

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 8th, 2024

The Honorable Robert M. Califf
Commissioner
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
10903 New Hampshire Ave
Silver Spring, MD 20993

Commissioner Califf,

We write to express our concern with several statements made by the current Chief Scientist at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Namandje Bumpus. These statements were brought to our attention by the American Accountability Foundation (AAF), an independent government watchdog group. AAF highlighted Dr. Bumpus' extensive history of alarming remarks disparaging "over-represented" groups in medicine and science while encouraging racial bias in hiring and job promotions. In November 2023, it was announced that Dr. Bumpus would succeed Janet Woodcock as Principal Deputy Commissioner at the FDA upon Dr. Woodcock's retirement. On the FDA website, Principal Deputy Commissioner Woodcock's role is described as "work[ing] closely with the Commissioner...to develop and implement key public health initiatives and...oversee the agency's day-to-day function."¹ Based on Dr. Bumpus' comments, we believe she is ill-suited to such an important public health oversight position.

In a *Nature* article written by Dr. Bumpus during her time at Johns Hopkins University, she called on "over-represented people in science" to help create an "anti-racist culture with the same vigor [they] apply to achieving every other dimension of scientific excellence."² Dr. Bumpus has made similar remarks in other speeches, in each instance claiming that the overrepresentation of certain groups in science and medicine is a problem that needs fixing. It is not hard to infer what groups she is referencing here. Asian scientists account for 26 percent of their field but only comprise 6 percent of the general population.³ White men comprise 66 percent of physicians while only accounting for roughly 30 percent of the general population.⁴ The only way for Dr. Bumpus to fix this problem would be to disregard otherwise qualified candidates for important positions in science and medicine and instead hire candidates based on their racial background.

The outcome of Dr. Bumpus' crusade against overrepresentation in science is obvious. Far from denying this implication, she has openly embraced it by not only calling for racial hiring quotas, but also suggesting that promotions and other workplace incentives should be provided for engaging in "the work of diversity." Below is a quote in which she expounds upon this idea.⁵

¹ <https://www.fda.gov/about-fda/fda-organization/janet-woodcock>

² Namandje Bumpus, "Too many senior white academics still resist recognizing racism", *Nature* 583, 661 (2020)

³ <https://www.zippia.com/scientist-jobs/demographics/>

⁴ <https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/workforce/data/figure-20-percentage-physicians-sex-and-race/ethnicity-2018>

⁵ "Perspectives of Black Scientists, Science and Systemic Racism." (32:06-32:11)

Provide endowed professorships...specifically for people that have achievements in doing diversity work...Give salary bonuses like you would for any other leadership role for people who are doing diversity work...Give meaningful career and promotional credit for the work of diversity...Make that one of the metrics for promotion...

Dr. Bumpus' comments are alarming for two reasons. First, she fails to explain how this so-called "diversity work" ought to be measured. Dr. Bumpus seems to be suggesting that employees should be evaluated based on devotion to political ideology rather than their professional achievements. Second, this system is antithetical to how any serious scientific institution should handle personnel decisions. Congress gave the FDA authority to regulate food and drugs under the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938 to protect consumers from mislabeled or adulterated products. Though many of the subsequent amendments to the Act have been overbearing and cumbersome, the FDA retains the critical responsibility of food and drug oversight. Each job opening at the FDA should be filled by the most qualified candidate who can best assist the agency in ensuring public safety. The measure of FDA officials should be scientific and professional merit alone, not ideological tests drawn on racial lines. Dr. Bumpus' proposal is an extreme danger to public health and overall trust in the mission of the FDA.

The FDA is charged with an incredibly important role in overseeing food and drug safety. At the time of writing this letter, the FDA has 123 medications listed on its drug shortage list, including many life-saving antibiotics.⁶ As many Americans scour shelves for critical medications, the soon-to-be Principal Deputy Commissioner at the chief pharmaceutical oversight agency seems to be more concerned with implementing radical diversity initiatives than addressing critical drug shortages. When the FDA loses focus on public health in favor of implementing a left-wing political agenda, the American people are put in harm's way. If the FDA implemented Dr. Bumpus' vision, the agency would be sacrificing public health and safety on the altar of identity politics.

We request that you respond to the following questions relating to Dr. Bumpus' comments:

1. As Principal Deputy Commissioner, what authority will Dr. Bumpus have over the hiring and promotion of FDA personnel?
2. According to the FDA staff manual, managers are responsible for evaluating job candidates "without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, sex, age or other non-merit factors."⁷ What steps have you taken to ensure that potential FDA employees are evaluated based on merit alone?
3. Have FDA employees, whether currently or in the past, been given performance evaluations that include "diversity work" as a metric for promotion?

Sincerely,

⁶ <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/drugshortages/default.cfm>

⁷ <https://www.fda.gov/media/81356/download>



Michael S. Lee
United States Senator



Eric S. Schmitt
United States Senator



Mike Braun
United States Senator