

BACKGROUND MATERIALS

UNC-Chapel Hill Coronavirus Research

Prepared for a meeting with Dave Boliek, North Carolina State Auditor
George A. Howard, UNC Class of 1989

Purpose. This is a limited, public-source background packet. It is not offered as a finding of misconduct or as a request that the recipient accept any disputed COVID-19 origin hypothesis before reviewing the evidence and discussing the appropriate process.

Documents in this packet

- 1 HHS Notice of Suspension and Proposed Debarment of Ralph Baric, PhD** (combined pages 2-11)
An official federal document enclosing the Action Referral Memorandum. The suspension is described as effective; debarment is proposed and therefore should not be described as a final adjudication. The memorandum summarizes NIH concerns about gain-of-function representations, grant disclosures, requested data, and federal funding eligibility.
- 2 Statement for the Record by James Haslam and George A. Howard** (combined pages 12-21)
Submitted to the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs following its July 29, 2026 hearing. It distinguishes Haslam's hypothesis from the generic laboratory-leak theory, describes UNC's role, identifies limitations in the public evidence, and lists records and questions for investigation.

Public reading links

[Chapelboro viewpoint by Howard and Haslam \(Aug. 12, 2026\)](#)

A concise statement of the case for release and independent examination of UNC records.

[ProPublica: Near Misses at UNC Chapel Hill's High-Security Lab \(Aug. 17, 2020\)](#)

Independent reporting on potential exposures involving laboratory-created coronaviruses at UNC.

[Haslam and Jeffrey Sachs: Did Ralph Baric at UNC Create SARS-CoV-2? \(Mar. 24, 2026\)](#)

The authors' public argument and proposed chronology; it is an advocacy analysis, not an official finding.

Selected interviews with Jim Haslam

[Six Researchers, One Grant, and the Carolina Flu](#)

Howard and Haslam's post-hearing conversation concerning the DEFUSE proposal, the individuals Haslam identifies, UNC's public-record releases, and records that remain unavailable.

[450 Pages Detailing How COVID Was Made in a U.S. Lab](#)

A long-form interview in which Haslam explains the public-document chronology and his conclusions in his own words.

[COVID COVERUP? A Marine Found It Buried in a Classified Folder](#)

George Howard's nearly two-hour Cosmic Tusk interview with Haslam concerning the DEFUSE proposal, UNC, and the broader theory. The claims are the speakers' analysis, not official findings.

Suggested reading sequence. Begin with the HHS notice because it is the strongest official record in the packet. Then read the Senate statement for the broader chronology and the questions directed specifically to UNC. The linked articles and interviews provide local context, biosafety history, and Haslam's fuller hypothesis in his own words.

**VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL AND CERTIFIED MAIL-RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED**

Dr. Ralph Baric

Email: rbaric@email.unc.edu

Re: Notice of Suspension and Proposed Debarment of Ralph Baric, PhD

Dear Dr. Ralph Baric:

This is to notify you that, on behalf of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), I have suspended you and initiated proceedings to debar you from participating in Federal Government procurement and nonprocurement programs. This action is initiated pursuant to 2 C.F.R. § 180, which HHS adopted and gave regulatory effect to at 2 C.F.R. Subpart 376.10. Copies of the referenced regulations are enclosed for your information. Also enclosed is a copy of an Action Referral Memorandum (ARM), dated the same date as this Notice of Suspension and Proposed Debarment (Notice), which sets forth the basis for the suspension and proposed debarment. The information in the ARM indicates that you lack the present responsibility to participate in Federal procurement and nonprocurement programs.

The suspension and proposed debarment for Dr. Ralph Baric is based on information from the following: 1) an April 15, 2026, Referral of Information (ROI), from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Office of Extramural Research (OER), Office of Policy for Extramural Research Administration (OPERA), recommending that the HHS Suspension and Debarment Official (SDO) consider initiating suspension and debarment proceedings against Dr. Ralph Baric; 2) NIH Notice Number: NOT-OD-15-011, Funding Pause for Certain Types of Gain-of-Function Research Projects, issued on October 17, 2014,¹ and an October 17, 2014, U.S. Government Gain-of-Function Pause on Selected Research Involving Influenza, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Viruses dated October 17, 2014; 3) an October 21, 2014, Letter from the NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) regarding Grant Number 5U19AI107810-02; 4) Dr. Ralph Baric's Response to NIAID Gain of Function (GoF) Pause Letter for Grant Number 5U19AI17810-02, submitted to the NIH on January 20, 2015; 5) A *Nature Medicine* journal article, "A SARS-like cluster of circulating bat coronaviruses shows potential for human emergence," published online on November 9, 2015, with Dr. Ralph Baric as co-author;² 6) Summary of Wellcome Trust Grant # 203268/Z/16/Z, "Why do Norovirus pandemics occur and how can we control them?," funding period January 1, 2017 through October 30, 2023; 7) an April 7, 2025, Letter from the NIH to UNC Regarding Dr. Ralph Baric's Salary Restriction; 8) an April 18, 2025, Summary of Dr. Ralph Baric, prepared by the NIH Office of Extramural Research – Research Integrity (OER-RI); 9) a May 21, 2025,

¹ Available online at: www.grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/not-od-15-011.html.

² Available online at: www.nature.com/articles/nm.3985#change-history.

Letter from UNC to the NIH, providing notification to the NIH that Dr. Ralph Baric was on extended leave from UNC; 10) Executive Order 14292, “Improving the Safety and Security of Biological Research, issued on May 5, 2025;³ 11) NIH Notice Number: NOT-OD-25-112, Implementation Update: Improving the Safety and Security of Biological Research, issued on May 7, 2025;⁴ and 12) a December 11, 2025, Letter from the NIH to UNC, requesting that UNC and Dr. Ralph Baric provide data comparing SARS-CoV Urbani, SARS-CoV MA15 and SHC014-S MA15 in human airway epithelial (HAE) cultures, in order to understand whether the addition of the SHC014 spike to SARS-CoV MA15 enhanced virus titers in vitro.

