

# Biden taps Walensky to head CDC

By Jessie Hellmann

• President-elect Joe Biden's pick to lead the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will be charged with restoring trust in the world's foremost public health agency, where officials have been repeatedly contradicted and criticized by President Trump throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden named Rochelle Walensky, chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases at Massachusetts General Hospital, as his CDC nominee. She would replace Robert Redfield, Trump's pick for the job in 2018, who has come under heavy criticism for not more strongly standing up to Trump on issues of public health.

Walensky, 51, is renowned in the public health field for her work on HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

Colleagues cited her strong work ethic, skills as an expert communicator, her leadership ability and commitment to science and data as part of why she was selected for the high-profile position.

Jeremy Faust, an instructor at Harvard Medical School and an emergency physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, called Walensky an "incredibly clear-sighted visionary" with the ability to see the picture without missing smaller details.

"The way to restore its prior reputation and enhance it further is to put it in the hands of someone who has expertise

and the leadership skills and personal skills required to wrangle these experts and stakeholders, and I think Dr. Walensky just embodies all of that," he said of the CDC.

Redfield, a well-known HIV/AIDS researcher in his own right, has been criticized for not sticking up to Trump and failing to defend career staff at the CDC from attacks and interference by Trump's appointees.

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The CDC has seen its public role in the COVID-19 fight diminished since Nancy Messonnier, the director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, said in February that the public should prepare for serious disruptions to everyday life.

CDC officials once conducted daily calls to update the public on the state of COVID-19 but were replaced by the White House coronavirus task force led by Vice President Pence, which generally offered a brighter depiction of the pandemic.

Walensky herself criticized the CDC's diminished role, stating in October that the agency should be at the forefront of the response and lamenting that career staff "literally can't do their job."

The CDC has also suffered from

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a number of missteps during the coronavirus battle, including shipping COVID-19 tests that it knew were flawed to public labs in February. It has also been criticized under the Trump administration for issuing unclear guidance on COVID-19 that doesn't match existing science or data.

The nonpartisan Government Accountability Office recently scolded the CDC for issuing guidance stating that people who don't show symptoms of COVID-19 don't necessarily need to be tested, despite evidence showing that about 40 percent of people who get the virus don't show symptoms but can spread it to others.

The CDC rescinded the guidance following widespread backlash from public health organizations and experts, who worried the change would undermine public health efforts, particularly at local health departments running contact tracing efforts.

Preeti Malani, a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Michigan, said she expects the CDC will be more transparent about its decisionmaking under Walensky.

"Dr. Walensky is a great communicator. There's this real genuine nature to her. She's a real person, and when you hear her talk, she will tell you what she doesn't know, along with what she does know. The honesty and integrity has been there with her since Day One," Malani said.



## Owls Are Being Mutilated—and You Paid for It!

PETA

The bureaucrats at the U.S. government's National Eye Institute are supposed to support vision research to help humans. Instead, they gave Johns Hopkins University \$1.5 million of your tax money to cut into barn owls' skulls, insert electrodes into their brains, and blast them with lights and noises for up to 12 hours. Once their brains are too mutilated to be useful, the owls are killed.

**National Eye Institute: Stop funding this cruelty.**