

Senator Demands Answers from CDC Over Ties to Pfizer, Moderna PR Firm Embedded in Agency to Promote COVID Vaccines



Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky) is grilling the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) after discovering it contracted with the same public relations firm representing Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna to promote vaccines.

In an Oct. 24 [letter](#) to the CDC, Rand Paul said the revelation raises serious concerns about conflicts of interest related to the agency's recommendations on COVID-19 vaccines and requested unredacted documents relating to its federal contract with public relations firm Weber Shandwick.

According to USASpending.gov, Weber has a contract with the CDC worth \$55.2 million that's at least partially funded by COVID-19 emergency funds. Since the initial award, CDC has

extended Weber's contract twice, most recently in August 2022.

According to Paul, on Sept. 28, 2020, the CDC awarded a federal contract to Weber Shandwick to "conduct marketing consulting services for the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD)." In addition, NCIRD provides management support services to the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), which issues recommendations on COVID-19 vaccines.

Weber's responsibilities include promoting vaccines, "communicating the risks and recommended actions for outbreaks," and providing the 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 include "generating story ideas, distributing articles and conducting outreach to news, media and entertainment organizations," conducting target audience research and developing and implementing plans to target healthcare providers.

"Weber embedded staff within CDC to promote vaccines and provide communications services related to COVID-19 while simultaneously representing the interests of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, two pharmaceutical companies actively seeking federal approval of their respective COVID-19 vaccines," Paul wrote.

"Weber's simultaneous work for the NCRID, Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna raises serious concerns about the independence of CDC and ACIP's vaccine recommendations," he added.

In his [letter](#), Paul requested unredacted copies of the CDC's contract with Weber Shandwick and all exercised options, unredacted copies of any records relating to any conflict of interest evaluation of Weber Shandwick, names of all individuals performing work for NCRID under the Weber Shandwick contract, communications between Weber Shandwick and

the CDC, unredacted copies of any records for work performed for the ACIP, including communications, talking points, memorandum and background material.

During the period Weber Shandwick has been working with the CDC, ACIP has recommended the use of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for individuals 16 and older, Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine for those 18 and older, Pfizer and Moderna's COVID-19 vaccines for the general population, including children as young as six months and signed off on Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna's boosters.

Paul said he believes Americans have the right to an open and transparent government. However, whether the CDC has complied with Paul's request is unknown.