

Official Statement of Hon. Dave Weldon, MD
Regarding recently withdrawal of nomination for CDC

Twelve hours before my scheduled confirmation hearing in the Senate, I received a phone call from an assistant at the White House informing me that my nomination to be Director of the CDC was being withdrawn because there were not enough votes to get me confirmed. I then spoke to HHS Secretary Bobby Kennedy who was very upset. He was told the same thing and that he had been looking forward to working with me at CDC. He said I was the perfect person for the job.

Bobby told me that earlier that morning he had breakfast with Republican Senator Susan Collins of Maine who said she now had reservations about my nomination and was considering voting no. I had a very pleasant meeting with her 2 weeks prior where she expressed no reservation, but at my meeting with her staff on March 11, they were suddenly very hostile -- a bad sign. They repeatedly accused me of being "antivax," even though I reminded them that I actually give hundreds of vaccines every year in my medical practice. More than twenty years ago, while in Congress, I raised some concerns about childhood vaccine safety, and for some reason the Collins staff suddenly couldn't get over that no matter what I said back.

There are 12 Republicans and 11 Democrats on the committee, so losing one was a problem if all the Democrats vote no which they have been doing. I can assume that the White House staff had my nomination withdrawn also because the Republican Chairman, Dr. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, was also voting no. Ironically, he is also an internist like me, and I have known him for years, and I thought we were friends. But he too was also throwing around the claim that I was "antivax" or that I believed that vaccines cause autism which I have never said. He actually once asked that my nomination be withdrawn. So, he was a big problem and losing Collins too was clearly too much for the White House. The president is a busy man doing good work for our nation and the last thing he needs is a controversy about the CDC.

The concern of many people is that big Pharma was behind this, which is probably true. They are hands-down, the most powerful lobby organization in Washington, D.C., giving millions of dollars to politicians on both sides of the aisle. They also purchased millions of dollars of advertising in newspapers, magazines, and on television. For any news outlet or organization to take on big Pharma could be suicide. Many media carry water for Pharma. Pharma also gives generously to medical societies, colleges and universities. I have learned the hard way don't mess with Big Pharma.

I have been told that Pharma had desperately tried to get rid of Bobby Kennedy, but were unable due to the strong support of President Trump. Many people feel big Pharma actually feared me more than they feared Bobby because of my credibility and my knowledge of science and medicine. So, if they had to live with Bobby for four years, they were definitely not going to have both him and me and presumably put serious pressure on Collins and Cassidy.

My big sin was that as a congressman 25 years ago I had the temerity to take on the CDC and big Pharma on two critical childhood vaccine safety issues. Hundreds of distraught mothers had been coming to me from all over the country, insisting that their child has been seriously damaged by the inoculations, and no one was listening to them. Furthermore, despite their claims of having a vaccine-injured child, they could get no compensation in court because of the Vaccine Safety Act.

Some claimed it caused autism. The parents made two different assertions. One was the fact that FDA, CDC, and Pharma had allowed a tremendous amount of a neurotoxic preservative called thimerosal into the infant schedule and that the thimerosal was the cause of the problem.

Under pressure from me and many other members of the House, both Democrat and Republican, the CDC and Pharma removed the neurotoxic thimerosal, but it took them years to do it. One of the things that seemed to unite us in the U.S. House who engaged on this was that none of us took money from Pharma. At the time, Bernie Sanders actually joined us.

CDC ended up publishing a research study claiming that the mercury had done no harm, but there were credible accusations that CDC had incorrectly manipulated the data to exonerate themselves. If confirmed, I was planning on going back into the CDC database and quietly investigate this claim. Ironically, I was hoping to find no evidence of corruption of the science at CDC. Maybe in hearing it from me, members of the public might be reassured, and it might help improve the currently somewhat tarnished image of CDC and Pharma.

But, I unfortunately also had the temerity to take on CDC and Pharma regarding another childhood vaccine safety issue, the safety of the measles vaccine called MMR. More than 25 years ago, there were a series of articles published by a British pediatric gastroenterologist named Andrew Wakefield. He had seen many parents who claimed that after taking the MMR, their child had not only deteriorated developmentally, but had also become fussy eaters and developed diarrhea. He did colonoscopies on the children and discovered that they had a new form of inflammatory bowel disease. His research was later duplicated and to this day he has been credited for defining this form of childhood inflammatory bowel disease.