As further explained in the ARM, the information from this record provides cause for the suspension under 2 C.F.R. § 180.700(b) and (c), and for the debarment cause provided in 2 C.F.R. § 180.800(d).

If you wish to contest this action, you, or a representative acting on your behalf, must either send or make arrangements to appear and present information and argument to me, the HHS SDO, within 30 days after you receive this Notice. *See* 2 C.F.R. §§ 180.725(b) and 180.820 (addressing when a Notice is considered to be received).

Any response contesting this suspension action may include any information and argument in opposition to the suspension that you would like considered by me, the HHS SDO, and should provide information responsive to 2 C.F.R. § 180.730(a)(1)-(4). Additional information about contesting the suspension is available at 2 C.F.R. Part 180, Subparts F and G, generally, and specifically, 2 C.F.R. § 180.720 *et seq.*

Any response contesting this proposed debarment action may include any information and argument in opposition to the suspension and proposed debarment that you would like to be considered by me, and should provide information responsive to 2 C.F.R. §§ 180.825(a)(1)(2). Additional information about contesting the proposed debarment is available at 2 C.F.R. § 180, Subparts G and H, generally, and specifically, 2 C.F.R. § 180.815, *et seq.*

Any response to this Notice should also include specific information that may raise a genuine dispute over facts material to the suspension and proposed debarment. A general denial is insufficient to raise a genuine dispute over facts material to the suspension and proposed debarment. If it is found that the information or argument submitted raises a genuine dispute over such material facts, fact-finding may be conducted to resolve the disputed facts. However, please note, actions based on conviction or civil judgment are not subject to dispute in this proceeding.

If you choose to designate a representative to respond on your behalf, please notify HHS Exclusion Inquiries at exclusioninquiries@hhs.gov, or in writing, of the identity of said representative. The designation should specifically state the names and addresses of all individuals or companies the designee has the authority to represent in this matter.

³ Available online at: www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/improving-the-safety-and-security-of-biological-research/.

⁴ Available online at: www.grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-25-112.html.

The suspension is effective as of the date of this Notice and enclosed ARM. The suspension and debarment, if ultimately imposed, has the following consequences pursuant to the authorities of 2 C.F.R. § 180 and the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) (under the reciprocal effect provision of 2 C.F.R. § 180.140).

1. Your name, Dr. Ralph Baric, will be published in the General Services Administration's web-based System for Award Management (SAM), available at www.sam.gov. SAM contains the names of contractors debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, or declared ineligible by any federal agency. Suspension and proposed debarment are effective throughout the executive branch of the Federal Government and apply to procurement and nonprocurement programs.
2. Offers will not be solicited from, contracts will not be awarded to, existing contracts will not be renewed or otherwise extended for, and subcontracts requiring Federal Government approval will not be approved for you by any agency in the executive branch of the Federal Government, unless the head of the agency taking the contracting action determines that there is a compelling reason for such action.
3. You may not conduct business with the Federal Government as an agent or representative of other contractors, or as an agent or representative of other participants in federal assistance programs, nor may you act as an individual surety to other government contractors.
4. No government contractor may award to you a subcontract equal to or in excess of \$30,000, except for certain subcontracts for commercially available off-the-shelf items, unless there is a compelling reason to do so and the contractor first notifies the contracting officer and further complies with the provisions of FAR 9.405-2(b).
5. Your affiliation with, or relationship to, any organization doing business with the Federal Government will be carefully examined to determine the impact of those ties on the responsibility of that organization to be a government contractor or subcontractor.
6. You are prohibited from acting as a participant in Federal agency transactions that are covered transactions unless an exception applies, and prohibited from acting as a principal of a participant in those covered transactions. *See* 2 C.F.R. §§ 180.130, 180.200, and 180.980. Covered transactions include certain procurement and certain nonprocurement transactions. *See* 2 C.F.R. 180.200.
7. You are prohibited from participating in certain non-procurement transactions which include but are not limited to grants, cooperative agreements, scholarships, fellowships, contracts of assistance, loans, loan guarantees, subsidies, insurances, payments for specified uses, and donation agreements. *See* 2 C.F.R. § 180.970.
8. No agency in the executive branch shall enter into, renew, or extend, primary or lower-tier covered transactions in which you are either a participant or principal, unless the head of the agency grants an exception in writing.

As noted in the ARM, this suspension is a temporary action. Suspension is used where immediate action is necessary to protect the integrity of federal procurement and nonprocurement activities. The suspension is effective until the conclusion of debarment proceedings pursuant to 2 C.F.R. § 180.760(a).

The determination to debar you is discretionary and will be made on the basis of an administrative record. Any written information submitted by you will become a part of this administrative record, as will any information added to the record by the Federal Government. A copy of the administrative record will be furnished upon request to exclusioninquiries@hhs.gov.

Debarment is generally for a period not to exceed three years; however, regardless of whether you contest this action or respond to this Notice, I may impose debarment for a longer period or shorter period as the circumstances warrant. The length of debarment, if ultimately imposed, will be based on the seriousness of the cause for debarment, as provided by 2 C.F.R. § 180.865. I may also consider any mitigating or aggravating factors that may apply, as provided by 2 C.F.R. § 180.860.

Suspension and debarment proceedings are not punitive. Accordingly, I will consider any information you wish to provide.

Any communications regarding this matter should be addressed to HHS Exclusion Inquiries at exclusioninquiries@hhs.gov. Written submissions should be addressed to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Acquisitions, Office of Recipient Integrity Coordination, 200 Independence Avenue, S.W., Mailstop 533H, Washington, D.C. 20201.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer D. Johnson". Below the signature is a blue horizontal line.

Jennifer D. Johnson
Suspension and Debarment Official and
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Acquisitions

Enclosures: Action Referral Memorandum
Copy of 2 C.F.R. Part 180
Copy of 2 C.F.R. Part 376

**ACTION REFERRAL MEMORANDUM**

On behalf of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), I hereby suspend and propose for debarment Ralph Baric, PhD (Dr. Ralph Baric) from participating in federal procurement and nonprocurement programs. This action is initiated pursuant to 2 C.F.R. Part 180, which HHS adopted and gave regulatory effect to at 2 C.F.R. Subpart 376.10.

