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Labour demands probe into leaked documents showing lucrative Covid contracts ‘were awarded to VIPs’

Ministers accused ‘putting the profit of their friends and donors above NHS workers who urgently needed PPE’

Rob Merrick Deputy Political Editor | @Rob_Merrick | Thursday 29 October 2020 16:18 | 16 comments



(AFP via Getty Images)



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contracts were awarded to firms, bypassing normal processes.

Ministers are already under fire for a succession of deals quietly struck with firms run by Conservative friends for **personal protective equipment** (PPE) at the height of the **pandemic**.

Now the **Good Law Project** – which has launched a court case – has unearthed the documents allegedly exposing special procurement channels, including for “**Cabinet Office** contacts”.

It says they show the department was “feeding its contacts into the procurement process” and that value for money was only raised “if prices were more than 25 per cent above the average”.

Rachel Reeves, the shadow Cabinet Office minister, accused ministers of “putting the profit of their friends and donors above NHS workers who urgently needed PPE at the height of the crisis”.

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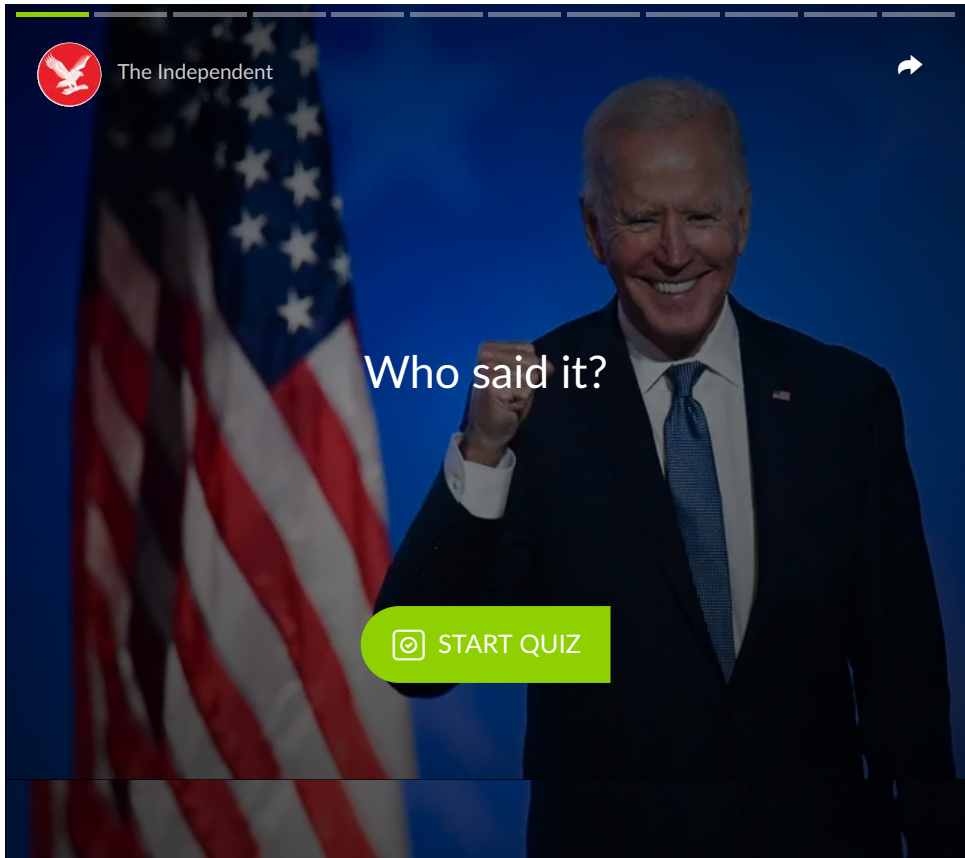
“The deeper you delve into this Tory government’s Covid outsourcing, the more disturbing it gets,” she said.

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“Not only were some of these ‘VIPs’ paid over the odds – in one case for unusable PPE – they were awarded these contracts at the height of the crisis when our NHS workers needed urgent, high quality PPE.”

The Good Law Project alleges that companies were able to “make enormous margins” of up to 45 per cent “on contracts sometimes worth hundreds of millions of pounds”.



It is highlighting contracts to three companies, all with connections to Conservative figures, worth more than £500m in total.

Ms Reeves added: “Labour has previously called for an investigation from the **National Audit Office** into this government’s strange procurement decisions. It is vital this new evidence is included.”

The NAO is already looking into deals worth more than £830m which were awarded to at least 12 different companies, earlier in the year.

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Controversy surrounds a £32m contract handed to a pest control company called PestFix to source surgical gowns, although it had listed net assets of only £18,000.

Public First was given £500,000 for focus groups to test the effectiveness of the government’s coronavirus advice, having been offered up to £840,000, although the contract was listed as coming from a budget to prepare for completing Brexit.

The company is co-owned by James Frayne, who was employed by Michael Gove when he was education secretary, alongside Dominic Cummings – now the prime minister’s chief aide.

Critics protested that the work was not advertised, there was no competition and that no official notice of the award was published.

A government spokesperson said: “We have been working tirelessly to deliver PPE to protect our health and social care staff throughout the pandemic, with more than 4.4 billion items delivered so far and 32 billion items ordered to provide a continuous supply to the frontline over the coming months.

“Proper due diligence is carried out for all government contracts and we take these checks extremely seriously.”



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