

# Attkisson Report Reveals Threats Against Congressmen Investigating Autism-Vaccine Link

Source: [The Vaccine Reaction](#)

by [Barbara Loe Fisher](#)

Published January 9, 2019

A Jan. 6, 2018 news report produced by investigative journalist Sharyl Attkisson for Sinclair Broadcast Group revealed that retired congressmen Dan Burton (R-IN) and Dr. Dave Weldon (R-FL) and current Rep. Bill Posey (R-FL) were pressured by colleagues or threatened by PhRMA lobbyists to back away from examining vaccine safety issues, including the reported link between vaccines and autism.<sup>1</sup> The report also revealed that, in 2007, federal government officials suppressed and then misrepresented the expert opinion of pediatric neurologist Dr. Andrew Zimmerman that vaccines can cause autism during U.S. Federal Court of Claims hearings evaluating vaccine-related autism claims filed in the federal vaccine injury compensation program (VICP).<sup>2</sup>

**“You really need to... back off on this”**

The “Vaccination Debate” report was featured on “Full Measure,” Sinclair’s investigative news show anchored by Attkisson, who said, “We spoke to 11 current and former members of Congress and staff who claim they faced pressure, bullying or threats when they raised vaccine safety questions.” Physician and former Rep. Dave Weldon commented,

“It would typically be in a hallway or the street and people would come up to you and say, “You know, you really need to, you know, back off on this. It could be, it could be bad for the community or bad for the country or bad for you.”

Attkisson also interviewed Rolf Hazelhurst, whose now 18-year old son, Yates, suffered severe vaccine reactions as a child and regressed into chronic poor health that was eventually diagnosed as autism. Hazelhurst, a criminal prosecuting attorney, said, “And at first, I didn’t believe it. I did not think that, I did not believe that vaccines could cause autism. I didn’t believe it.”

### **US Government Suppresses Pediatric Neurologist’s Expert Opinion on Autism-Vaccine Link**

After Rolf Hazelhurst learned that Dr. Zimmerman’s expert opinion was discounted and misrepresented by federal government officials for the purpose of denying federal vaccine injury compensation to his son<sup>3</sup> and thousands of other children with vaccine related autism,<sup>4</sup> Hazelhurst told congressional staffers at a 2013 briefing, “If I did to a criminal in a court of law what the United States Department of Justice did to vaccine injured children, I would be disbarred and I would be facing criminal charges.” He and environmental activist attorney Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. have filed a fraud complaint with the Justice Department Inspector General about the withholding of Zimmerman’s expert opinion on vaccine-induced autism in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims proceedings.

### **The “Vaccine Court” and the Class Action Omnibus Autism Proceeding**

The Secretary of Health and Human Services is legally represented by Department of Justice (DOJ) attorneys in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims (“Vaccine Court”) when federal health officials contest vaccine injury compensation claims

filed under the National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act, a law that was passed by Congress in 1986 and substantively altered by congressional amendments between 1987 and 2016.<sup>5</sup> The 1986 Act gave partial liability protection to vaccine manufacturers but protected a vaccine injured person's right to file a vaccine injury lawsuit in civil court if federal compensation was denied or was inadequate to provide for lifetime needs or if it could be proven that the vaccine manufacturer could have made a vaccine safer (design defect). In a split decision in 2011, the U.S. Supreme Court effectively barred all vaccine injury lawsuits, including for manufacturer design defect.<sup>6 7</sup>

Under the 1986 Act, special masters are appointed by the U.S. Court of Federal Claims to adjudicate federal vaccine injury compensation claims. The "Vaccine Court" oversaw a seven-year class action type Omnibus Autism proceeding that concluded in 2009 and threw out more than 5,500 vaccine injury claims for children with vaccine-related autism.<sup>8</sup> The Court rejected the argument made by plaintiff's lawyers that vaccine-related autism is caused by mercury preservatives in vaccines and/or MMR vaccine or a combination of both.<sup>9</sup>

The gutting of the 1986 Act's safety and compensation provisions by congressional amendments, the Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Supreme Court has been strongly criticized by the National Vaccine Information Center for many years.<sup>10 11 12</sup> The Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report in 2014 analyzing the VICP's operation and was critical of how long it took for compensation claims to be resolved, primarily because most vaccine injury claims are contested by DHHS.<sup>13</sup>

### **Sharyl Attkisson: The Reporter Who Goes Where No One Else Will**

A *CBS* correspondent for more than 20 years, Sharyl Attkisson is a five-time Emmy Award winner and recipient of the Edward

R. Murrow award for investigative reporting and Pillar Human Rights Journalism Award for “Fearless Reporting in the Face of Government Retaliation.” From 1996-2001, she hosted a half-hour weekly medical news magazine on *PBS* entitled “Health Week.” She is the best-selling author of the books *Stonewalled* (2014) and *The Smear* (2017). After leaving *CBS* in 2014, Attkisson joined Sinclair to head up the investigative journalism team staffing “Full Measure” to explore government waste, national security and whistleblower reports on government and corporate abuse.<sup>14</sup>

For more than a decade, Attkisson has authored and produced reports on a number of vaccine safety issues, including these:

- [Vaccine Case: An Exception or A Precedent?](#) Mar. 6, 2008
- [How Independent Are Vaccine Defenders?](#) July 25, 2008 and [Orange County Register Correction](#) Apr. 18, 2011
- [Leading Dr: Vaccines-Autism Worth Study](#) July 28, 2008
- [Court Links Hepatitis B Vaccine to A Death](#) May 12, 2009
- [Swine Flu Cases Overestimated?](#) Oct. 27, 2009.
- [CDC: “Possibility” That Vaccines Rarely Trigger Autism](#) Sept. 2, 2014 (republished Dec. 10, 2018)
- [Fact Check: Anne Schuchat’s Claim That Vaccines Can’t Cause Brain Damage](#) Feb. 24, 2015.

She presented a *Ted Talk* on “Is Fake News Real?” in February 2018.<sup>15</sup> Currently, she has a lawsuit pending against the DOJ and FBI based on First and Fourth Amendment rights alleging improper government surveillance of a private citizen journalist, including electronic surveillance of her computer, cyber stalking and cyber attacks.<sup>16</sup>

**View the “Full Measure” report on The Vaccination Debate [here](#)**