The suspension and proposed debarment for Dr. Ralph Baric is based on information from the following: 1) an April 15, 2026, Referral of Information (ROI), from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Office of Extramural Research (OER), Office of Policy for Extramural Research Administration (OPERA), recommending that the HHS Suspension and Debarment Official (SDO) consider initiating suspension and debarment proceedings against Dr. Ralph Baric; 2) NIH Notice Number: NOT-OD-15-011, Funding Pause for Certain Types of Gain-of-Function Research Projects, issued on October 17, 2014,¹ and an October 17, 2014, U.S. Government Gain-of-Function Pause on Selected Research Involving Influenza, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Viruses dated October 17, 2014; 3) an October 21, 2014, Letter from the NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) regarding Grant Number 5U19AI107810-02; 4) Dr. Ralph Baric's Response to NIAID Gain of Function (GoF) Pause Letter for Grant Number 5U19AI17810-02, submitted to the NIH on January 20, 2015; 5) A *Nature Medicine* journal article, "A SARS-like cluster of circulating bat coronaviruses shows potential for human emergence," published online on November 9, 2015, with Dr. Ralph Baric as co-author;² 6) Summary of Wellcome Trust Grant # 203268/Z/16/Z, "Why do Norovirus pandemics occur and how can we control them?," funding period January 1, 2017 through October 30, 2023; 7) an April 7, 2025, Letter from the NIH to UNC Regarding Dr. Ralph Baric's Salary Restriction; 8) an April 18, 2025, Summary of Dr. Ralph Baric, prepared by the NIH Office of Extramural Research – Research Integrity (OER-RI); 9) a May 21, 2025, Letter from UNC to the NIH, providing notification to the NIH that Dr. Ralph Baric was on extended leave from UNC; 10) Executive Order 14292, "Improving the Safety and Security of Biological Research, issued on May 5, 2025;³ 11) NIH Notice Number: NOT-OD-25-112, Implementation Update: Improving the Safety and Security of Biological Research, issued on May 7, 2025;⁴ and 12) a December 11, 2025, Letter from the NIH to UNC, requesting that UNC and Dr. Ralph Baric provide data comparing SARS-CoV Urbani, SARS-CoV MA15 and SHC014-S MA15 in human airway epithelial (HAE) cultures, in order to understand whether the addition of the SHC014 spike to SARS-CoV MA15 enhanced virus titers in vitro.

The information summarized below indicates that Dr. Ralph Baric lacks the present responsibility to participate in federal procurement and nonprocurement programs.

¹ Available online at: www.grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/not-od-15-011.html.

² Available online at: www.nature.com/articles/nm.3985#change-history.

³ Available online at: www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/improving-the-safety-and-security-of-biological-research/.

⁴ Available online at: www.grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-25-112.html.

INFORMATION IN THE RECORD

A summary of the information in the record upon which the suspension and proposed debarment is based appears below:

1. According to the April 15, 2026, NIH ROI, Dr. Ralph Baric is a Professor in the Department of Epidemiology and the Department of Microbiology & Immunology at UNC. He began his career at UNC in 1986 as an Assistant Professor. Dr. Ralph Baric's research focuses on coronaviruses, using them as models to study the genetics of RNA virus transcription, replication, persistence, pathogenesis, genetics and cross-species transmission.
2. According to the April 15, 2026, NIH ROI, Dr. Ralph Baric is co-founder and Scientific Adviser of the Rapidly Emerging Antiviral Drug Development Initiative (READDI), a nonprofit biotechnology company dedicated to preventing global catastrophes caused by viruses.
3. According to the April 15, 2026, NIH ROI, on October 17, 2014, the U.S. Government announced that it would be instituting a funding pause on GoF research projects that reasonably may be anticipated to confer attributes to influenza, MERS, or SARS viruses, such that the resulting virus has enhanced pathogenicity and/or transmissibility (via the respiratory route) in mammals. The funding pause was implemented after several biosafety incidents at U.S. Government laboratories prompted a reassessment of the risks and benefits associated with certain types of GoF research involving high-risk pathogens. Along with pausing funding, the U.S. Government announced it would undertake a deliberative review to evaluate the potential benefits and risks of these studies and to support the development of a framework to guide future funding decisions. As such, also on October 17, 2014, the NIH issued Notice Number: NOT-OD-15-011, Funding Pause for Certain Types of Gain-of-Function Research Projects, for the purpose of notifying NIH applicants that, in accordance with the October 17, 2014, White House announcement, the NIH was instituting a funding pause on the provision of new funding for certain GoF research projects, federalwide.
4. According to the April 15, 2026, NIH ROI, in a letter dated October 21, 2014, NIAID notified UNC that it had determined that Project 1's Specific Aims 2 and 3 of NIH/NIAID Grant Number 5U19AI107810-02, with Dr. Ralph Baric as Principal Investigator (PI), may include GoF research that was subject to the October 17, 2014, U.S. Government funding pause.
5. According to the April 15, 2026, NIH ROI, on January 20, 2015, Dr. Ralph Baric submitted a response to the response to NIAID's October 21, 2014, letter. In his response, Dr. Ralph Baric stated, "As the insertion of the WIV1 and SHC014 S glycoprotein genes attenuated in vivo pathogenesis, these viruses fall outside the current pause." However, the NIAID found Dr. Baric's response to be "deceptive," because he did not mention that the SHC014 spike within the MA15 background demonstrates a "gain in pathogenesis" compared to the Urbani spike (wild type spike)

