



Hearing of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations: “Challenges and Opportunities to Investigating the Origins of Pandemics and Other Biological Events”

February 1st, 2023 (Updated from original [Witness Testimony](#): June 25th, 2023)

Dr. Gerry Parker Testimony: “Attribution for Natural and Unnatural Emerging Infectious Diseases of Unknown Origin”

Summary:

[Dr. Gerald Parker was a witness as hearing / because / hearing focused on]

On February 1, 2023, the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce held a hearing to identify challenges to understanding the origins of pandemics. Dr. Gerald Parker, Director of the Scowcroft Institute’s Pandemic and Biosecurity Policy Program, was asked to be a witness at the hearing to share with Members of Congress his expertise on federal coordination on outbreak investigation and biological threats, both in relation to ongoing efforts to identify the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic and to build a federal infrastructure capable of investigating the origins of future pandemics and “risks of catastrophic biological incidents”. (Hearing Memo)

Within this testimony the term “Bioattribution” will be used to refer to the scientific and policy process for understanding the origins of a pathogen and identifying how and where it first infected humans, whether or not it causes an epidemic or pandemic. Successful bioattribution requires accurate information from across scientific disciplines and across federal agencies, including virology, bacteriology, and toxicology expertise, intelligence sharing, criminal investigatory expertise, and a process for interagency communication and leadership. Thus, this House committee convened the hearing to evaluate the efficacy of bioattribution in the federal system.

Dr. Parker explains in this testimony that “there are no effective international agreements, protocols, or guidelines that provide needed authority to rapidly attribute the source of a pandemic, or other biological threats.” The testimony describes how insufficient coordination can render an investigation into the origins of a biological threat ineffective. This includes investigations into tools used to create or deploy a biological agent and identification of potential perpetrators of deliberate attacks. In his testimony, Dr. Parker explains how the federal government’s system to recognize the origins of these threats can lead to conflicting information from multiple different institutions that do not have a central mechanism to analyze these issues. Our federal framework for bioattribution is not designed to adjudicate such conflicting information effectively for policymakers or the public. The testimony provides Dr. Parker’s personal experience in federal bioattribution efforts, such as the investigation of the Amerithrax anthrax attacks of 2001.

This testimony has been updated to incorporate questions for the record received after the hearing. Updated testimony also includes a section on the role of the Director of National

Intelligence in biological threat attribution investigations due to the controversies and confusion associated with the DNI's June 2023 release of declassified report on potential links between the Wuhan Institute of Virology and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the full testimony, Dr. Parker describes the policy implications of the recent declassified reporting on the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as policies to address the preparedness gaps evident in the Policy Implications:

1. Restructure WHO organizational lines of authority
2. Establish a Multidisciplinary Attribution Task Force
3. Continue Negotiations of the Proposed Pandemic Treaty
4. Establish Smart and Security Aware International Scientific Collaborations
5. Establish an International Biorisk Management Framework
6. Apply One Health Strategies
7. Establish Biological Attribution Policy, Leadership Structure, and Capacities