

TO: HELP Committee Member Staff
FROM: HELP Committee Minority Staff
RE: Emails Revealing Secretary Kennedy's Politicization of CDC
DATE: June 23, 2026

This memo, and the attached documents, provide new and important background on the decisions by Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. that have resulted in political control over public health systems at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). They also reveal previously unknown information about Secretary Kennedy's quest for evidence of a link between vaccines and autism—a search he entrusted to a disgraced researcher without proper clearance to review sensitive data or any limitations on his access.

SUMMARY

On August 27, 2025, Secretary Kennedy fired CDC Director Susan Monarez for failing to pre-approve the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendations “regardless of the scientific evidence.” Dr. Deb Houry, then-Chief Medical Officer at the CDC, resigned in response. On September 17, 2025, Dr. Monarez and Dr. Houry [testified](#) before the HELP Committee about these events.

Following the hearing, Ranking Member Sanders sent a private letter to Dr. Houry requesting documents related to Secretary Kennedy's politicization of the CDC. Dr. Houry provided HELP Committee Minority staff with emails from January 2025 to August 2025.

Secretary Kennedy has [repeatedly maintained](#) that he is freeing CDC from political influence and promoting radical transparency to restore [trust](#) in the agency. This is not true. His dogged pursuit of a war on science has prioritized politics over public health, ignored expert guidance, and endangered people, particularly children. The emails obtained further demonstrate how this operates in practice:

- Secretary Kennedy's chief of staff explicitly demanded CDC staff subject decisions to political review.
- Secretary Kennedy did not seek out expert recommendations or advice prior to making decisions or circulating information about vaccines to the public.
- Secretary Kennedy called for the cancellation of public health campaigns related to vaccines and wasted agency resources to obtain data to demonstrate the long-unproven link between vaccines and autism.
- Secretary Kennedy directed ACIP actions to undermine access to vaccines.

NOTABLE EMAILS

Just days before firing then-CDC Director Susan Monarez, Secretary Kennedy's chief of staff stated that all major decisions would need to be reviewed by political leadership.

- On August 19, 2025, Matthew Buckham, then-Chief of Staff to Secretary Kennedy, emailed CDC Director Monarez: “I wanted to elevate the absolute need for political review of major decisions at CDC. . . . we want to ensure that [the Immediate Office of the Secretary] and CDC political leadership all have eyes on the decisions for approval/changes before they go into effect. . . . Make America Great!” (Document G2-2)

- During a hearing with Secretary Kennedy in April 2026, Chairman Cassidy asked whether the new CDC Director will have the right to make decisions independently of political appointees, replace them, or reassign them. Secretary Kennedy [stated](#), “your characterization of political appointees is wrong, and the CDC director has that power.”¹

Secretary Kennedy altered COVID-19 vaccine recommendations without input from CDC officials.

- On May 27, 2025, Secretary Kennedy announced, in a [video](#) posted on X, that COVID-19 vaccines would no longer be recommended for healthy children and pregnant women. CDC staff appeared to be unaware that the announcement was coming and had no written directive to operationalize the announcement. (B1-5)
- On June 6, CDC officials provided data on the COVID vaccine recommendation for pregnant women and asked for the decision to be revisited. (B2-1)
- On June 8, CDC staff indicated that HHS distributed an FAQ to Congressional staff, regarding the Secretary’s directive that had not been reviewed by subject matter experts at CDC. In response, CDC officials provided data on the COVID vaccine for children and pregnant women following the Secretary’s announcement. (B2-6)
- Notably, in September 2025, Secretary Kennedy testified before the Senate Finance Committee. Senator Hassan asked the Secretary about why he “unilaterally changes the parameters for giving [COVID] vaccines.” The Secretary called it “[crazy talk](#).”²

HHS circulated materials to the public without vetting from subject matter experts.

- On April 17, 2025, following a press conference by Secretary Kennedy about CDC data on autism rates, CDC staff indicated there were “irregularities” in what was presented and stated that prior administrations would send talking points and slides to programs for expert review. (H3)
- On April 30, Secretary Kennedy [stated](#) that “the [Measles, Mumps, Rubella] vaccine contains a lot of aborted fetus debris and DNA particles.” On May 1, in an email with the subject line “if helpful- re vaccines,” suggesting it was unsolicited, Dr. Houry provided information about fetal cells in vaccines to CDC political appointees. (D1-1)
- In a [post](#) on X on June 7, 2025, Secretary Kennedy made a number of claims about Vaccine Safety Datalink, which monitors vaccine safety and investigates adverse reactions, and conclusions about vaccine safety. The following day, CDC staff provided talking points and data to correct some of the misinformation contained in that post. (E2)
- Secretary Kennedy appeared on Fox News and discussed transferring the vaccine injury compensation program, which is currently implemented by HRSA, to CDC without discussing that plan with staff at CDC. CDC staff outlined concerns regarding real or perceived conflicts of interest of such a move, misperception by the public that vaccines are not safe, and challenges with implementation. (H5)

¹ S. Comm on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Hearing on Fiscal Year 2027 Department of Health and Human Services Budget (Apr. 22, 2026), at 0:37:03–37:06.

