Concerns About Robert Redfield for CDC

Nominated to head the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Redfield has close ties with anti-gay and anti-PLHIV activists.

March 20, 2018 By Sean Strub

Donald Trump has nominated Dr. Robert Redfield to head the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In the early ’90s, Dr. Redfield was accused of scientific fraud by the U.S. Army concerning AIDS vaccine research, which is cause for some concern. He was ultimately exonerated, but Public Citizen and others considered their investigation to be a “whitewash.” I am sure he will get asked questions about that episode.

However, I am more concerned about his intimate, decades-long relationship with the leaders of the organization the Army criticized him for having an “inappropriate close relationship” with, that led to those scientific fraud charges, than I am with the fraud charges themselves.

That organization is “Americans for a Sound AIDS Policy” (ASAP), founded and led by ultra-right conservative anti-gay activists Shepherd and Anita Smith. ASAP became the Children’s AIDS Fund, now Children’s AIDS Fund International (CAFI). They have had an insidious effect on HIV prevention efforts around the world (especially in Africa).

Dr. Redfield has been one of if not their closest allies in government; he served on ASAP’s board and he still serves on CAFI’s board today. The Smiths, their organizations and their ultra-right “Christian” activism are largely unknown to the public, but they have been a powerful behind-the-scenes player, currying favor with HIV policy leaders in government in large part because of their ability to deliver evangelical/Christian Right votes in Congress for appropriations.

They first hit my radar screen more than 30 years ago—in the mid 1980s—when they were one of the initial 11 grantees of the “America Responds to AIDS” program, receiving a $300,000 grant from the CDC for HIV prevention work in “faith-based communities.”

Since then, they have received millions and millions to support their anti-gay and anti-PLHIV agenda. They were one of the most influential private organizations behind pushing for mandatory HIV testing in the 1980s and early ’90s and abstinence-only HIV prevention education. More recently, they have been powerful advocates for the anti-prostitution restrictions with PEPFAR funding. The New York Times reports that Dr. Redfield supported mandatory testing as well.

They also opposed home HIV testing—I debated Shepherd Smith at the National Press Club on that topic—because they didn't want the government to have the names of all who test positive (they also lobbied for mandatory names reporting, a battle they largely won that I believe has worsened the epidemic). Shepherd Smith was also on the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) committee that created the "model" HIV criminalization statute in the early '90s and successfully lobbied for states to pass it.

They were the strategists behind the exploitation of Kimberly Bergalis, the woman in Florida who supposedly got HIV from her dentist. They dragged her, nearing death, to testify before Congress in favor of mandatory testing of health care workers.

And they are still active, getting millions of dollars in funding.

Below are some links about ASAP and CAFI (on whose board Redfield still serves), as well as two links specific to the fraud allegations against Dr. Redfield. The Army's investigation ultimately exonerated him, but Public Citizen and others considered that investigation to be a whitewash.

I think there are many questions that need to be answered by Dr. Redfield.

– Sean

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https://www.thenation.com/article/anti-gay-anti-choice-childrens-aids-fund-still-raking-taxpayer-money/

> CAF founders Shepherd and Anita Smith] have been vehement foes of what they see as the corrupting influence of LGBT organizations in the field of AIDS relief. In a 2001 speech to the conservative Christian group Concerned Women for America (CWA), Anita said, "What we have here is a power struggle between homosexual white men who abuse all the government AIDS programs fundamentally to fund their subculture and their political activities." And the Smiths continue to align themselves with right-wing "pro-family" organizations. In 2011, for example, the Smiths were featured speakers at the Moscow Demographic Summit, sponsored by the anti-gay World Congress of Families, where the couple spoke alongside representatives of CWA; the Population Research Institute, which promotes the threat of a "demographic winter" if white Christians don't reproduce in greater numbers; and the Family Research Council. In Uganda, the couple became close allies of Pastor Martin Ssempa, best known for his public condom burnings and anti-gay diatribes, who strongly pushed the anti-homosexuality bill. In 2004, Ssempa became a PEPFAR subgrantee. The Smiths' support helped his work get noticed in Washington, and in 2005 he testified on Capitol Hill.
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> ...One of the organizations the activists highlighted was CAF, which has close ties to an ex-gay ministry called He Intends Victory. Ex-gay pastor and He Intends Victory president Bruce Sonnenberg sits on CAF's board of directors and has for nearly a decade—...

> ...The Smiths and CAF have long been staunchly opposed to condoms, which they denounce as promoting promiscuity. To bolster their case against condoms, the Smiths repeatedly make inaccurate assertions about condom failure rates and their inefficacy in preventing the spread of HIV. Now CAF seems poised to launch an offensive against pre-exposure prophylaxis, known as PrEP...

> Despite having been the subject of multiple investigations—CAF was found unfit for funding by a congressional committee as early as 2004—and repeated questions about its anti-gay positions, opposition to condoms and support for failed abstinence-only-until-marriage approaches, the Smiths continue to be embraced by government officials as experts in the field of HIV and AIDS. Just two months ago, Anita Smith was a featured speaker at a PEPFAR-sponsored event called “Children’s Risk and Resilience in the Age of HIV/AIDS,” where she sat on a panel with representatives of major players in global AIDS such as USAID and Oxford University.

https://www.thenation.com/article/obamas-evangelical-gravy-train/

> It’s not as if advocates haven’t sounded the alarm to administration officials. On that September 2012 call, participants raised concerns about other US-funded groups besides the Inter-Religious Council, notably the Children’s AIDS Fund (CAF), an American organization, led by the husband-and-wife team Shepherd and Anita Smith, that operates in Uganda.

