from its own failures in managing the pandemic, while simultaneously using it to justify economic decoupling, punitive tariffs, and expanded military investments—all with China in its crosshairs.

The origins of the "lab leak" lie

The lab leak theory first emerged in mid-January 2020, shortly after the novel coronavirus was identified as the cause of a wave of pneumonia-like illnesses overwhelming hospitals in Wuhan, China. The theory gained early traction on fringe platforms like 4Chan and Zero Hedge, which speculated that SARS-CoV-2 was either engineered or accidentally released from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV)—a facility known for its research on SARS-CoV-1, which caused a limited outbreak in

2002-2004, and other bat coronaviruses.

Its transformation into a globally coordinated conspiracy theory began with claims by Chinese virologist Dr. Li-Meng Yan, then affiliated with Hong Kong University (HKU). Her allegations were quickly amplified by Steve Bannon, former chief strategist to President Trump, and Miles Guo (Guo Wengui), a self-styled Chinese dissident and billionaire who fled to the U.S. in 2014. Guo, who cultivated close ties with the Trump administration, was convicted last year in a billion-dollar fraud scheme that targeted his online followers. Investigations have also revealed that Guo maintained deep connections with Republican political consultants, further underscoring the politicized machinery behind the lab leak narrative.

Although Dr. Li-Meng Yan's scientific work while in Hong Kong focused primarily on influenza vaccines, her deep mistrust of the Chinese Communist Party shaped her interpretation of early viral data. As noted by science writer Philip Markolin in his new book *Lab Leak Fever*, Yan viewed the genetic similarity—approximately 90 percent—between SARS-CoV-2 and two bat coronaviruses discovered by the Chinese military in 2018 in Zhoushan, Zhejiang Province, more than 1,000 kilometers from Wuhan, as more than a coincidence.

Steve Bannon and Miles Guo swiftly seized upon Yan's unverified suspicions and professional credentials to advance a narrative that SARS-CoV-2 was a bioweapon deliberately released upon the global population. They claimed: "The SARS-like coronavirus in Wuhan originated from a new type of coronavirus discovered and isolated from bats in Zhoushan by the Chinese military in 2018. The virus sequence shown in the picture can be found in the gene database of the National Institutes of Health (NIH's GenBank) and was submitted by the Institute of Military Medical Sciences of the Nanjing Military Region. The Zhoushan bat virus was intentionally altered through technological means into a new virus suitable for human transmission."

In April 2020, Dr. Li-Meng Yan was flown first-class to the United States, provided with financial support, coached on media appearances, and booked on right-wing platforms such as Tucker Carlson Tonight to promote the narrative that SARS-CoV-2 was artificially engineered. Despite co-authoring several preprint papers asserting the virus was "produced in a laboratory," scientific reviewers, including those from the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, dismissed the reports as "contradictory and inaccurate... not supporting their argument." Leading virologists went further, likening the work to junk science crafted to disseminate political propaganda.

Undeterred by widespread scientific rejection, Yan and her collaborators claimed that reputable journals were "censoring" evidence of engineered viruses, casting peer review itself as part of a global conspiracy to suppress the truth. These tactics—discrediting scientific consensus while portraying oneself as a persecuted whistleblower—have become the *sine qua non* of fascist conspiracy theorists such as those promoting distrust in vaccines and those claiming the World Trade Center was brought down by explosive charges, not airplanes.

From the "fringe" to the "mainstream"

This narrative was quickly seized upon by the political establishment. While Republicans were the most vocal proponents, Democrats, including President Biden, gave tacit endorsement to elements of the theory, effectively legitimizing it. That the U.S. intelligence community openly admitted it had no definitive evidence supporting a lab leak—and that its conclusions were based on "low confidence" assessments—did little to dampen support for the bogus theory in both capitalist parties.

