

# **BIO Vaccine Policy Steering Committee (VPSC) Meeting**

## **April 3, 2025**

### **Executive Summary – Key Highlights**

- **Political Landscape**
  - Widespread concern over RFK Jr.'s anti-vaccine stance; members view him as a direct threat to public health.
  - FDA's April 2 RIF (reduction in force) marked a critical turning point, raising concerns about institutional stability.
  - Speculation about the Trump-RFK Jr. alliance, with potential for breakdown over conflicting interests.
- **Strategic Voices and Allies**
  - Dr. Oz seen as a potential "voice of reason" on public health within the current administration.
  - Senator Cassidy emerging as an influential advocate for CDC and public health engagement.
  - AEI and former Senator Richard Burr seen as important conservative allies in vaccine advocacy.
- **VPSC Leadership and Goals**
  - New co-chairs: Silvia Taylor (Novavax) and Art Hirt (Merck).
  - Emphasis on governance restructure, AEI relationship-building, and defining 2025 vaccine strategy.
  - Strategy centered on continuity, innovation access, and restoring public trust.
- **Investor and Market Challenges**
  - Vaccine development viewed as unpredictable and politicized; goalposts are constantly shifting.
  - Investor confidence shaken; limited capital access for the next 6–9 months.
  - Jim Wassil (Vaxcyte): no viable capital-raising opportunities in current climate.
- **Communications and Messaging Strategy**
  - Need to frame vaccine narrative around "efficiency," "transparency," and "national security."
  - Shift BIO's messaging regarding ACIP/FDA from defensive to proactive: from "protect" and "defend" to "optimize" and "enhance."
  - Launch of the pro-vaccine campaign "Why We Vaccinate" to be tested in the Washington, D.C. area.
- **Opportunities and Threats**
  - Threats: Anti-vaccine rhetoric, tariffs, index pricing, weakened FDA capacity.
  - Opportunities: Leverage National Security Commission report, onshore supply chains, reposition vaccines as national security assets.
- **Tactical Recommendations**
  - Engage conservative voices and grassroots/state-level influencers rather than federal figures like RFK Jr.
  - Convene a Senate Public Health Caucus.
  - Rebuild FDA capacity with Commissioner Makary; modernize review pathways while protecting mission integrity.
  - Focus public messaging on science and economic benefits—healthy workforce, national resilience.

## Meeting Details

1. Meeting Goals
  - a. New governance structure of VPSC
  - b. Key areas for BIO engagement
  - c. VPSC goals/priorities
  - d. Build a relationship with AEI
2. Introduction of New Co-Chairs
  - a. Silvia Taylor – Corporate Affairs, Novavax
  - b. Art Hirt – SVP Vaccines, Merck
3. BIO is diversifying input to include Conservative voices.
  - a. American Enterprise Institute (AEI)
  - b. Richard Burr – former Senator NC; Advisor DLA Piper Health Policy Steering Committee
4. 2025 Vaccine Strategy
  - a. Goal: protecting continuity and viability of vaccine business
  - b. Core Principles: promoting access innovation and trust
  - c. Objective: maintain and strengthen environment for vaccine access and innovation
  - d. Objective: help build trust in vaccines
5. Impact of New HHS Administration
  - a. “it is time to go to The Hill and lobby that it is time for RFK Jr to go...communicate what’s going on in business”
  - b. Trump owed RFK Jr (for his support) but that loyalty may/may not last
  - c. There are now definitive examples of RFK Jr’s threat to vaccines and public health
  - d. If vaccine companies lose the confidence of investors – everyone loses
  - e. Jim Wassil, EVP & COO Vaxcyte
    - i. Investors have stated they are leaving until the next data read out.
    - ii. No opportunity to raise capital in the current environment
    - iii. Investors are sitting on the sidelines for next 6-9 months
    - iv. Vaccine pathway to approval is unpredictable and politicized
  - f. They (RFK Jr Administration) keep moving the goal posts on vaccines
  - g. BIO supports change, as long as the core mission of institutions are protected and there is business continuity
  - h. Need to communicate with the new Administration using their words – safety, efficiency, health resilience, transparency
6. John Crowley – BIO President & CEO
  - a. Vaccines are the #1 priority at BIO
  - b. Vaccines are “canary in the coal mine” with respect to gauging HHS anticipated actions
  - c. BIO created vaccine task force (1<sup>st</sup> BIO task force)
  - d. There are both threats and opportunities working with the new Administration
    - i. Threats
      1. Tariffs
      2. Index pricing
      3. Vaccine lack of trust
    - ii. Opportunities
      1. National Security Commission Report – Biotech Threats (<https://www.biotech.senate.gov/final-report/chapters/>)
        - a. Need for accelerated research and approval timelines
        - b. Need for on-shoring supply lines