> The Smiths got their start working with Watergate crook Chuck Colson and his evangelical prison ministry; later, Shepherd was a top strategist for* Pat Robertson’s 1988 presidential campaign. They took on AIDS as their mission in the 1980s, fashioning what they saw as a love-the-sinner, hate-the-sin approach that focused on ministering to the sick, particularly children. Over time, they would articulate a more fulsome conservative evangelical approach to AIDS centered around praying people out of homosexuality, abstinence-only education, virginity pledges and robust criticism of condoms, laid out in their 1990 book Christians in the Age of AIDS. Even in recent years, Shepherd has pounced on modest failure rates to denounce condom efficacy against HIV.

> Despite lacking any medical background... Shepherd’s nonprofit, the Institute for Youth Development, was one of the first groups ever to receive funding through Bush’s faith-based initiatives. In 2004, a review panel determined CAF unsuitable for funding due to “outstanding technical issues.” In a memo to USAID officials, Representative Henry Waxman, then ranking minority member of the Government Reform Committee, wrote that the funding of CAF was so out of bounds that it “raises serious concerns about the integrity of the PEPFAR grant review process.”

https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/970/19/1639236/

> "At approximately the same time that Congress awarded millions of dollars in taxpayer funds for testing the gp160 vaccine at Walter *29 Reed, allegations surfaced that Lt.Col. Redfield

had distorted the results of his research...

...In a memorandum to Col. Burke (Redfield's supervisor), Major ("Maj.") Craig W. Hendrix, M.D., the Director of the HIV Program in the Air Force and Col. R. Neal Boswell, M.D., the Associate Chief of the Division of Medicine in the Air Force complained about "[t]he problem of misleading or, possibly, deceptive presentations by Dr. Redfield, which overstate the GP160 phase I data." Memorandum of Oct. 21, 1992, at ¶ 1, attachment 2 to Plaintiffs' Ex. G. This memorandum indicates that Redfield's presentations had been subjected to severe and substantial criticism within the military medical research community since at least late July 1992 when Dr. Maryanne Vahey "first questioned Dr. Redfield's Amsterdam talk." Id. ¶ 1. Maj. Hendrix and Col. Boswell described the Amsterdam presentation as "[t]he most serious example of potential scientific misconduct." Id.

Noting that the scientific credibility of the military medical research was at risk, the two senior military doctors who authored the memorandum described their concerns in no uncertain terms:

Last week, at the 32nd Annual ICAAC meeting in Anaheim, CA, Dr. Redfield again presented data in an incomplete and misleading fashion, despite assurances to the MMCARR[1] in several recent meetings that he understood his past presentations to be in error and that he would refrain from repeating that error. If these actions are an intentional deception, it is an error of the most serious kind in science that betrays the trust of colleagues, patients and sponsors.

They also raised their "serious concern" regarding Lt. Col. Redfield's connection to a non-profit organization called "Americans for a Sound AIDS Policy" or "ASAP," which had lobbied Members of Congress for gp160 funding at the same time that Redfield was a member of ASAP's Advisory Board. The memorandum's authors alleged that ASAP's President, Shepherd Smith, had attempted to influence Dr. Vahey, the doctor who had assisted Redfield in analyzing the "viral load" of the patients receiving the vaccine and who later criticized his Amsterdam presentation:

Smith also contacted Dr. Vahey prior to her 31 AUG 92 presentation of the GP160 phase I data which was to be the first public presentation of the data in a nonselective, appropriately analyzed fashion. According to Dr. Vahey, Mr. Smith had intimate knowledge of the GP160 phase I data and offered detailed suggestions for how Dr. Vahey should present the incomplete data with the control groups, coincidentally as Dr. Redfield had done in Amsterdam, to favor further development of the vaccine. He also insisted that she needed to know of the increasing pressures on her due to: (1) the millions of dollars at stake, (2) Army-NIH vaccine competition, and (3) upcoming congressional testimony on GP160 vaccine studies. We are suspicious of Mr. Smith's access to GP160 data, his involvement at the most basic level of data analysis on this study, and his motivations in raising issues of financial and congressional pressure which are scientifically immaterial and have, on the surface, the appearance of a very gross impropriety.

> ...The subcommittee "agreed that the information presented by Dr. Redfield seriously threaten[ed] his credibility as a researcher and ha[d] the potential to negatively impact AIDS research funding as a whole. His allegedly unethical behavior create[d] false hope and could result in premature deployment of the vaccine." Id. at 2.

http://articles.courant.com/1994-06-30/news/9406300185_1_microgenesys-aids-vaccine-vaccine-trials

> "Public Citizen characterized as a whitewash an Army investigation clearing Redfield of misconduct charges that first surfaced in 1992."

> "He developed a relationship with the company and its president. In the fall of 1992 Redfield flew to Southern California to make a joint presentation with Volvovitz, who was trying to raise money for his small, struggling company from a group of movie stars and Hollywood power brokers. Redfield's trip expenses were paid by the lobbying group, Americans for a Sound AIDS Policy."

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