- in the MA15 background, as stated in the 2015 *Nature Medicine* article, “A SARS-like cluster of circulating bat coronaviruses shows potential for human emergence,” published online on November 9, 2015, with Dr. Ralph Baric as co-author.
6. According to the April 15, 2026, NIH ROI, Dr. Ralph Baric’s January 20, 2015, response to NIAID stated that “the proposed experiments are not GoF studies” because the SARS-CoV mutants “are either attenuated compared to wild-type virus or can be reasonably anticipated to be attenuated.” However, Figure 2 included in the response did not report wild-type virus as the comparator; instead, the mouse-attenuated strain SARS-CoV MA15 was labeled as the comparator for both human and mouse studies (left figure below). When the same data was submitted to NIAID on March 31, 2015, in the progress report for Grant Number 5U19AI107810-03, the same comparator was instead labeled SARS-CoV Urbani.
 7. According to the April 15, 2026, NIH ROI, these data were later published in the 2015 *Nature Medicine* article, “A SARS-like cluster of circulating bat coronaviruses shows potential for human emergence,” as Figure 1c-f with SARS-CoV Urbani labeled as the comparator for Calu3 cells and HAE cultures and SARS-CoV MA15 labeled as the comparator for the mice studies.
 8. According to the April 15, 2026, NIH ROI, on December 15, 2014, prior to his response to NIAID, Dr. Ralph Baric participated in a panel at the National Academies Symposium on Potential Risks and Benefits of Gain of Function Research entitled, “Potential Benefits of GOF Research II: Treatment and Response.” During the session, Dr. Ralph Baric described the SHC014 chimeric virus as a “a chimeric gain of function virus.” In addition, the symposium’s proceedings also described Dr. Ralph Baric’s work on chimeric virus as gain of function: “While studies using pseudotypes and structure-based prediction confirmed the existence of a bat SL-CoV that can infect human cells, only studies using GoF chimeric virus identified an additional bat SL-CoV as a potential threat.” The NIAID found Dr. Ralph Baric’s public statements at the meeting and in the 2015 *Nature Medicine* article to be in direct conflict with his statements to the NIH, and, therefore, appeared to demonstrate a pattern of deception.
 9. According to the April 15, 2026, NIH ROI, the NIAID also found Dr. Ralph Baric to be “engaged in deception” regarding certain grants/awards that he has been affiliated with. For example, Wellcome Trust Grant # 203268/Z/16/Z (01/01/2017 – 10/30/2023) “Why do Norovirus pandemics occur and how can we control them?” awarded to University College London, United Kingdom (UK), with Dr. Judith Breuer as PI and Dr. Ralph Baric, and five others from the UK, as Co-PIs, is not consistently disclosed or accurately described in documents submitted to the NIH as follows:
 - Dr. Ralph Baric’s publications in which he is corresponding author attribute the Wellcome Trust award to him. However, the funding organization is reported to the NIH as “Burroughs Welcome Trust.” Burroughs Welcome Fund is a US-based nonprofit funding organization; while the Wellcome Trust is a UK-based research funding charity, the NIAID found this to be “a clear attempt at deception.”

- The Wellcome Trust award appears similar to Dr. Ralph Baric's NIH award, R01AI148260 (03/05/2020 – 02/28/2026) "Antibody Landscape following Human Norovirus Infection and Vaccination." However, the Wellcome Trust award was not disclosed as other support in Just-In-Time (JIT) documents submitted to the NIH, for Grant Number R01AI148260, on 02/12/2020.
10. According to the April 15, 2026, NIH ROI, in a letter dated April 7, 2025, the NIH notified UNC that Dr. Ralph Baric's salary would be restricted on NIH-funded grants while the NIH conducted a compliance review of grant awards awarded to UNC with Dr. Ralph Baric as PI or any senior key capacity.
 11. According to the April 15, 2026, NIH ROI, in a letter dated May 21, 2025, UNC notified the NIH that Dr. Ralph Baric was on extended leave with no end date and would be absent from his NIH-funded grants.
 12. On May 5, 2025, the President Trump issued Executive Order 14292, "Improving the Safety and Security of Biological Research," which immediately paused federal funding for dangerous GoF research, restricted funding for research in specific countries of concern, and directed the development of a stricter oversight policy within 120 days, for the purpose of preventing enhancements to pathogen transmissibility or virulence and mandating stricter screening for synthetic nucleic acid procurement. The purpose of the Executive Order was to implement additional steps to strengthen oversight of research that could or will make a naturally occurring pathogen or toxin more dangerous to American citizens, and directed the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and the National Security Advisor to work with federal agencies to revise or replace existing policies overseeing this research.
 13. On May 7, 2025, the NIH issued Notice Number: NOT-OD-25-112, Implementation Update: Improving the Safety and Security of Biological Research.
 14. According to the April 15, 2026, NIH ROI, the NIH provided a letter to UNC, dated December 11, 2025, following up on responses UNC submitted in response to an NIH inquiry regarding disclosures of foreign support, financial conflicts of interest, and GoF research related to Dr. Ralph Baric. In the letter, the NIH requested that UNC and Dr. Ralph Baric provide data comparing SARS-CoV Urbani, SARS-CoV MA15 and SHC014-S MA15 in HAE cultures, in order to understand whether the addition of the SHC014 spike to SARS-CoV MA15 enhanced virus titers in vitro. The NIH found that Dr. Ralph Baric failed to provide this requested data in his response, and found that he minimized the concern about a potential increase infectivity in human cells.

15. According to the April 15, 2026, NIH ROI, the following are active and pending NIH grants associated with Dr. Ralph Baric:

Grant Number	Role	Status	Project Period	Institution
5R01AI148260-05	PI	Awarded	03/05/2020 – 02/28/2026	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
2R01AI148260-06	PI	Pending Award	03/05/2020 – 11/30/2030	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
1U19AI171292-01	PI	Contact-PI	05/16/2022 – 04/30/2026	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
2P01AI106695-11	Project Lead & Subcontract PI	Awarded	07/29/2015 – 07/31/2030	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
1U19AI181960-01	Co-Investigator	Awarded	08/12/2024 – 07/31/2027	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
5U19AI116484-10	Subaward PI	Awarded	03/01/2015 – 03/31/2026	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
R21AI196622-01	Co-Investigator	To be Paid	12/01/2025 – 11/30/2027	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
1R01AI195963-01	Subaward PI	Pending Award	12/01/2025 – 11/30/2023	University of Pennsylvania
1R01AI195640-01	Co-Investigator	Pending Award	12/01/2025 – 11/30/2030	Duke University
2P01AI158571-02	Project Lead	Awarded	09/16/2021 – 01/31/2031	Duke University
2R01AI157155-06	MPI	Awarded	09/15/2020 – 08/31/2030	Washington University
2R01AI127845-06A1	Co-Investigator	Pending Award	09/27/2016 – 11/30/2030	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
2R01AI089728-11A1	MPI	Pending Award	05/15/2010 – 11/30/2030	University of Minnesota
2R01AI157253-06	MPI	Pending Award	09/25/2020 – 06/30/2030	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
1P01AI167966-01	Project Lead	Awarded	09/02/2022 – 08/31/2026	Washington University