The transition of the lab leak theory from fringe speculation to a fixture of official policy was orchestrated through a concerted campaign led by lawmakers and think tanks. Chief among them was Representative Brad Wenstrup's House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, which conducted a two-year series of hearings that resembled a show trial more than a scientific inquiry. Scientists such as Kristian Andersen, Robert Garry, Anthony Fauci, David Morens, and Peter Daszak were publicly vilified, interrogated, and accused of covering up the virus's origins—a modern-day inquisition thinly veiled as congressional oversight.

Despite the absence of any credible evidence supporting claims that COVID-19 resulted from an “accidental lab leak” or “gain-of-function” engineering, the Republican majority on the Select Subcommittee led by Wenstrup concluded its hearings by asserting that official U.S. policy should now rest on the premise that the virus “likely emerged from a lab accident.”

The Democrats, who had submitted their own version of the final draft offered their anemic objections by stating that both “theories, i.e., “lab leak” and natural origins, remained viable, a false premise to begin with. If they had any backbone and scientific integrity, the Democrats would have repudiated the entire proceeding, declaring it a show trial. However, they were fully in agreement with the political purpose of the hearings, regardless of their different spin on the facts.

This shift was bolstered by a coordinated blend of sensationalist media coverage and deliberate disinformation campaigns. Chief among the mainstream enablers was the *New York Times*, which repeatedly gave legitimacy to lab leak conspiracy theories through opinion pieces by figures like Alina Chan and Zeynep Tufekci. Meanwhile, ultra-right outlets such as the *Washington Times* and the British *Daily Mail* pumped out a relentless stream of unverified claims regarding biosafety breaches at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV). These stories often conflated the WIV's legitimate coronavirus research—conducted as part of global pandemic preparedness efforts—with baseless allegations of bioweapons development.

Fringe platforms continued to assist. Zero Hedge went so far as to dox Chinese scientists, placing them at risk of harassment and threats. The *Epoch Times*—closely linked to exiled billionaire and convicted fraudster Guo Wengui—framed the lab leak theory as evidence of a sweeping Chinese Communist Party cover-up. On social media, algorithms rewarded inflammatory content, allowing Guo's disinformation network alone to reach an estimated 143 million views in early 2020, according to the Digital Forensics Research Lab.

The major corporate media contributed to the erosion of public understanding by adopting a “both sides” framing—presenting the entirely unproven lab leak claims and the well-supported zoonotic spillover hypothesis as equally plausible. This false equivalency undermined trust in science and gave pseudoscientific claims a veneer of legitimacy.

The impact of this disinformation campaign is clear. A Quinnipiac University poll from March 2023 found that 64 percent of Americans believed COVID-19 originated from a laboratory leak—demonstrating just how deeply this narrative has taken root in public consciousness.

After Trump's return to power

A close examination of the Trump administration's assault on public health, science, and pandemic response reveals the central role played by the conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation, and its Project 2025 initiative. These entities have been instrumental in shaping media narratives, constructing the rhetorical scaffolding of the COVID-19 lab leak conspiracy, and pushing for sweeping political control over public

health institutions. A key pillar of Project 2025 is its call to consolidate all scientific and public health agencies under direct state authority—effectively subordinating independent research to political ideology.

In July 2024, Derrick Morgan, Executive Vice President of the Heritage Foundation, moved to formally codify the Wuhan lab leak theory, positioning China as the primary culprit behind the pandemic. In public statements, he catalogued the economic devastation and loss of life attributed to COVID-19 and laid out a blueprint for how the next U.S. administration should confront the Chinese government. This agenda was not limited to diplomatic measures including punitive economic actions and a reorientation of national security strategy grounded in the lab leak narrative. Morgan noted:

It's critical that the US take the leadership role and hold the Chinese Communist Party accountable for one of the most catastrophic cover-ups in human history. It has been nearly five years since the outbreak in Wuhan, China, and nothing has been done to hold China accountable. They believe they have gotten away with it. But, in action, it incentivizes the CCP to persist in secretive and aggressive and dangerous behavior. The commission has worked diligently over the last eight months to produce a report with actionable recommendations for the president and legislative branch of government to implement right now. This commission report brings today facts and a blueprint to begin.

