

Letter to the Editor: Informed Choice

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My name is Blake Rosso, DC, and this letter is written in opposition to LD798, a proposed bill that would remove vaccination exemptions on philosophical and religious grounds for Maine citizens.

The majority of doctors who testified against LD798 are not against vaccination in principle. A number of them spoke up because they are opposed to the influence that the vaccine industry has on US vaccination policy. This influence is far-reaching and involves U.S. politicians, the U.S. research community, the media, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The CDC is the government agency in charge of setting the vaccination schedule for the United States. Dr. Julie Gerberding was the head of the CDC from 2002-2009. After completing her stint with the U.S. government, Dr. Gerberding waited the 12 months required by law, then immediately took a position with Merck, as president of the company's vaccine division. Merck is the largest producer of vaccines in the world, and at the time of Dr. Gerberding's hiring, the company marketed 11 of the 17 vaccines recommended by the CDC.

Vaccine producers like Merck and GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) each spend between 4 and 10 million dollars per year, lobbying the U.S. government and funding political campaigns of politicians who will eventually help shape vaccination policy. Every year, the U.S. government turns that money around and purchases vaccines directly from these same corporations. In 2017, vaccine sales totaled \$6.5 billion dollars for Merck, and \$7 billion dollars for GSK.

Pharmaceutical corporations also regularly approach and influence the university labs that are responsible for testing new products before they hit the American market. To understand the scope of this problem, I encourage you to read this article published in the June/July 2017 edition of the Atlantic, "Universities Get an Education in Private Industry." Legislation has recently been floated that if passed, would require pharmaceutical companies to only pay universities for research that comes back with favorable results for production.

Furthermore, the CDC has a foundation in place (The CDC Foundation) that raises private funds from corporations like Merck to support federal biomedical and health research. Much of that research is then used to recommend public policy. The National Institutes of Health also has a foundation in place that serves the same purpose. Collectively, these two foundations have raised over \$2 billion dollars in the last quarter century.

When all of these pieces come together, it results in the U.S. having one of the most extensive vaccination schedules in the world. Kids today receive nearly three times the number of vaccine doses as did kids in the 1980s. All of the doctors and Ph.Ds who testified against LD798 consider this schedule excessive.

The CDC currently recommends vaccinations for 16 different illnesses, in multiple doses, from the day a child is born, until he or she turns 18. There is a lack of quality observational studies in the literature regarding the consequences of asking young immune systems to mount simultaneous immune responses, to that number of antigens, for that length of time. We simply do not know all the ways in which this type of vaccine scheduling impacts the human immune system. What we do know is that rates for many autoimmune disorders in America are at all-time highs. Conveniently, vaccine producers such as Merck make the drugs to treat those disorders as well.

Mainstream media, which takes in billions of dollars per year in advertisement income from the pharmaceutical industry, will not cover this story. Instead, they sensationalize reports of measles outbreaks — a household illness with an extremely low mortality rate — and in some cases, follow those reports up with advice from TV anchors to vaccinate your children.

Social media is following suit. Facebook is taking steps to limit vaccine “misinformation” on their platform. After urging from a member of Congress, YouTube has begun removing advertisements from videos containing anti-vaccination content. Amazon has removed a short list of videos and books on the subject. How you view these actions taken by the U.S. tech giants most likely depends on which side of the vaccination debate you fall on.

The purpose of this letter is not to question the historical validity of vaccines in principle. I am in no way advising people on whether or not to vaccinate their children. I am writing to encourage people to think for themselves about some of the broader issues surrounding the introduction of LD798.

Government mandates remove personal freedoms. Which freedoms are the people of Maine willing to give up? At what cost? And for what reasons?

In conclusion, it is my hope that the U.S. healthcare community will come together on this issue and stand up with the American public to demand higher ethical standards for our government officials, the research community, the CDC, the media, and this multibillion dollar vaccine industry.

If approved, LD798 would grant the vaccine corporations — a group that has been given complete liability protection by our government — a captive market to push their product onto. In my opinion, that is not an acceptable way forward. This bill should be opposed, tooth and nail, by every person in this state who values the freedom of informed choice as it relates to healthcare. If this resonates with you, please contact your state representatives and let your voice be heard.

The views expressed above are mine alone and do not represent any professional offices that I am affiliated with.

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