SUSPENSION FINDINGS AND BASIS FOR THE PROPOSED DEBARMENT

Based on the information in the record identified above, I have determined that there is adequate evidence which provides cause for the suspension and proposed debarment of Dr. Ralph Baric, pursuant to the Nonprocurement Common Rule, found at 2 C.F.R. § 180. Pursuant to 2 C.F.R. § 180.700, a suspending and debarring official may immediately suspend an individual or entity when “there exists adequate evidence to suspect any other cause for debarment listed under § 180.800(b)-(d), which includes “Any other cause that is so serious or compelling in nature that it affects your present responsibility.” *See* 2 C.F.R. §§ 180.700(b); 180.800(d). In addition, the suspending and debarring official may immediately suspend an individual or entity when “immediate action is necessary to protect the public interest.” *See* 2 C.F.R. § 180.700(c). It is important to note that suspension is a temporary action, used where immediate action is necessary to protect the integrity of United States Federal Government procurement and nonprocurement activities.

As stated in the information in the record, the NIH found that, based on his own statements and published research, Dr. Ralph Baric was engaged in GoF research that was subject to the October 17, 2014, U.S. Government funding pause and NIH Notice Number: NOT-OD-15-011, Funding Pause for Certain Types of Gain-of-Function Research Projects to that effect, and continued to participate in in GoF research even after being notified of this by the NIH. Also, the NIH found that Dr. Ralph Baric was not forthcoming surrounding his Wellcome Trust grant in documents submitted to the NIH. Furthermore, as established in the information in the record, Dr. Ralph Baric is associated with multiple active NIH-funded grant awards.

While GoF research can help scientists understand diseases, it can also be extremely dangerous and introduce serious risks, with the potential to cause disease by enhancing its pathogenicity or increasing its transmissibility. If left unrestricted, its effects can include widespread mortality, an impaired public health system, disrupted American livelihoods, and diminished economic and national security. No matter how many safety precautions are taken, there is always a chance that a never-before-seen virus can escape and trigger an outbreak, with the potential to significantly endanger the lives of American citizens.

Therefore, I have determined that the information in the record provides cause for Dr. Ralph Baric's suspension, pursuant to 2 C.F.R. §§ 180.700(b) and 180.700(c), and proposed debarment, pursuant to 2 C.F.R. § 180.800(d).

DECISION

Pursuant to 2 C.F.R. Part 180, which was adopted and given regulatory effect by HHS at 2 C.F.R. Subpart 376.10, and based upon the administrative record and the findings herein, Dr. Ralph Baric is hereby suspended and proposed for debarment, effective as of the date of this Action Referral Memorandum and enclosed Notice of Suspension and Proposed Debarment. The suspension of Dr. Ralph Baric is effective until the conclusion of debarment proceedings, pursuant to 2 C.F.R. § 180.760(a).



Jennifer D. Johnson

Suspension and Debarment Official and
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Acquisitions

THE AMERICAN CHAPTER OF COVID-19

Why Congress Should More Fully Examine the Role of the University of North Carolina and Duke University in Coronavirus Research and the COVID-19 Origins Investigation

Statement for the Record

Submitted to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

James Haslam

Houston, Texas

George A. Howard

Raleigh, North Carolina

Chairman Paul, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee:

We respectfully submit this statement for inclusion in the record of the Committee's hearing concerning Dr. Anthony Fauci, the origins of COVID-19, and federal oversight of research involving pathogens with pandemic potential.

We are private citizens who have spent years examining the documentary record concerning the origin of SARS-CoV-2, the development and funding of advanced coronavirus research, and the adequacy of the governmental and institutional systems responsible for overseeing that work. Our inquiry has relied principally upon grant applications, research proposals, published scientific papers, congressional testimony, records obtained through public-records and Freedom of Information Act requests, institutional communications, federal reports, and contemporaneous accounts.

James Haslam is the author of *COVID-19: Mystery Solved: It Leaked From a Wuhan Lab, But It's Not Chinese Junk*, a detailed account of the development and inadvertent release of SARS-CoV-2.^[1] He also co-authored with Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs the report *The Most Plausible Origin of SARS-CoV-2*, which was submitted on May 21, 2025, to the World Health Organization's Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins of Novel Pathogens, commonly known as SAGO.^[2] The WHO's subsequent SAGO assessment expressly acknowledged receipt of that report, although SAGO disputed important elements of its analysis.^[3]

George A. Howard is a North Carolina businessman and independent scientific researcher who has co-authored numerous peer-reviewed scientific papers. His published work has received approximately 1,200 scholarly citations. He has also publicly raised concerns, together with Rutgers University microbiologist Richard H. Ebright, about the risks, transparency, and oversight associated with extreme virological research conducted at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

We do not ask the Committee to accept any contested origin hypothesis as an established fact. We do ask that Congress examine the full range of credible evidence and devote substantially greater attention to the American institutions, technologies, researchers, funding systems, and oversight failures that may have contributed to the circumstances under investigation.

Two Distinct Laboratory-Origin Hypotheses

Public discussion commonly treats the laboratory-origin explanation as a single theory. In reality, it includes materially different hypotheses.

The view most often advanced by laboratory-origin researchers and advocates is that SARS-CoV-2 emerged through an accident involving Chinese scientists conducting coronavirus research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, funded by the United States government through EcoHealth Alliance. Under that general account, Chinese personnel themselves collected, manipulated, cultured, or otherwise worked with a precursor or engineered virus, and the pathogen escaped through infection of a researcher, a laboratory-safety failure, or another accidental route.

