

# Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

July 25, 2022

Delivered via E-Mail

The Honorable Christi Grimm  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
330 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Congress has passed five bipartisan COVID-19 relief bills totaling \$3.496 trillion.<sup>1</sup> On March 11, 2021, President Biden signed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan that was pushed through Congress on a partisan basis, rejecting the bipartisan approach of the prior five COVID-19 relief bills.<sup>2</sup> Recently, it has been reported that the Biden administration and Congressional Democrats are pursuing yet another partisan spending bill<sup>3</sup>, despite record levels of inflation and billions of unspent dollars in COVID-19 relief funds.<sup>4</sup> To date, the Biden administration's accounting of how it spent trillions of dollars in past COVID-19 relief funding has been inadequate.

As part of Congress's effort to understand exactly how the Biden administration spent COVID-19 relief money, we request an audit of a \$10 billion COVID-19 vaccine public education campaign launched by the Biden administration and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

On March 25, 2021, less than two weeks after the American Rescue Plan was signed into law, the Biden administration announced this \$10 billion campaign to expand access to COVID-19 vaccines and strengthening vaccine confidence.<sup>5</sup> The campaign was primarily funded through the American Rescue Plan and administered by HHS and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It committed at least \$3 billion dollars to vaccine confidence efforts with funding going to, among other recipients, "community based organizations" to support "launching new programs and initiatives intended to increase vaccine access, acceptance, and uptake."<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46449>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1319/text>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2022/07/10/democrats-manchin-spending-deal/>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://republicans-budget.house.gov/press-release/having-sparked-the-worst-inflation-in-40-years-and-billions-in-waste-biden-administration-continues-big-spending-with-american-rescue-plan-funds/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/25/fact-sheet-biden-administration-announces-historic-10-billion-investment-to-expand-access-to-covid-19-vaccines-and-build-vaccine-confidence-in-hardest-hit-and-highest-risk-communities/>

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

The Honorable Christi Grimm  
July 25, 2022  
Page 2

According to the White House press release, HHS and CDC planned to start making awards in early April, 2021.<sup>7</sup>

On April 1, 2021, HHS announced the launch of the COVID-19 Community Corps (Corps), described as:

HHS is launching a nationwide, grassroots network of local voices and trusted community leaders to encourage vaccinations, with more than 275 founding member organizations that have the ability to reach millions of Americans. This effort will mobilize health professionals, scientists, community organizations, faith leaders, businesses, rural stakeholders, civil rights organizations, sports leagues and athletes, and Americans from all walks of life to become leaders within their own communities to help get friends, family, and neighbors vaccinated. A full list of founding members can be found at the end of this fact sheet.<sup>8</sup>

The Corps is a high-profile program with the support of many senior Biden administration officials. The inaugural meeting was held for the Corps' "founding members" and attended by Vice President Kamala Harris and Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy.<sup>9</sup> The April 1, 2021 press release also named Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, then-National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Francis Collins, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Director Anthony Fauci, Senior Advisor to the White House COVID-19 Response Team and Chair of the Presidential COVID-19 Equity Task Force Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, and CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky as co-chairs for HHS's broader public education efforts. Vice President Harris was identified as "championing the next phase of the [public education] effort from the White House."

Many of the individuals and groups listed are appropriate for a government funded, non-partisan, vaccine public education campaign. There are celebrities, sports leagues, colleges, veterans associations, business groups, religious organizations, and civil society groups. Participation by these groups does not seem unexpected or inappropriate.

However, a substantial number of partisan political advocacy organizations, trade unions, and non-profits allied to and supportive of the Biden administration are also participating in the Corps. Collectively, these groups and their members have donated hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of volunteer hours to the Biden-Harris 2020 presidential campaign, Democrat politicians, and other partisan causes. Many of their employees are now political appointees in the Biden administration. Such groups include: Nurses for Biden Harris, Planned Parenthood,

---

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/04/01/hhs-launches-nationwide-network-trusted-voices-encourage-vaccination-next-phase-covid-19-public-education-campaign.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/04/01/hhs-launches-nationwide-network-trusted-voices-encourage-vaccination-next-phase-covid-19-public-education-campaign.html>

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Center for American Progress, and the Sierra Club.

Of particular note is the involvement of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT<sup>§</sup>) and National Education Association (NEA). Both groups are close allies of President Biden. They enjoyed tremendous access and influence over the CDC as the agency drafted its widely-criticized school re-opening guidance.<sup>10</sup> The resulting guidance incorporated several AFT recommendations and if implemented would have closed over 90 percent of schools then open for in-person instruction.<sup>11</sup> Thankfully, most school districts ignored the CDC and remained open. Including these groups in a \$10 billion government funded public relations campaign raises serious ethical concerns given their close affiliation with the Biden-Harris presidential campaign and the Democrat Party.

Even more troubling is the participation of highly partisan, advocacy non-profits and political consulting firms, who are heavily involved in campaigns to elect progressive politicians and advance partisan political agendas. Some are openly partisan in their support for the Biden administration and the Democrat Party and expressly exist to defeat Republican politicians. Many of these groups process donations through ActBlue, a nonprofit fundraising platform available only to “Democratic candidates and committees, progressive organizations, and nonprofits that share our values.”<sup>12</sup> These groups emphasize their ability to advance progressive and liberal candidates by building up contact information on voters for political outreach, mobilizing activists for canvassing and rallies, and using advanced data analytics. Such groups include:

