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Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the CDC and Me

I was fired after 29 days because I held the line and insisted on rigorous scientific review.

By Susan Monarez

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Supporters outside the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Aug. 28. PHOTO: ERIK S LESSER/EPA/SHUTTERSTOCK/SHUTTERSTOCK

I served for 29 days as director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Senate confirmed me to ensure that unbiased evidence serves our nation's health, and for doing that, I lost my job. America's children could lose far more.

During my first week as CDC director, a gunman opened fire on our Atlanta headquarters on Aug. 8. Investigators recovered more than 500 shell casings at the scene and more than 180 rounds struck CDC campus buildings. Officer David Rose was killed.

Investigators found documents in which the gunman expressed his discontent with Covid vaccines, indicating his actions were driven by vaccine distrust. Amid the

trauma, hundreds of CDC employees told me the same thing: We need to take immediate steps to rebuild public trust. That's the CDC I know: service before self.

Just as we began to recover, I was confronted with another challenge—pressure to compromise science itself.

Reporters have focused on the Aug. 25 meeting where my boss, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., pressured me to resign or face termination. But that meeting revealed that it wasn't about one person or my job. It was one of the more public aspects of a deliberate effort to weaken America's public-health system and vaccine protections.

I'm gone now, but that effort continues. One of the troubling directives from that meeting more than a week ago: I was told to preapprove the recommendations of a vaccine advisory panel newly filled with people who have publicly expressed antivaccine rhetoric. That panel's next meeting is scheduled for Sept. 18-19. It is imperative that the panel's recommendations aren't rubber-stamped but instead are rigorously and scientifically reviewed before being accepted or rejected.

For three decades, I have worked at the intersection of public health, science and technology innovation—always challenging the status quo and welcoming discovery and change. Real science evolves with evidence.

As President Trump recently wrote on social media: "It is very important that the Drug Companies justify the success of their various Covid Drugs. Many people think they are a miracle and saved millions of lives." Mr. Trump is right to call for proof. We should always demand evidence—exactly what I was doing when I insisted all CDC recommendations be based on credible data, not ideology or preordained outcomes.

The CDC can't fulfill its obligation to the American people if its leader can't demand proof in decision-making. If discarding evidence for ideology becomes the norm, why should parents, physicians or the public trust the CDC's guidance?

This week, HHS leadership [published a vision](#) that mirrors the priorities I laid out during my Senate confirmation hearing and had already advanced during my brief tenure at CDC. But since Aug. 25 I have had serious concerns.

Those seeking to undermine vaccines use a familiar playbook: discredit research, weaken advisory committees, and use manipulated outcomes to unravel protections that generations of families have relied on to keep deadly diseases at bay. Once

trusted experts are removed and advisory bodies are stacked, the results are predetermined. That isn't reform. It is sabotage.

Public health shouldn't be partisan. Vaccines have saved millions of lives under administrations of both parties. Parents deserve a CDC they can trust to put children above politics, evidence above ideology and facts above fear.

I was fired for holding that line. But the line doesn't disappear with me. It runs through every parent deciding whether to vaccinate a child, every physician counseling patients, and every American who demands accountability.

If we stay silent, preventable diseases will return—as we saw with the largest measles outbreak in more than 30 years, which tragically killed two children. If we act, the facts can still prevail.

Dr. Monarez served as CDC director (2025) and deputy director of the federal Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (2023-25).

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