Mr. Haslam's hypothesis is different.

Based on the chronology and documentary record he has assembled, he argues that investigators should examine whether Australian virologist Danielle Anderson, who worked at the Wuhan Institute of Virology and was associated with the Duke-NUS Medical School in Singapore, may have played a direct role in the initial release.

Haslam's analysis further proposes that her Wuhan experiments with the world's only known laboratory colony of Chinese horseshoe bats at the WIV were motivated by her grant-application team's desire to improve its funding prospects through the development of a transmissible vaccine or immunizing agent intended for bat populations, rather than merely the creation of a pathogen for conventional laboratory study.

Circumstantial Evidence Concerning Danielle Anderson and the Release of COVID-19 in Wuhan

Anderson was named in the 2018 DEFUSE proposal to lead animal studies involving experimental infection of wild-caught Chinese horseshoe bats.^[9] Haslam contends that the proposed virus or vaccine would have been produced through Baric's work at UNC, developed or tested in bats at Rocky Mountain Laboratories, and then transferred to Wuhan for trials.

Anderson unquestionably worked inside the Wuhan BSL-4 laboratory during 2019 and completed her final stint in November, very close to the earliest recognized outbreak.^[5] She was apparently the only foreign scientist regularly working there.^[5]

Her 2019 federal-grant curriculum vitae reportedly mentioned “coronavirus replication” and extensive experience designing bat experiments. Haslam contrasts that description with her later public statement that her Wuhan BSL-4 work concerned Ebola. This establishes relevant expertise and raises a legitimate records question, although it does not, standing alone, establish that she handled SARS-CoV-2 or any precursor in Wuhan.

DEFUSE contemplated testing bat-vaccine candidates on wild-caught *Rhinolophus* bats at the WIV.^[9] Peter Daszak later stated that Anderson had confirmed the existence of a WIV bat colony. Haslam therefore infers that her otherwise poorly explained presence in the BSL-4 facility was connected to those bat trials.

Haslam also relies upon cellphone-location evidence obtained by NBC News.^[4] He argues that Anderson's Singapore-linked device appeared around the remote BSL-4 facility from July through October 2019, disappeared during a period of reportedly diminished laboratory phone activity, and later returned around the time Linfa Wang visited in November.^[12] The underlying cellphone analysis was disputed from its first publication and does not itself demonstrate an accident, infection, quarantine, or cleanup.^[4] It nevertheless identifies a factual question that Congress can test by obtaining the underlying records.

Anderson left Wuhan on November 29 and did not return.^[5] Her boss, Linfa Wang, resigned as director of Duke-NUS's emerging-diseases program on January 10, 2020^[6]—the date the SARS-CoV-2 genome became public. Haslam treats that timing as suggestive of recognition and institutional reaction. Standing alone, neither departure proves knowledge of an accident.

Haslam also considers Anderson's later public statements incomplete. She stated that she was tested for SARS-CoV-2 before vaccination and had never been infected. Haslam has called for the release of her earlier, apparently 2020, antibody-testing records, together with her 2019 laboratory notebooks, material-transfer agreements, shipping records, emails, and related institutional communications.

These are reasonable investigative requests. The absence of those records is not affirmative proof that Anderson was infected. It does, however, prevent the hypothesis from being fully and fairly tested.

This hypothesis remains disputed and should not be presented as proven. It is nevertheless distinct from the prevailing laboratory-leak account and should be evaluated on its evidence rather than merged into a generic narrative involving unidentified Chinese researchers.

The Haslam-Sachs submission to SAGO placed this alternative account before an international scientific body and required SAGO to address it in the course of its origins assessment.^{[2][3]} That process does not establish the hypothesis. It demonstrates, however, that Mr. Haslam's work has advanced beyond informal online speculation and entered the formal international debate concerning the origin of SARS-CoV-2.

We respectfully suggest that the Committee examine the competing laboratory-origin hypotheses separately. The identity, institutional affiliation, purpose, timing, and location of the relevant work are not secondary details. They bear directly upon questions of responsibility, federal funding, international collaboration, laboratory safety, record preservation, and the accuracy of representations made to government agencies and the public.

The Underexamined Role of the University of North Carolina

In our judgment, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has received substantially less scrutiny than its scientific importance warrants.

Public attention has understandably centered on the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Yet the relevant coronavirus-research network was not confined to China. It included American federal agencies, universities, nonprofit intermediaries, contractors, international research partners, and scientists who exchanged funding, technology, viral samples, research methods, and expertise across institutional and national boundaries.

Within that network, the laboratory led by Dr. Ralph Baric at UNC occupied an exceptionally important position. UNC was not merely a passive funding recipient or distant academic observer. Its researchers possessed advanced capabilities in coronavirus genetics, reverse genetics, infectious-clone systems, viral reconstruction, and the evaluation of altered coronaviruses in laboratory models.

For example, on January 31, 2020, Scripps professor Kristian Andersen concluded that the new SARS-CoV-2 genome “looks engineered” after comparing it with a bat sample called RaTG13, which Shi Zhengli of the WIV had published only days earlier.^[7]

The comparison of RaTG13 and SARS-CoV-2, including the PRRAR insertion, is as follows:

RaTG13:

YECDIPIGAGICASYQTQTNS_____RSVASQSIIAYTMSLGAENSVAYSNN

SARS-CoV-2:

YECDIPIGAGICASYQTQTNSPRRARSVASQSIIAYTMSLGAENSVAYSNN

Under the 2018 DEFUSE proposal and related 2019 NIAID grants, Baric testified that Shi was to share samples such as RaTG13 with him before publication. Although Shi could not isolate a live RaTG13 virus, Baric had written that inserting a furin cleavage site could help “recover non-cultivable viruses.”^[9]

Importantly, Baric's cell cultures preserve the furin cleavage site, whereas Shi's Vero cells delete it. In this framework, Baric would “introduce” a furin cleavage site, such as PRRAR, and then “provide” Linfa Wang with the resulting chimera for testing on Chinese bats at the WIV.^{[9] [14]}

The next day, February 1, 2020, Fauci participated in a hastily convened teleconference organized by Andersen and other prominent virologists.^{[7][8]} Two days later, both Andersen and Baric were invited to present engineering evidence to National Academies officials and representatives of agencies including the FBI, CIA, and White House.^[9]

A redacted Slack message dated February 3, 2020, revealed in Baric's testimony, showed Andersen writing:^[10]

“I should mention that Ralph Baric pretty much attacked me on the call with NASEM, essentially calling anything related to potential lab escape ludicrous, crackpot theories. I wonder if he, himself, is worried about this, too.”

