

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 29, 2019

The Honorable Seema Verma  
Administrator  
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services  
7500 Security Boulevard  
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Administrator Verma:

We are examining the awarding of certain contracts by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). According to a recent press report, you personally approved the awarding of millions of dollars of federal contracts to Republican communications consultants.<sup>1</sup> The report states that you employ a team of private consultants who write your speeches, polish your brand, and travel with you across the country.<sup>2</sup> These contracts are a highly questionable use of taxpayer dollars, and call into question your commitment to transparency, ethics, and responsible stewardship of CMS resources.

The subcontracts in question may be part of a \$2.25 million contract with Porter Novelli, an international public relations firm. Under your leadership, CMS reportedly has also spent at least \$1 million on contracts with Republican-affiliated communications consultants. Those Republican consultants include one with whom you reportedly have a professional relationship, one who previously led President Trump's transition team, and another who was hired in the Trump Administration.<sup>3</sup>

The consultants reportedly handled your media calls and wrote speeches for you, both of which are functions that CMS's Office of Communications has historically performed. One of the Republican subcontractors reportedly arranged interviews that focused on emphasizing your personal life and your role as a prominent Republican woman.<sup>4</sup>

Although previous Administrations have used communications consultants to emphasize agency and program initiatives, current and former officials reportedly indicate that "CMS' current use of communications contractors has gone well beyond the norm."<sup>5</sup> CMS should be spending agency resources to ensure Americans have quality health care – not bolstering your

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<sup>1</sup> *Key Trump health official spends millions on GOP-connected consultants*, Politico (Mar. 28, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

image. Under your leadership, CMS has eliminated tens of millions of dollars in funding that was intended to raise awareness about health coverage options under the Affordable Care Act and funding for Navigators that assist individuals in gaining coverage. Instead of spending resources to improve health care for everyone in the country, you appear to have steered money to political allies to boost your reputation.

Our committees have longstanding interests in ensuring responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars and that funds are spent on advancing agency initiatives – not for the personal benefit of agency political leaders and their well-connected associates. As such, please provide us with the following information no later than April 12, 2019:

1. A list of all contracts and subcontracts with Porter Novelli, Nahigian Strategies, Pam Stevens, and Marcus Barlow since January 20, 2017. For each contract or subcontract, please provide a description of the work performed, whether the contract was competitively bid, an explanation as to how and why these companies or consultants were selected, what your role was in the awarding of the contract or subcontract, the amount awarded and obligated, and copies of each contract or subcontract.
2. All communications from any individuals in the Office of the Administrator regarding contracts or subcontracts with Porter Novelli, Nahigian Strategies, Pam Stevens, and/or Marcus Barlow since January 20, 2017.
3. All communications from any individuals in the Office of Communications regarding the selection of Pam Stevens and Marcus Barlow as subcontractors.

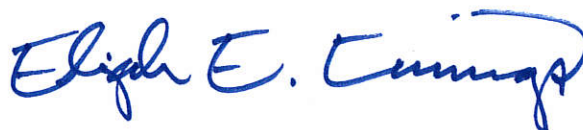
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We appreciate your attention to this matter and your cooperation with this request. If you have any questions, please contact Kevin Barstow with the Committee on Energy and Commerce staff at (202) 225-2927.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Chairman  
House Committee on Energy  
and Commerce



Elijah E. Cummings  
Chairman  
House Committee on Oversight  
and Reform



Ron Wyden  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Finance



Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Health,  
Education, Labor, and Pensions