

January 27, 2025

Senate Committee on Finance
Attn. Editorial and Document Section
Room SD-219
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Statement of the Center for Inquiry: Why the Senate Committee on Finance Must Reject Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.'s Nomination for Secretary of Health and Human Services

Title of hearing: Hearing to consider the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services

Date of hearing: Wednesday, January 29, 2025 (10:00 AM)

Introduction

The Center for Inquiry (CFI) posits that Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. is wholly unfit and unqualified to lead the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which includes many vital federal agencies.

Beyond the fact that he has no training in medicine or public health, Kennedy has long espoused dangerous views and spread misinformation about health issues. To protect the American public, the Senate Committee on Finance must reject his nomination.

Kennedy Is Opposed to Vaccinations

- Kennedy has made a career out of spreading misinformation about the supposed ill effects of vaccinations despite being wrong on the science: Vaccines are among the safest and most beneficial advances in modern medicine.
- His organization, Children's Health Defense (CHD), has promoted the harmful belief that vaccinations cause childhood autism, again without evidence.¹ CHD is one of the leading anti-vaccine organizations in the world.
- In Samoa, Kennedy contributed to a deadly measles outbreak in 2019 by sowing distrust in vaccinations.² This cost more than eighty lives, mostly of children, until a door-to-door vaccination campaign proved to be ameliorative.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/20/opinion/rfk-jr-vaccines-public-health.html>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/25/opinion/rfk-jr-vaccines-samoa-measles.html>



- Kennedy personally claimed to the prime minister of Samoa that an epidemic of measles was caused by mothers and children receiving the measles vaccine. This led to reduced vaccination uptake, with less than one-third of eligible one-year-olds in Samoa receiving the vaccine.
- As Dr. Paul Offit makes clear, Kennedy is not a vaccine “skeptic”; he is a vaccine “cynic” who ignores scientific evidence when it does not lead to his preferred outcome.³

Kennedy’s Record on Healthy Foods

- Kennedy has spent decades spreading uninformed claims that conventionally grown American produce is “toxic” and covered in pesticides—and that pesticides cause cancer, autism, infertility, and obesity.⁴
- He deliberately ignores that conventional farming uses pesticides that are more stringently regulated for safety than organic farming does, which also costs American consumers more to purchase.
- Even though conventional produce is safe, nutritious, and affordable, Kennedy’s organization, Children’s Health Defense, brings in considerable donor money by spreading fear of pesticides. In short, he has put his own financial interests ahead of Americans’ health and access to healthy foods.

How Kennedy Could Abuse the Position

- As Secretary of HHS, Kennedy could use the “bully pulpit” to cast doubt on the safety and effectiveness of vaccines. This will lead countless Americans to avoid vaccinations and become sick (and die) from preventable diseases. Already, vaccinations among kindergarten students have remained below the federal target of 95 percent for four straight years.
- Howard Lutnick, chair of Donald Trump’s transition team, admits that Kennedy wants scientific studies on vaccines conducted for one reason only: “He wants the data so he can say these things are unsafe.”⁵ In fact, vaccines are more thoroughly studied than most medications, and there is overwhelming data that approved vaccines are safe and effective.
- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), under Kennedy’s watch, could discourage pharmaceutical companies from pursuing vaccine research and development. The FDA determines the type of clinical trials required to test a vaccine and can slow the review of results, thus putting costly roadblocks in front of these companies.

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/13/opinion/rfk-jr-is-a-vaccine-cynic.html>

⁴ <https://skepticalinquirer.org/exclusive/rfk-jr-cant-champion-healthy-food-while-spreading-agriculture-myths-he-fabricated>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/20/opinion/rfk-jr-vaccines-public-health.html>



- Kennedy would also have purview over the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the world's largest funder of biomedical research. He has promised to force the NIH to cease any studies into infectious diseases for eight years.

Conclusion

Putting Kennedy in charge of America's health agencies would be, in the words of Michael Bloomberg, "medical malpractice on a mass scale."⁶ Given Kennedy's record on many health-related issues, the Senate Committee on Finance must vote against his confirmation.

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/03/us/politics/bloomberg-rfk-jr-health.html>