For another example, on March 5, 2020, United States government biodefense officials asked Baric in the Red Dawn emails whether SARS-CoV-2 contained “any restriction sites.”^[9]

Baric responded:

“No, there is absolutely no evidence of genetic engineering.”

SARS-CoV-2 contains five restriction sites, yielding six pieces.^[9]

Baric later testified:

“We think our [UNC] approach is safer [than the WIV] because we've divided the genome into six pieces.”^[9]

In DEFUSE, Baric proposed to use:

“six contiguous cDNA pieces linked by unique restriction endonuclease sites.”

The central question is not whether Congress can already prove every element of a particular origin hypothesis. It is whether American institutions possessing extraordinary capabilities, receiving substantial federal support, and participating in the very research network now under scrutiny have received anything approaching the examination demanded by the stakes.

They have not.

For more than six years, the public discussion has focused overwhelmingly on what may have happened inside China. But the scientific methods, funding decisions, research proposals, institutional relationships, and oversight failures relevant to this inquiry did not stop at the doors of the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Important parts of this story may run through American laboratories, American universities, American agencies, and American decisions.

That possibility should not be dismissed as politically inconvenient, institutionally embarrassing, or scientifically impolite. It should be investigated.

The American people endured millions of deaths, profound economic and social disruption, and an unprecedented loss of trust in public-health authorities. They are entitled to more than carefully limited inquiries, missing records, unexplained timelines, and categorical assurances from the very institutions whose conduct requires examination.

Congress should follow the evidence wherever it leads—including home.

The following questions remain unanswered

1. The Role of Danielle Anderson and Duke-NUS

What was Fauci's \$82M CREID contractor, Dani Anderson, doing inside the Wuhan BSL4?

Why did her boss, Linfa Wang, resign as director of Duke's EID program on January 10, 2020, the same day the first SARS-CoV-2 genome sequence was publicly released? ^[6]

What did Duke and Duke-NUS know about Danielle Anderson's work in Wuhan, her involvement in the DEFUSE proposal, the proposed experiments involving Chinese horseshoe bats, and any relationship between those activities and the earliest outbreak?

Did Danielle Anderson undergo antibody, PCR, or other testing during or after 2019 that could establish whether she had been exposed to SARS-CoV-2 or a related virus? Who possesses those records?

What laboratory notebooks, material-transfer agreements, shipping documents, cellphone-location records, experimental protocols, sequence data, and institutional communications would confirm or disprove Mr. Haslam's proposed pathway?

2. Rocky Mountain Laboratories (RML) and Vincent Munster

What did Fauci discuss with Rocky Mountain Lab during weekly teleconferences that began in January 2020?

What did Vincent Munster present to Fauci on January 27? Why were Munster and Baric's names provided to Fauci on that same date?

In 2016, Fauci gave a joint presentation with Munster. That same year, Baric and Munster were infecting Egyptian fruit bats. Why are these same bats the reservoir host for SARS2?

What was RML doing with both DARPA Preempt and DEFUSE projects in 2018-19? How would Munster run “experimental trials on Rhinolophus bats,” which are found in Wuhan? Is this why Fauci built a \$100M Rhinolophus bat breeding facility at RML?

In 2014, Fauci told Francis Collins that RML was developing a new (self spreading) vaccine platform targeting wildlife vaccination. But it was only tested in a mouse model and “very early stage of development.” How far advanced was this technology in 2019?

RML was cited in a recent Nature paper on the theory that COVID was a bat vaccine. Does Fauci deny that COVID was a bat vaccine developed at RML?

Do you have an alibi for Rocky Mountain Lab?

3. Scientific Integrity, Research Methods, and Disclosures

During the NASEM meeting on February 3, why did Baric “attack” Andersen for bringing attention to the furin cleavage site? ^[10] ^[11] In 2018, RML published a paper about a furin cleavage site needed in a bat virus for “intracellular proteases.”

What information concerning Dr. Baric's work, the DEFUSE proposal, furin-cleavage-site insertion, coronavirus reconstruction, restriction sites, or six-piece viral assembly was presented during the February 2020 teleconferences and National Academies discussions?

Why did Dr. Baric reportedly characterize laboratory escape as a “ludicrous” or “crackpot” theory during the National Academies discussion, and what evidence did he possess at that time that justified such certainty? ^[10]

Why did Dr. Baric tell government biodefense officials that there was “absolutely no evidence of genetic engineering” in response to a question concerning restriction sites, when SARS-CoV-2 contained five such sites and his own UNC platform assembled coronavirus genomes from six pieces?

What viral samples, sequence information, constructs, protocols, or other materials did Shi Zhengli and the WIV provide to Dr. Baric or UNC before publication, and when were those materials received?

4. Federal Agency Involvement and Decision-Making

When Major Murphy leaked DARPA DEFUSE, he claimed Fauci funded it? Daszak & Baric split the bid and resubmitted as the 2R01 and U01 CREID grant.

Why did Fauci blind copy (bcc) John Mascola on his reply to Kristian Andersen? Andersen testified he, not Fauci, wanted to contact the FBI.

Did Fauci or his “NIH staff” invite Baric to the February 1, 2020 call? Baric first testified that “NIH staff” invited him, but now he claims not to know. ^[10]

Why didn't Fauci contact the FBI? Fauci testified that he did not, yet Andersen wanted to contact the FBI on January 30.

Why did Fauci's office nominate Munster and his RML boss, Heinz Feldmann, for the WHO Mission to China in February 2020?

