

20 Dec 2023

Dear Representative Raúl Grijalva,

I am an Arizonan expat living in Canada. My zip code growing up in Tucson was 85716. I have been suffering from disabling Long Covid following my first COVID infection. This holiday season, I would like to tell you my story.

I moved to Canada at the start of the pandemic. My partner was wrapping up her studies at a conservation school in a different city. I missed her, so I went out to visit. Towards the end of the visit we went on a walk over the downs to a local windmill.

On this walk, we found dried poppy straw with seeds. We collected the seeds, and I brought them home with me to Toronto. I scattered the seeds throughout the yard. I wasn't particularly careful in placing them, so I assumed there was little chance that they survived.

I got sick with COVID in the early months of 2022 and our lives fell apart. I struggled with severe neurological symptoms and could barely leave my bed for months. I went from being a rising star in my academic field to being unable to work or take care of myself. My doctors struggled to figure out what was wrong with me, and as the medical possibilities were ruled out, I was abandoned without any answers or formal diagnosis.

In the summer of 2022, as I struggled through the most acute moments of my illness, we found the little pink poppies blooming throughout the yard. Somehow, the wild poppies had survived! But, we were overwhelmed with managing my illness and did not tend to them.

My condition has improved since then, and, amazingly, the poppies returned for a second summer in the corners of the yard where they had established a presence the summer before. This summer, I made sure to collect their seeds, and I am hoping that we can continue to maintain them.

Although there is hope that I will continue to improve in time, there is no guarantee. My life is still severely impacted, and medicine is not yet able to address this disease. Unfortunately, according to the CDC there are millions of people with my story throughout the United States, many of whom are still trying desperately to hold together shattered lives.

I do not expect miracles. I want the simple decency of medical research to answer what is a large scale public health crisis. I am joining other advocates, patients, and researchers in calling for a Long Covid moonshot—a commitment to invest at least \$1B per year over the next 10 years into NIH research funding and clinical trials for Long Covid.

There is hope that my wild poppies will continue to propagate unattended. But to ensure it, I know that they need good soil, sunlight, and water. We must tend to the things we love.

Happy Holidays

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Maddison', with a stylized, cursive script.

Chris Maddison

P.S. If you would like to continue the discussion, feel free to reach out at cmaddis@cs.toronto.edu.