What has been notably absent from most mainstream coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic is any sustained engagement with the actual science—the robust body of research conducted by virologists, epidemiologists, and investigators working to understand the origins of SARS-CoV-2. Instead, the voices of those who have dedicated their careers to studying coronaviruses have been overshadowed by political posturing and media sensationalism. Yet any serious analysis of the pandemic's origins must begin with the scientific evidence and require broad, international cooperation to prevent the next one.

Long before COVID-19 emerged, leading scientists such as Dr. Linfa Wang (Singapore), Dr. Peter Daszak (United States), and Dr. Shi Zhengli (China) were engaged in collaborative research on zoonotic spillovers in the aftermath of the 2002–2004 SARS outbreak, which infected over 8,000 people and killed more than 800 worldwide. Their work emphasized the crucial role of bats as viral reservoirs and warned of the increasing risks posed by human encroachment into wildlife habitats. In *Blame*, a recently released documentary by acclaimed filmmaker Christian Frei, Dr. Wang recounts how, as early as 2013, he predicted that another coronavirus pandemic would occur within a decade. Despite repeated warnings, government and institutional responses were limited and short-lived.

More recent scientific investigations continue to reinforce the natural spillover theory. A landmark 2024 *Cell* study analyzed over 800 environmental samples collected from the Huanan Seafood Market in Wuhan. The researchers found SARS-CoV-2 RNA in conjunction with raccoon dog DNA—strongly suggesting zoonotic transmission. The emergence of two distinct viral lineages, A and B, from separate spillover events, contradicts the hypothesis of a singular laboratory origin.

Molecular clock analyses conducted by researchers including Jonathan Pekar and Michael Worobey trace the most recent common ancestor of SARS-CoV-2 to November 2019—consistent with natural emergence rather than engineered release. Furthermore, the WHO's phase one investigation found no evidence that the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) possessed SARS-CoV-2 or any direct progenitor, prior to the

pandemic. A 2023 assessment by the U.S. intelligence community confirmed the absence of the virus in any lab prior to the outbreak and debunked claims about WIV lab workers falling ill with COVID-19-like symptoms, noting that the illnesses were neither unusual nor clinically diagnosed as COVID rather than flu. Additionally, antibody testing of Wuhan blood bank samples from 2019 showed no sign of prior SARS-CoV-2 circulation.

Taken together, this growing body of scientific evidence makes a compelling case for a natural origin of the virus—and underscores the urgency of placing science, not speculation, at the center of public discourse on pandemic preparedness.

Meanwhile, the EcoHealth Alliance has been forced to shut its doors after 55 years of vital work in ecological conservation and pandemic preparedness. Dr. Peter Daszak, its president, continues to receive hate mail and death threats. All EcoHealth’s NIH grants have been revoked, bringing critical research on bat coronaviruses to an abrupt halt. In China, Dr. Shi Zhengli—one of the world’s foremost coronavirus experts—has endured ongoing global suspicion and vilification. According to the FBI, anti-Asian hate crimes spiked dramatically as the pandemic unfolded, fueled in part by the rhetoric surrounding COVID-19’s origin.

With Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, co-author of the anti-science Great Barrington Declaration, now heading the NIH, policy has pivoted sharply: Chinese researchers face bans, and “national security” has been prioritized over scientific collaboration. Cross-border partnerships between US and Chinese scientists—once a cornerstone of global pandemic preparedness—have eroded. As a result, the world is arguably less prepared than ever to face the next viral threat.

The lab leak narrative’s rise marks the convergence of anti-science ideology and geopolitical reaction. By exploiting unverified claims, political figures like Trump and Brad Wenstrup and institutions like the Heritage Foundation have dismantled mechanisms for pandemic accountability, redirected vital resources away from public health infrastructure, and institutionalized distrust in scientific consensus.

The consequences are profound. As the U.S. escalates economic retaliation and scientists face growing hostility, the damage extends well beyond COVID-19. In silencing experts and rewriting the record, the lab leak campaign exposes a dangerous truth: when science becomes a casualty in political warfare, it is public health that suffers most.



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