When did Dr. Fauci first learn that Kristian Andersen and other scientists believed SARS-CoV-2 might have been engineered or associated with laboratory research?

Did Dr. Fauci, NIAID, NIH, or any other federal agency request laboratory records, sequencing data, viral constructs, material-transfer agreements, or explanations from Dr. Baric or UNC after concerns about possible engineering were raised?

5. University of North Carolina: Institutional Accountability and Internal Reviews

When did UNC's and University System's institutional chain of command first learn that SARS-CoV-2 might have arisen from coronavirus research connected to Dr. Baric's collaborators, methods, proposals, or technology, and what do they know today?

What did Dr. Baric tell UNC's Institutional Biosafety Committee, laboratory-safety personnel, department leadership, Gillings School leadership, research administrators, university counsel, senior executives, trustees, and federal officials during January and February 2020?

Did UNC initiate an internal inquiry into its coronavirus work, international collaborations, viral-sample transfers, DEFUSE-related activities, restriction-site methods, or possible relationship to SARS-CoV-2? If so, who conducted that inquiry, and where are its records?

Were relevant records preserved, withheld, redacted, deleted, reclassified, transferred to legal counsel, or otherwise removed from ordinary institutional custody after a possible research-related origin was raised?

What did the leadership of UNC, the UNC System, Duke, and Duke-NUS know; when did they know it; what representations did they make to federal agencies and the public; and what actions did they take in response?

Notes and Sources

The following notes provide sourcing for the numbered citations above. Items marked with an editorial note below should be verified against primary committee records (hearing transcripts, FOIA productions, or underlying email/document releases) before final filing, since several currently rely on secondary reporting.

1. [James Haslam](#), *COVID-19: Mystery Solved: It Leaked From a Wuhan Lab, But It's Not Chinese Junk* (2024/2025). Publisher/edition details should be added by the authors.
2. Jeffrey D. Sachs & James Haslam, [“The Most Plausible Origin of SARS-CoV-2,”](#) submitted to WHO SAGO, May 21, 2025.
3. World Health Organization, Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins of Novel Pathogens (SAGO), [“Independent Assessment of the Origins of SARS-CoV-2,”](#) June 27, 2025 (acknowledging and disputing elements of the Haslam/Sachs submission). See also James Haslam, [“A Response to World Health Organization,”](#) Substack, June 2025.
4. NBC News, [“Report says cellphone data suggests October shutdown at Wuhan lab, but experts are skeptical,”](#) May 2020. Note: this report describes an Oct. 7–24, 2019 window; the July–October date range and the specific attribution of the device to Anderson in the statement above should be checked directly against the underlying report and Mr. Haslam's analysis (see note 12) before filing.
5. South China Morning Post, [“Only foreign scientist in Wuhan lab says Covid-19 leak highly unlikely,”](#) June 2021 (Bloomberg-sourced interview with Danielle Anderson); see also [Newsweek](#), June 2021.
6. “Linfa Wang,” [Wikipedia](#) (confirms resignation as Duke-NUS EID Programme director announced January 2020, effective September 2020). Editorial note: the specific date of January 10, 2020, used in the statement should be independently verified—for example, against Duke-NUS's internal announcement or contemporaneous press coverage—before it is asserted as fact in testimony.
7. PolitiFact, [“No, emails don't show early agreement the virus was engineered,”](#) June 2, 2021 (quoting Kristian Andersen's January 31, 2020 email to Anthony Fauci in full context, including Andersen's own caveats and the subsequent March 2020 Nature Medicine “Proximal Origin” paper).

8. Fox News, [“Fauci, top scientist called to brief House committees; phone call questioned,”](#) (on the February 1, 2020 call and subsequent congressional inquiry by Reps. Jim Jordan and James Comer).
9. Jeffrey D. Sachs & James Haslam, [“Did Ralph Baric at UNC Create SARS-CoV-2?,”](#) Brownstone Institute, March 18, 2026 (also syndicated at [The Unz Review](#) and [jeffsachs.org](#)). Editorial note: this article is the direct source for the DEFUSE, furin-cleavage-site, and Red Dawn email material in this statement. Because it is co-authored by one of the undersigned, we recommend citing it explicitly here and separately obtaining the underlying primary records (the DEFUSE proposal itself, the Red Dawn email thread, and Dr. Baric's committee testimony transcript) as independent, checkable sources for the record.
10. James Haslam, [“Baric Testified Again But Still Hasn't Provided an Alibi,”](#) Substack (reproducing an exchange identified as committee testimony in which Dr. Baric is questioned about the February 3, 2020 Slack message). Editorial note: for a Statement for the Record, the official committee hearing transcript itself—obtainable from committee staff—should be cited as the primary source in place of, or alongside, this secondary republication.
11. James Haslam, [“What's in Your Freezer, Dr. Baric?,”](#) Substack (same testimony exchange).
12. James Haslam, [“Let's Be Blunt: SARS2 Leaked From the BSL4,”](#) Substack (Haslam's own analysis of the cellphone-location data as it relates to Anderson and Linfa Wang).
13. [Reserved.]
14. Jon Fleetwood, [“SARS-CoV-2 Furin Cleavage Site Sits At Exact Amino Acid Residue Location Designated by 2018 DEFUSE Document,”](#) Substack. Editorial note: for the record, this claim is best anchored to the DEFUSE proposal document itself and to the peer-reviewed Menachery et al. Nature paper on the furin cleavage site's functional role, rather than to secondary commentary.

Additional items in the statement—including the \$82M CREID contract figure, the January 27, 2020 Munster presentation to Fauci, the 2016 joint Fauci/Munster presentation, the DARPA Preempt/DEFUSE overlap, the \$100M RML bat-breeding facility, the 2014 Fauci-to-Collins self-spreading vaccine communication, the Nature paper on the bat-vaccine theory, the Mascola bcc, and the specific institutional-knowledge questions in Section 5—were not independently verified in this research pass. We recommend the authors supply direct citations (committee testimony transcript pages, specific FOIA production Bates numbers, or named article/journal citations) for each before the statement is finalized, both to strengthen the submission and to protect it from the criticism that it relies on unsourced assertions.