- e. FDA needs to stay strong. Bio priority to work with Commissioner Makary to replace lost talent; modernize FDA; communicate big picture implications regarding vaccine access
  - f. Need a creative communication campaign targeting:
    - i. Legislators and influencers (as opposed to directly with RFK Jr)
    - ii. Conservative constituents such as AEI
    - iii. Unions (concern regarding Member health)
    - iv. Campaign needs to both inspire and frighten (potential outcomes)
    - v. \$2M of BIOs \$4M cash reserve will be spent on vaccine programs
  - g. Need to identify common ground areas
    - i. Domestic manufacturing
    - ii. Strategic importance to U.S.
      - 1. Need for a healthy population
      - 2. Protection from pandemic/bio attacks
7. Scott Gottlieb – Resident Fellow, AEI
- a. “MAHA movement is a cover for an anti-vaccine campaign”
  - b. Focus attention and dialog on grassroots/state/local level (vs Federal)
  - c. Very few people in the WH with public health backgrounds
  - d. Q: will the Trump-RFK Jr relationship break?
    - i. Not convinced it will break as there are non-vaccine issues, such as food safety, within MAHA
  - e. Q: how does one reach out and get support when no one is willing to stick their neck out?
    - i. Focus on the national security benefit – need for domestic manufacturing
  - f. Concern that companies are exiting smaller vaccine markets
  - g. Need to differentiate between anti-vaccine /vaccine hesitancy (“movable middle”) vs anti-vaccine mandate groups
  - h. Need to differentiate between science argument vs economic argument (healthy workforce)
  - i. Dr Oz can be public health voice of reason within WH
    - i. Has strong healthcare team
    - ii. Deeply scientific and public health minded
    - iii. Potential role educating the public
  - j. Senator Cassidy is getting more involved regarding CDC, etc
  - k. Recommend convening a Senate Public Health Caucus
  - l. Q: How work with AEI to target messages?
    - i. AEI is pro-vaccine
    - ii. Use as a data-leading voice to leverage the discussion
8. VPSC Strategy Discussion – ACIP and FDA
- a. BIO needs to change the messaging narrative from “protect”, “defend”, “maintain” to “support”, “shape”, “optimize”, “enhancing”, “streamline”, “efficiency”, “transparency”
  - b. Focus on positive change; no place for politics; areas of commonality
  - c. Move narrative to the middle
  - d. BIO Communications Strategy
    - i. Have built out a pro-vaccine campaign (whywewaccinate.org) based on qualitative and quantitative research
    - ii. Plan to market test in WDC market (April/May)
  - e. Re-imagining the FDA
    - i. Key messages working with FDA are “efficiency” and “speed”
    - ii. How does one approach the FDA given the brain-drain?
    - iii. Q: is Novavax (data requirements) the new review standard?
    - iv. Conflicting FDA objectives
      - 1. Drive to modernize

- 2. Slowing down vaccine development – eg, Novavax approval;  
slow-walking ACIP
- f. More productive to target Makary and Trump Insiders vs RFK Jr
- g. Risk of U.S. losing its worldwide advantage in biotech by dramatically changing the FDA