

White House Withdraws Weldon as CDC Nominee

Medical doctor and former GOP congressman had doubted vaccine safety

**By Liz Essley Whyte, Natalie Andrews and Lindsay Wise
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The White House withdrew President Trump's nominee to lead the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a rare change in plans to fill top roles with candidates who have mostly won approval.

Senators told the Trump administration that Dr. Dave Weldon didn't have the votes to be confirmed, a Republican familiar with the discussions said. White House officials told Weldon on Wednesday evening that they planned to withdraw his nomination.

But Weldon believed his confirmation hearing by a Senate health committee would proceed on Thursday. He was driving to the Capitol when a Wall Street Journal reporter called and asked him about the withdrawal.

Weldon said he spoke with Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., "who was very upset" about plans to end Weldon's candidacy.

"He said I was the perfect person for the job," Weldon said.

Weldon said Kennedy told him Sen. Susan Collins (R., Maine) told Kennedy at a breakfast that she was considering voting no on Weldon.

Weldon said he had a good meeting with Collins followed by a contentious meeting with her staff, who questioned his views on vaccines.

Collins said she hadn't expressed her concerns to the White House and hadn't reached a final judgment. "I had reservations about the nominee, but I wanted to give him the opportunity to answer questions in a public forum," she said.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R., Alaska) said she had concerns about Weldon related to vaccines and had shared those concerns with him and the White House.

Weldon's meetings with other senators also went poorly, people familiar with the conversations said. Weldon arranged some of the meetings himself instead of relying on presidential transition staff, people familiar with the meetings said.

Weldon told staff for Senate Republicans in one meeting that he would have to get to the CDC before creating a vision for how to lead it, a person familiar with the discussion said. He said that he hadn't reviewed public information on the CDC's budgets and priorities because he was busy transferring patients in his medical practice to other doctors.

"Those people came loaded for bear and started ripping into me from the start," Weldon said in a text message. "Very nasty what they were trying to do."

Previously, Weldon said Sen. Bill Cassidy (R., La.) had asked for his nomination to be withdrawn. "He was a big problem and losing Collins too was clearly too much for the White House," Weldon said.

Cassidy declined to comment on Thursday on whether he would have voted against Weldon's confirmation. "The White House made the call," Cassidy told reporters at the Capitol.

In a statement, Cassidy said that "his poor response to the situation shows that the pressures of being CDC director would have been too much."

The White House has pushed lawmakers to back even controversial nominees, buttressed by the enthusiasm of ardent Trump supporters among the public. Most of those nominees have sailed through the Senate, with the exception of the withdrawn nomination of former Republican Congressman Matt Gaetz for attorney general.

Axios earlier reported that the White House would withdraw Weldon's nomination to lead the CDC.

Weldon, a former Republican Congressman who has expressed skepticism about vaccine safety in the past, is an internist who served in Congress from 1995 to 2009 representing Florida's 15th congressional district. He has since been in private practice.

It was to have been the first time a CDC nominee faced Senate confirmation after Congress in recent years added the requirement for leaders of the agency responsible for investigating infectious disease and guarding public health.

The CDC, with roughly 10,000 employees, is a division of the Department of Health and Human Services [overseen by Kennedy](#). Kennedy and Weldon have both

questioned vaccine safety in the past. Kennedy [backed vaccines](#) in his own confirmation hearings this year. Since he has taken charge of HHS, the department [has scuttled meetings](#) of infectious-disease experts and begun scrutinizing vaccine contracts.

Weldon in 2007 introduced a bill that would have moved some responsibility for vaccine-safety research from the CDC to an independent HHS office. He suggested in congressional testimony in 2002 that vaccines might cause autism. Many large studies have [established no link](#) between vaccines and autism.

Weldon told Sen. Patty Murray (D., Wash.) in February that he was concerned that vaccines could be causing toxic buildups of mercury in children, a person familiar with the conversation said. Weldon subsequently struck a more moderate tone on vaccines in meetings with senators, people familiar with the conversations said.

Murray wrote Thursday on X: “During one of the worst measles outbreaks in years because of Trump, Weldon should NEVER have even been under consideration to lead CDC.”

Vaccine skeptics have made the mercury claim since the 1990s. Thimerosal, a form of mercury used as a preservative in some shots, was removed from childhood vaccines in 2001 out of an abundance of caution, scientists have said.

Trump’s other picks to [lead agencies](#) within the health department include Dr. Marty Makary, a Johns Hopkins surgeon, to lead the Food and Drug Administration; Dr. Jay Bhattacharya of Stanford University, to [lead the National Institutes of Health](#); and Mehmet Oz, a heart surgeon best known as the host of TV’s “The Dr. Oz Show,” to lead the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Each would need to be confirmed by a majority vote in the Senate. Republicans have 53 seats there to the Democrats’ 47 seats.