

United States Senate

May 22, 2020

Scott Gast
Deputy Counsel to the President
Deputy Assistant to the President at Office of White House Counsel
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Gast:

With the appointment of Dr. Moncef Slaoui to serve as the Administration's "therapeutics czar" we request that you require Dr. Slaoui to divest himself of any financial interests in the pharmaceutical industry and resign his position from the boards of any medical, biotech, or pharmaceutical-related company. In addition, we seek ethics documents concerning Dr. Slaoui's proposed White House tenure. Any potential conflict of interest, or the appearance of a conflict, undermines Dr. Slaoui's, and the Administration's, scientific credibility and its mission of finding a vaccine for the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

As reported by several news outlets, Slaoui will oversee the race to find a COVID-19 vaccine, as well as possible treatments.¹ This is a position that requires sound judgment, free from any possible conflicts or even the suggestion of potential conflict; when Dr. Slaoui speaks, medical professionals, scientists, policymakers, and citizens must have complete confidence that he is providing his best, unbiased advice and opinions. As former chairman of vaccines at GlaxoSmithKline, Dr. Slaoui's had an extensive web of financial interests. For example, he oversaw the \$720 million purchase of Sirtris Pharmaceuticals in 2008.² He also directed GlaxoSmithKline's over \$3 billion acquisition of Human Genome Sciences in 2012.³

Even more troubling is that until recently Dr. Slaoui sat on the board of Moderna, which is in the midst of a high-profile pursuit of a COVID-19 vaccine,⁴ and his most recent financial disclosure shows that he owns more than \$10 million in Moderna stock.⁵ According to *Bloomberg*, Dr.

¹ New York Times, "Trump Vows Vaccine by End of Year and Mobilizes Military to Help," May 15, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/15/us/politics/coronavirus-vaccine-timeline.html>

² GlaxoSmithKline Shuts Down Sirtris, Five Years After \$720M Buyout, March 12, 2013, <https://xconomy.com/boston/2013/03/12/glaxosmithkline-shuts-down-sirtris-five-years-after-720m-buyout/>.

³ Politico, Meet the Big Pharma Vet in Charge of Trump's Vaccine Strategy, May 14, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-pulse/2020/05/14/meet-the-big-pharma-vet-in-charge-of-trumps-vaccine-strategy-787607>

.GSK, GSK to acquire Human Genome Sciences for US\$14.25 per share in cash, July 16, 2012, <https://www.gsk.com/en-gb/media/press-releases/gsk-to-acquire-human-genome-sciences-for-us-1425-per-share-in-cash/>.

⁴ Politico, White House to tap former pharmaceutical exec as 'therapeutics czar', May 13, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/13/slaoui-vaccine-therapeutics-czar-coronavirus-255668>.

⁵ Moncef Slaoui, SEC Form 4: Statement of Changes in Beneficial Ownership, April 30, 2020, <https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1712369/000112760220014877/0001127602-20-014877-index.htm>; The

Slaoui recently joined the board of Lonza Group, a Swiss company contracting with Moderna to manufacture a possible vaccine.⁶ He also sits on the board of SutroVax, another vaccine developer.⁷ Moreover, *The New York Times* reports that Dr. Slaoui “still holds just under \$10 million in GlaxoSmithKline stock and remains a partner in Medicxi, a venture capital firm that specializes in investing in biotech concerns, with several companies engaged in the global race to develop treatments or vaccines to stanch the coronavirus pandemic.”⁸ Two of Medicxi’s investors are GlaxoSmithKline and a division of Johnson & Johnson, both of whom are conducting COVID-19 vaccine research.⁹ Although Dr. Slaoui announced this week that he will divest from his stock options in Moderna, the public deserves to know the full extent of his existing financial relationships to all industry stakeholders.

To remove any appearance of a conflict of interest, we believe Dr. Slaoui must resign from the boards of any medical, biotech, or pharmaceutical-related company, disclose ties or holdings he or his immediate family may have to entities involved in the COVID-19 response, and divest any holdings in entities involved in the COVID-19 response.

The American people, and the entire world, are desperate for a vaccine. We believe the U.S. can and will lead the charge, as researchers around the world race for a vaccine and treatments to defeat this virus. But we must have confidence that the individuals overseeing such an important task do not have personal financial interests that may affect their actions or the advice they provide to medicals experts and policymakers. For that reason, we ask that you require Dr. Slaoui to divest of any financial interests in the pharmaceutical industry and require Dr. Slaoui to resign his position from the boards of any medical or pharmaceutical-related company to ensure the American people have their best interests represented by your choice for “therapeutics czar.” Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert Menendez

United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

United States Senator

/s/ Chris Murphy

United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris

United States Senator

Daily Beast, *Trump’s Vaccine Czar Holds Millions in Stock Options at Company That Got Federal Funding for COVID-19 Work*

, May 15, 2020, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/trumps-vaccine-czar-holds-millions-in-stock-options-at-company-that-got-federal-funding-for-covid-19-work>.

⁶ Bloomberg News, *Trump Taps Ex-Glaxo Official and General to Lead Vaccine Race*

, May 13, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-13/trump-taps-ex-glaxo-official-and-general-to-lead-vaccine-race?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=b2ef7f20-86a7-4952-8a75-15a3c604506a>

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ New York Times, *Trump’s Vaccine Chief Has Vast Ties to Drug Industry, Posing Possible Conflicts*

, May 20, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/20/health/coronavirus-vaccine-czar.html>.

⁹ *Id.*

/s/ Tammy Baldwin

United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey

United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley

United States Senator

/s/ Mazie Hirono

United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar

United States Senator