

CDC Used Same PR Firm as Pfizer, Moderna — Prompting Demand for Transparency

Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) this week demanded the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention turn over documents related to the agency's contract with a New York-based public relations firm that also represented Pfizer and Moderna.

By [Suzanne Burdick, Ph.D.](#)

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Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) this week demanded the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [turn over documents](#) related to the agency's contract with a New York-based public relations firm that also represented Pfizer and Moderna.

The demand followed revelations that the CDC contracted with [Weber Shandwick](#) to provide marketing services to the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD) — the division of the CDC responsible for providing management and support to the agency's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), which issues recommendations to the CDC on vaccines including the [COVID-19](#) vaccine.

The CDC on Sept. 28, 2020, awarded a federal contract to Weber Shandwick to “conduct marketing consulting services” for the NCIRD, Paul said. The CDC twice extended the contract, as recently as August this year, Paul said.

According to [USAspending](#), Weber's contract with the CDC is worth up to \$55.2 million — and is paid partially using COVID-19 emergency funds, Paul said.

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In a [letter to CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky](#), Paul wrote:

“According to reports, Weber's work on behalf of NCIRD includes promoting vaccines and communicating the risks and recommended actions for outbreaks. Weber is responsible for providing NCIRD with ‘10 on-site health communications staffers, seven health comms specialists, two health research specialists and one social media specialist.’

“Weber's strategic communications will include ‘generating story ideas, distributing articles and conducting outreach to news, media and entertainment organizations.’”

Paul demanded the following information Nov. 7 at 5 p.m.:

- Unredacted copies of the CDC's contract award with Weber Shandwick.
- Unredacted copies of all offers received for the CDC [Solicitation ID 75D301-20-Q-71336](#).
- Unredacted copies of records relating to any “conflict of interest evaluation of Weber Shandwick” as it relates to its contract with the CDC.
- The names of all individuals who work for the CDC's NCIRD under the Weber Shandwick contract award and their “place of performance.”

- Unredacted copies of “any record relating to work performed under the Weber Shandwick contract award for ACIP, including communication, talking points, memorandum, and background material.”

For any document the CDC does not produce, the agency should “include a justification and citation of the legal authority that authorizes the withholding of the document from Congress.”

“The American people have a right to a transparent and open government,” Paul added.

Weber ‘embedded’ staff within the CDC to promote shots, says Paul

Citing the work of investigative reporter Paul D. Thacker, Paul said Weber “[embedded staff](#)” within the CDC to “promote vaccines and provide communications services” related to COVID-19 — while “simultaneously representing the interest of [Pfizer-BioNTech](#) and [Moderna](#).”

The two pharmaceutical companies sought and gained U.S. government approval of their COVID-19 vaccines. In December 2020, the ACIP recommended the use of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for those ages 16 years and up and recommended the use of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine for those 18 and older.

Since then, the ACIP has recommended Pfizer and Moderna’s COVID-19 vaccines for the majority of the U.S. population, including children and infants as young as 6 months old. It also recommended Pfizer and Moderna’s COVID-19 booster shots, including the [new bivalent boosters](#).

“Weber’s simultaneous work for the NCIRD, Pfizer-BioNTech, and Moderna raises serious concerns about the independence of CDC and ACIP’s vaccine recommendations,” Paul said.

In 2020, Weber Shandwick also won an up to \$50 million contract from the U.S. government to [promote flu vaccines](#) to the public.

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