- **Nextgen America.** A non-profit 501(c)(4) founded by billionaire and former 2020 Democrat Presidential candidate Tom Steyer. Nextgen describes itself as “the nation’s largest youth voter organization, mobilizing millions of young people each year to support progressive candidates up and down the ballot.”<sup>13</sup>
- **Indivisible.** A network of non-profits, including a political action committee, that describes itself as a “movement of thousands of group leaders and more than a million members taking regular, iterative, and increasingly complex actions to resist the GOPs agenda, elect local champions, and fight for progressive policies.” Indivisible believes the United States is a “sick democracy” that is “rigged from the start in favor of the white and wealthy” and that “in the last few decades, an alliance of white nationalists and the ultra-rich have been actively working to further undermine democracy and cement their hold on power permanently.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup><https://www.collins.senate.gov/newsroom/collins-burr-press-cdc-director-inconsistencies-about-teachers%E2%80%99-union-influence-school>

<sup>11</sup><https://www.cnbc.com/2021/02/18/cdcs-classroom-guidance-would-keep-90percent-of-schools-at-least-partially-closed.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://secure.actblue.com/about>

<sup>13</sup> <https://nextgenamerica.org/who-we-are/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://indivisible.org/about>

- **Data for Progress.** A “progressive think tank and polling firm” that uses “state-of-the-art techniques in data science to support progressive activists and causes.”<sup>15</sup> Data for Progress asserts that their work was essential in passing the American Rescue Plan through Congress and that they have “helped elect national progressives to office” and “collaborated with them on policy.”<sup>16</sup>
- **Democracy Partners.** A “premier policy and political consulting firm,” that provides a wide range of services from electoral campaign planning to fundraising and opposition research.<sup>17</sup> The firm’s post-2020 election “Victories Press Release” quotes a firm partner as saying:

We are proud that many of the members of Democracy Partners made major contributions to the massive movement that defeated Donald Trump, put Joe Biden in the White House and allowed Democrats to win majorities in both houses of Congress. Now we are working with progressive organizations throughout the country to convert these victories into real progressive change that qualitatively improves the lives of ordinary Americans.

- **Blue Future.** A collaborative project of the Youth Progressive Action Catalyst, which claims to be “the largest progressive youth-led, political action committee in America,” and the Progressive Leadership Initiative, a 501(c)(4).<sup>18</sup> Blue Future pays and trains “youth organizers” to work on campaigns for politically progressive issues and candidates. Its website includes testimonials from Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senator Bernie Sanders, and House Democratic Caucus Chair Hakeem Jefferies. Blue Futures claims that it flipped 17 of 20 congressional districts that it targeted in the 2020 election and mobilized 2,200 volunteers for campaigns since 2018.
- **Movement Labs.** Formerly known as Resistance Labs and founded in 2017, Movement Labs provides mass-texting services for Democrat campaigns. It advertises as specializing in combining, “data, technology and experimental methods with an army of passionate volunteers to build power” and claims to have “sent over 200 million texts, worked with some of the nation’s top progressive organizations and campaigns in all 50 states and mobilized over 11,000 volunteers for change.”<sup>19</sup>

It is incredible that HHS and the Biden administration would partner with partisan political organizations and Democrat-affiliated campaign consultants on a \$10 billion taxpayer funded

---

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.dataforprogress.org/about>

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> <https://democracypartners.com/sites/default/files/DP%202020%20Victories%20press%20release.pdf>; see also <https://www.democracypartners.com/#services>

<sup>18</sup> <https://ourbluefuture.us/about-us/about-us/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://movementlabs.com/about/>

The Honorable Christi Grimm  
July 25, 2022  
Page 5

vaccine confidence public education campaign, ostensibly intended to appeal to all Americans. It is not clear from publicly available information exactly what these groups do and what benefits they may derive from being a “founding member” of the COVID-19 Community Corps.

Therefore, we request an audit and investigation into this program. Specifically, we have two major concerns that we request you investigate about the so-called “founding members.”

First, we are concerned that some of these “founding members” may inappropriately receive direct or indirect funding and support from HHS for partisan activities. During a typical election year, these groups mobilize thousands of volunteers and paid activists on behalf of Democrat Party politicians and partisan progressive campaigns. In addition to direct federal funding, state and local governments have received billions of dollars in grant funding for COVID-19 response activities, including contact tracing and public outreach campaigns. Beyond investigating whether these groups receive direct federal funding, we request that you investigate whether these “founding sponsors” receive any preferential treatment, referrals, or other advantages when state and local governments sub-contract for COVID-19 education activities.

Second, HHS’s agencies contain or have access to vast amounts of personally identifiable information on hundreds of millions of Americans. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) provides health insurance for nearly one out of every three Americans. The CDC has access to state and local public records and hospital administration data. The Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) funds clinics that treat millions of Americans annually. In addition to personally identifiable data held by HHS, the Corps accepts volunteers who sign up to get information on how they can promote vaccination in their communities.

Many of the partisan organizations listed as “founding members” collect and analyze individuals’ personal data to maximize the effectiveness of their outreach on behalf of the politicians and activist causes they support. It would be inappropriate for such groups to have access to the personal information of the hundreds of millions of Americans who interact with HHS agencies.

We request that you initiate an audit and investigation of the HHS COVID-19 Communicators program and related public relations campaigns with a specific focus on the whether “founding members” received government funding or access to Americans’ personal information. We respectfully ask that your review of this matter be expedited and that you brief the signatories on your preliminary findings as soon as possible.

The Honorable Christi Grimm  
July 25, 2022  
Page 6

We appreciate your prompt attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions



Cathy McMorris Rogers  
Republican Leader  
Committee on Energy and Commerce



James M. Inhofe  
United States Senator



H. Morgan Griffith  
Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations  
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Rand Paul, M.D.  
United States Senator



Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Health  
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Tim Scott  
United States Senator



Mitt Romney  
United States Senator

The Honorable Christi Grimm  
July 25, 2022  
Page 7



Roger Marshall, M.D.  
United States Senator



Tommy Tuberville  
United States Senator