

US adviser on board of firm that sold anthrax drug

May 20 2013

(AP)—Former Navy Secretary Richard J. Danzig, who has served as a bio-warfare adviser to the president, the Pentagon, and the Department of Homeland Security, urged the government to stockpile an anti-anthrax drug while serving as a director for the company that supplied it, according to a report published Sunday.

While there is no evidence any nation or terrorist group has achieved it, Danzig warned for a decade that terrorists could easily engineer a strain of anthrax resistant to common antibiotics that could be a devastating threat to national security, according to an investigation by the [Los Angeles Times](#) (lat.ms/12K6Rxx).

Danzig successfully suggested stockpiling a drug known as raxibacumab, or "raxi," to guard against the potential threat, and biotech startup Human Genome Sciences Inc. has won \$334 million in federal contracts since 2006 to supply the drug that now goes for \$5,100 a dose.

At the same time, Danzig was a director for the company, earning more than \$1 million in company compensation between 2001 and 2012. It was the first product the company sold and the U.S. government remains the only buyer. The Rockville, Maryland-based company was acquired by [GlaxoSmithKline](#) in August for \$3.6 billion.

Several officials who attended seminars led by Danzig said they had no knowledge of his ties to Human Genome Sciences.

"Holy smoke—that was a horrible conflict of interest," said Dr. Philip K. Russell, a physician, retired major-general and biodefense official in the George W. [Bush administration](#).

Federal law bars U.S. officials, including advisers and consultants, from giving counsel on matters in which they have a financial interest.

Danzig said there was no [conflict of interest](#), and that he sought only to inform officials of the danger, not to lobby for the purchase of raxibacumab.

"My view was I'm not going to get involved in selling that," Danzig told the Times in an interview. "But at the same time now, should I not say what I think is right in the government circles with regard to this?"

Danzig added, "I feel that I've acted very properly with regard to this."

Danzig, 68, who served as Navy secretary in the Clinton administration and has since worked as a consultant, began warning about antibiotic-resistant anthrax in the wake of five deaths from anthrax-laced letters that came soon after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The [anthrax](#) in the letters was not resistant to antibiotics, but Danzig was soon warning of the possibility of a deadlier form of the germ, saying his interest in the subject came from "people whose technical skills exceed mine."

The Times investigation found seven papers Danzig had written on bioterrorism since 2001, and in only one did he disclose his ties to [Human Genome](#) Sciences.

© 2013 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: US adviser on board of firm that sold anthrax drug (2013, May 20) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-05-board-firm-sold-anthrax-drug.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.