



December 9, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

I write today to express concerns regarding the recent nomination of Dr. Robert Califf to lead the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and to urge the committee to reject his nomination.

The Project On Government Oversight (POGO) is a nonpartisan independent watchdog that investigates and exposes waste, corruption, abuse of power, and when the government fails to serve the public or silences those who report wrongdoing. We previously raised concerns about the extent to which some of Dr. Califf's work benefited the pharmaceutical industry at the expense of public health and safety.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Califf's record since then has not dispelled our concerns. Since Dr. Califf left the FDA in 2017, he has received over a million dollars from the pharmaceutical industry, raising serious questions about his ability to separate his future financial opportunities from the decisions he would be charged with making as the FDA Administrator.

In February 2018, Dr. Califf joined the board of Cytokinetics, a biopharma company.<sup>2</sup> His compensation as a board member in cash and stock options came to about \$347,000 for 2018, \$181,000 for 2019, and \$427,000 for 2020.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Letter from POGO Executive Director Danielle Brian to Senators urging them to reject Dr. Califf's nomination to lead the FDA, February 6, 2016. <https://www.pogo.org/letter/2016/02/pogo-urges-senate-to-vote-against-nominee-to-fda/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Meet Our Leaders: Robert M. Califf, M.D.," Cytokinetics. <https://cytokinetics.com/persons/robert-califf/> (accessed December 8, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Cytokinetics Inc., "Schedule 14A Information," Securities and Exchange Commission, March 3, 2019, [https://sec.report/Document/0001564590-19-010625/#DIRECTOR\\_COMPENSATION](https://sec.report/Document/0001564590-19-010625/#DIRECTOR_COMPENSATION) (accessed December 8, 2021); "Notice of Annual Meeting of Stockholders," Cytokinetics Inc., March 26, 2020. <https://content.edgar-online.com/ExternalLink/EDGAR/0001564590-20->

In March 2017, about two months after he left the FDA, Califf announced the creation of the People-Centered Research Foundation, with himself as chairman of the board.<sup>4</sup> Other board members include executives from Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson. The board also included Marc Boutin, then-chief executive of the National Health Council (NHC). POGO has previously noted NHC as a prime example of self-professed patient advocates backed by the pharmaceutical industry.<sup>5</sup>

In 2017, 2018, and 2019, Dr. Califf also received other payments that exceeded the national mean and the national mean for his specialty, according to the federal Open Payments database.<sup>6</sup> For example, in 2017, he received several payments from Merck totaling about \$10,000. Those included a consulting fee of \$9,000 plus travel and lodging. In 2018, his payments included a consulting fee of \$12,500 from AstraZeneca, a consulting fee of \$10,000 from Merck, a consulting fee of \$7,700 from Eli Lilly, and a consulting fee of almost \$2,900 from Sanofi. In 2019, he received a total of about \$7,800 from Boehringer Ingelheim.

It is critically important for the public to have faith that the decisions made by those in our government are driven by the public interest. Dr. Califf's financial ties to the pharmaceutical industry will inevitably — and unnecessarily — raise questions about whether his decisions are impartial and driven by the public good. I therefore urge you to reject his nomination.

Sincerely,



Danielle Brian  
Executive Director

---

[013249.html?hash=40b8c4eb6d2e10b71f6c296b04954b3ce6c7ec2ffcc26d2adb7f687094f7478f&dest=CYTK-DEF14A\\_20200513\\_HTM\\_APP\\_A#CYTK-DEF14A\\_20200513\\_HTM\\_APP\\_A](https://www.fda.gov/oc/2020/05/13/fda-announces-people-centered-research-foundation) (accessed December 8, 2021); “Notice of Annual Meeting of Stockholders,” Cytokinetics Inc., May 12, 2021. <https://ir.cytokinetics.com/static-files/7d3b9d85-85b8-4972-ae5a-bd5dfabcbbd4> (accessed December 8, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> “Rob Califf Introduces People-Centered Clinical Research Foundation,” Duke Clinical and Translational Science Institute, March 22, 2017. <https://www.ctsi.duke.edu/news/rob-califf-introduces-people-centered-clinical-research-foundation>.

<sup>5</sup> David Hilzenrath, “Drug Money: In FDA Meetings, ‘Voice’ of the Patient Often Funded by Drug Companies,” Project On Government Oversight, December 1, 2016. <https://www.pogo.org/investigation/2016/12/in-fda-meetings-voice-of-patient-often-funded-by-drug-companies/>.

<sup>6</sup> “Robert M. Califf: Totals By Payment Type in 2019,” Open Payments, <https://openpaymentsdata.cms.gov/physician/300432> (accessed December 8, 2021).