



RFK, Jr. Confirmation Hearing: Battle Between Health Reformers & Status Quo Defenders

As expected, [Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.'s](#) confirmation hearing for Health and Human Services secretary produced a series of tense exchanges and theatrics.

The Senate Finance Committee hosted the four-hour long hearing Wednesday in a packed chamber. Two outbursts from protesters disrupted the process and prompted security to escort them out. After the second such incident, Chairman Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) warned that he would ask the police to get involved if everyone did not keep quiet.

There is a lot riding on this confirmation, and everyone paying attention knows it. Kennedy's agenda to shake things up in the healthcare system and get to the bottom of what is making Americans sick threatens to disrupt a system plagued with suspect science, corruption, incompetence, agency capture, and waste.

Of course, the ideal — and Constitutional — remedy would be to eliminate the position Kennedy is running for and shutter the entire federal "public health" apparatus. There are zero provisions in the U.S. Constitution for a federal health bureaucracy. Moreover, the food and health system rot that's sickening Americans stems, in part, from its centralization. Restricting health and food regulation to local and state levels makes it easier for citizens to know what's going on and to address corruption.

Nevertheless, for now the effort is focused on reforming the whole behemoth, and many who questioned Kennedy showed they had very little interest in accomplishing even that. They seemed more interested in preserving the status quo.

Democrats Attack

From the outset, in his opening statement, Ranking Member Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) established the role Democrats were cast to play. He immediately accused Kennedy of embracing "conspiracy theories, quack charlatans, especially when it comes to safety and efficacy of vaccines." Kennedy made it his life's work to discourage people from getting vaccines, Wyden added.

Kennedy's long history of casting doubt on vaccines *was* a major theme in many Democrats' attacks. But he did deny several times during the hearing that he was anti-vaccine.

Kennedy opened with his usual routine of describing the condition of America's collective health. More than 70 percent of American adults and one-third of children are overweight or obese, he said. Diabetes



AP Images
Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.



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is 10 times more common today than it was in the 1960s. Cancer among young people is rising by one to two percent a year. Autoimmune and neurodevelopment issues, Alzheimer's, asthma, ADHD, depression, addiction, and other health conditions are all on the rise. Over half of Americans are chronically ill. "The United States has worse health than any other developed nation. But we spend more money on healthcare." Chronic illness management, Kennedy said, is where 90 percent of healthcare costs are allocated. He added:

We have massive health problems in this country that we must face honestly. And the first thing I've done every morning for the past 20 years is to get on my knees and pray to God that he would put me in a position to end the chronic disease epidemic and to help America's children.

Kennedy's Plan

Kennedy laid out what he would do as HHS secretary. He would make sure American tax dollars support healthy food, the chemicals in food are properly investigated, financial conflicts among employees of regulatory agencies are removed, and that honest, unbiased, transparent, and accountable "gold standard science" would be created at HHS. When he was asked what he meant by "gold standard science," he responded:

The gold standard means real scientific research with replication of studies, which very rarely happens at NIH (National Institute of Health)... We should make sure all the science is published with the raw data. We should make sure that the peer reviews are also published.... The reason people don't trust the public health agencies is because they haven't been trustworthy.

Kennedy went on to point out that NIH funded 800 studies based on a fraudulent hypothesis. He also emphasized the need for transparency within the agency.

His exchange with Senator Elizabeth Warren's (D-Mass.) started out with a rare moment of lightheartedness before turning tense. First, Warren asked him if he would commit to not take any money from pharmaceutical companies, hospitals, or producers of medical products for four years after leaving HHS. He had no problem obliging, adding that it would be very unlikely he would be tempted in such ways, anyway. Then she asked if he'd commit to refrain from suing drug companies for four years after leaving the office. He refused and the two talked over each other. "I'm not going to commit to not sue drug companies — or anybody," Kennedy responded. Warren went on to say that as HHS secretary, he would have the power to undercut vaccines and vaccine manufacturers.

"Anti-vaxxer"

A recurring narrative during the hearing was the accusation that Kennedy's anti-vax crusade led to the deaths of more than 80 people in Samoa in 2019, a characterization he denied and tried repeatedly to explain while Senators talked over him.

Medicaid and Medicare services also came up. Kennedy said the problem with Medicaid is that the premiums and deductibles are too high, networks too narrow, and that doctors and high-quality



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hospitals often don't accept it. Some senators, such as Ben Lujan (D-N.M.), tried to downplay Medicaid's brokenness.

The topic of SSRIs came up as well. Senator Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) said Tennessee's Medicaid program spent \$90 million in 2024 on ADHD treatment for 417,000 children. They both agreed that HHS should prioritize alternative solutions such as counseling, behavioral therapy, and community-based interventions. Kennedy pointed out that 15 percent of America's youth are on Adderall or other ADHD medication, something he found unacceptable.

But Raphael Warnock (D-Ga.) was not as agreeable on this suspect view of SSRIs, accusing Kennedy of linking school shootings to anti-depressants, a connection the Peach State legislator found unbelievable.

When it was Senator Bernie Sanders' (I-Vt.) turn, he started with his favorite song. He tried to get Kennedy to agree that universal healthcare is a right, but to no avail. Kennedy said healthcare isn't like free speech because there's a cost associated with it. The two did, however, agree that something should be done about the fact that Americans pay far higher prices for the same drugs than Europeans.

“Anti-science”

The tone-deafness among Democrats was perhaps best encapsulated in the exchange with Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.). She asked if he knew how harmful his “anti-science” views were to the public. Kennedy pushed back and said evidence-based science is exactly what he subscribes to. He quickly pointed out that chronic disease causes 92 percent of deaths in the United States, yet the NIH does not invest any studies in this area. Cantwell causally responded, “it's an interesting point” before moving back to her script.

The hearing concluded, appropriately, with applause. What had transpired was not so different from a play, where nearly all the characters dutifully stuck to their scripts. Unfortunately, this confirmation process has massive implications for real people. It will determine whether healthcare reformers will be allowed to address a serious problem.

Kennedy returns to Capitol Hill Thursday for a hearing in front of the Senate [Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee](#). It's considered a courtesy hearing, because only the Senate Finance Committee will vote on Kennedy's confirmation. Republicans control the Senate by a 53-47 majority. Kennedy can only afford to lose support from three GOP senators if all the Democrats follow their marching orders. During Wednesday's hearing, no Republicans seemed to be opposed to his nomination.

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