² S. Comm on Finance, The President’s 2026 Health Care Agenda (Sept. 5, 2025), at 2:01:53–02:08.

Secretary Kennedy directed the cancellation of flu vaccine campaigns.

- In one email, a CDC staffer wrote: “Andrew Nixon/HHS gave me a call and asked that we pull out of circulation all campaign ad buys related to flu or anything encouraging shots or vaccinations. He said this request came directly from the secretary.” (C1-2)
- Andrew Nixon, Director of Communications, confirmed this in his own email to the same staffer: “This was a direct ask from Secretary Kennedy.” (C2-3)

Secretary Kennedy directed staff to seek data to undermine the long-proven understanding that vaccines do not cause autism, despite privacy and ethics concerns.

- On March 18, 2025, then-Acting CDC Director Susan Monarez indicated that David Geier “needs access to [Vaccine Safety Datalink (VSD)] data.” (F1-13)
- Geier has been [barred](#) from accessing VSD at least twice for misuse of data.
- As of April 3, 2025, CDC staff did not have confirmation that David Geier had obtained a scientific ethics verification number or taken required training to access CDC research data sets. (E1)
- On July 9, 2025, Hannah Anderson, then-deputy chief of staff for Secretary Kennedy, informed staff that she was responsible for overseeing Geier’s work. (F5-1)
- On July 14, 2025, CDC staff indicated that David Geier, “acting as the direct agent of the Secretary,” would not be signing an assurance of confidentiality, nor had he identified a study question or proposed protocol prior to accessing VSD data. (F2-1). In September, Secretary Kennedy [indicated](#) to Senator Luján during a hearing in the Senate Finance Committee that the protocols for Geier’s study were public.
- Reyn Archer, counselor to the secretary, stated that “the Secretary wants to buy all the VSD data and put it in the office of the Secretary.” (F3-2)

Secretary Kennedy and political staff actively worked to link autism and the MMR vaccine, despite the need to dedicate CDC resources to the ongoing measles outbreak response.

- In June, William Thompson sought source data from a 2004 [study](#) by Dr. Frank DeStefano that found no connection between the MMR vaccine and autism. Thompson indicates that the data from the DeStefano study were obtained from school vaccines records. Thompson indicated that it was “a high priority for Secretary Kennedy” to access the source and control data for the study. Thompson also states that Secretary Kennedy is interested in having staff “examine isolated autism cases more closely using the DeStefano study data.” Secretary Kennedy is cc’d on the email and responds. (G6)
- In August, Reyn Archer asked for data from the DeStefano study to be released to a researcher, Daniel O’Connor. (G3)
- In an email with the subject line “Measles data 2010-present,” a CDC political appointee, Stuart Burns, pushed for a very quick deadline to release that data, despite Dr. Houry’s concerns about staff capacity. Dr. Houry stated, “The active measles response has to take priority.” (D2-1)

Advisors to Secretary Kennedy sought information about what needs to happen to remove vaccines from the Vaccines for Children program.

- CDC’s Vaccines for Children program [provides](#) vaccines at no-cost to eligible children. The program automatically covers vaccines recommended by ACIP. On March 30, 2025, Ken Callahan, then-Senior Advisor to Secretary Kennedy, asks, “What legally needs to

happen or should be considered if a vaccine is going to be removed from the VFC program at CDC?” (H4). HHS announced firings of all 17 ACIP members on June 9, 2025.

- On January 29, 2025, Secretary Kennedy told Senator Wyden: “I will do nothing as HHS Secretary that makes it difficult or discourages people from taking vaccines.”

Secretary Kennedy directed ACIP’s membership, agenda, and votes.

- Then-Deputy Chief of Staff Hannah Anderson sent an email to Reyn Archer on May 19 that stated, “Bobby has asked for the following changes to be made for the next ACIP meeting” and listed replacing 10 members, adding votes on joint-decision making for hepatitis B and multi-dose flu for pregnant women and children, the return of a 7-year review and biannual report on vaccines, and review of the definition of vaccines. (A17-1)
- This is substantiated from internal notes from a CDC meeting on the same day that indicate that the Secretary was seeking to replace ACIP members without consultation from CDC. He was also seeking to ensure the agenda for the next ACIP meeting included the elimination of hepatitis B birth dose. (A17-19)
- That same day, HHS emailed a list of new members to CDC staff, and the CDC team responsible for reviewing conflicts of interest appeared to be unaware of their selection. (A17-12)
- On June 16, 2025, Stuart Burns wrote that he was hearing an interest “in having ACIP votes to recommend only thimerosal free flu vaccine to pregnant women and children 12 and under” from the secretary’s office. CDC staff indicated that it was unusual, and potentially illegal, to hold a vote without prior review of the evidence. (A18-3)

ACIP Working Group materials were released without edits by CDC’s Office of General Counsel (OGC).

- “...while OGC reviewed earlier drafts of the Terms of Reference for the COVID-19 Work Group, we did not see the final nor clear it. In its reviews, OGC expressed legal concerns regarding the proposed role of the Work Group Chair relative to that of the committee [Designated Federal Officer] and Work Group Lead given FACA’s clear statutory provisions that the agency maintains responsibility to define agendas/scops of topics addressed and membership...those legal concerns remain.” (A12-2)