Wakefield published 15 papers in all. Only one was withdrawn. The one that created the big controversy was published in a journal called Lancet, and one of the co-authors on the paper was a highly respected Irish virologist by the name of O'Leary. I actually knew of O'Leary. I used to take care of AIDS patients prior to going to Congress, and I knew of O'Leary's reputation as a solid scientist. One of the complications the AIDS patients were developing was a form of cancer called Kaposi Sarcoma, and O'Leary had shown that the cancer occurred in the AIDS patients when there was co-infection with a second virus called Herpes Simplex Type 8.

Wakefield decided to give some of the colon biopsy specimens to O'Leary who was able to show using a technique called PCR that the inflammatory bowel disease biopsies in these children contained the vaccine strain measles viruses. The live virus in the vaccine was

supposed to be weakened and not cause illness. This suggested that the children were not able to handle the viral particles and that it was causing an infection in their bowels, which also might have been affecting their central nervous system and causing the autistic features.

When this article was published, thousands of British parents started refusing the MMR and there were measles outbreaks. British health officials had their hands full. They decided to get the journal Lancet to withdraw the article and they actually got O'Leary to withdraw his research findings. I was following all of this closely and had actually met with O'Leary, and I had looked at his biopsy micrographs and his PCR findings. It certainly looked to me like the vaccine particles were causing the problem in these children, and I was surprised that O'Leary withdrew his assertions.

I then called O'Leary on the phone and asked him why he was doing this. There was a very long pregnant pause. He then said that it had taken him many years to get to the place where he was in the scientific community, and after another pause, he said he had four small children at home. I had small children at home myself at the time, and I understood what he was saying. If he didn't do it, he was going to be fired. He was going to be ruined.

British officials were not satisfied with just getting the journal to withdraw the article and getting Dr. O'Leary to withdraw his claims. They then decided to begin proceedings to take away Dr. Wakefield's medical license and one of his lead co-authors. Wakefield, by this time, had moved to the United States. To defend himself in court would have cost him hundreds of thousands of dollars, so he let them take his license away. But his lead co-author, Dr. Simon Murch, was still practicing medicine in England and decided to defend himself in court, and the government lost and they were not able to take his license away. If Wakefield had the money to defend himself, he would never have lost his license. The court documents clearly show that Wakefield and his co-authors had not done anything unethical or inappropriate, and their work was possibly valid.

But that was all big Pharma needed. They could go around saying it and feeding it to the media that the research had been withdrawn and that Wakefield lost his license. But I looked at the micrographs, and it indeed appeared like there was vaccine strain measles particles infecting the bowels of these kids.

The CDC was charged with the responsibility of repeating the Wakefield research and showing that the measles vaccine was safe, but they never did it the right way. They decided to do epidemiologic studies instead of a clinical study. Again, as in the mercury study, claims were made that indicators of there being a problem with MMR were present. CDC was accused again of changing the protocol and data analysis until the association went away.

Ironically, I talked with Wakefield after all of this was over. He agreed with me that we have to vaccinate our kids for measles. He thought the solution was to give the vaccine at a slightly older age, like they do in many European countries. Or, we might be able to do research and

figure out why some kids have a bad reaction to the MMR. Clearly, big Pharma didn't want me in the CDC investigating any of this.

There are a lot of additional ironies in all of this. I believe the CDC is mostly made up of good people who really care about public health for our nation, though its credibility has been seriously tarnished because of the failures in the way the COVID-19 crisis was managed. Around 40% of Democrats and 80% of Republicans don't trust the CDC. Many don't trust Pharma as well. I really wanted to try to make the CDC a better, more respected agency, and killing my nomination could likely have the opposite effect. Distrust may worsen.

I also have a lot of respect for the pharmaceutical industry. I practice internal medicine, and I use many medications in caring for my patients that were invented by American pharmaceutical companies. I can tell you firsthand they are very effective and help a lot of people. The new ones are outrageously expensive, but once they go off patent, they can become very affordable and very life-saving for many people with chronic and acute illnesses.

But, I unfortunately, am viewed very negatively by the industry that I use on a daily basis to help my patients. Bobby Kennedy is a good man who really is passionate about improving the health of the American people. President Trump did a good thing in making him Secretary of HHS. Hopefully they can find someone for CDC who can survive the confirmation process and get past Pharma and find some answers.