

Trump's cabinet of social counterrevolution

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As Republican President-elect Donald Trump continues to fill out his cabinet, the counterrevolutionary character of his incoming government is becoming more and more apparent. Trump's earlier nominations, mainly to the military-intelligence agencies and the apparatus of domestic repression, demonstrated his determination to launch a violent fascist attack on millions of immigrants. His latest selections, to federal departments that in some limited way provide social benefits to working people, are aimed at disrupting their functioning or outright destroying them.

The first signal of Trump's plans for social services came with his selection of anti-vaccine conspiracy theorist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to head the Department of Health and Human Services, the huge agency that includes the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), which provides health insurance for the elderly and health insurance for low-income people of all ages.

Before his abortive 2024 presidential campaign, which he began contesting the Democratic Party nomination, then switched to running as an "independent," before finally endorsing Trump and campaigning for him enthusiastically, Kennedy was best known for his notorious lies about childhood vaccines causing autism. His multi-million-dollar effort to discredit these vaccines has had a profoundly negative effect on public health, particularly for diseases like measles which are so contagious that a drop in vaccination coverage below 95 percent of children creates the conditions for a renewed outbreak. Trump has promised to empower Kennedy to "go wild on health," which will have the effect of disarming the American population against the danger of diseases both old and new.

Next came the selection of Dr. Mehmet Oz to head the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). While originally a cardiothoracic surgeon, Oz became a television celebrity, first on the Oprah Winfrey program, then on his own syndicated program produced by Winfrey's production company and distributed by Sony Pictures.

Oz became notorious as a promoter of dubious remedies and was denounced by fellow physicians at Columbia University for "promoting quack treatments and cures in the interest of personal financial gain." He endorsed Trump's recommendation of hydroxychloroquine as a cure for COVID-19. By 2022, fully in the fascist camp, Oz entered electoral politics as the Trump-backed Republican candidate for US Senate from Pennsylvania, a race which he lost narrowly to Democrat John Fetterman.

In his statement nominating Oz, Trump pointed to the nine daytime Emmy awards for his television show, as though that was a medical credential. He declared, "Dr. Oz will work closely with Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to take on the illness industrial

complex and all the horrible chronic diseases left in its wake."

A central policy goal of these appointments is to destroy the federal public health infrastructure, even as major new pandemic threats such as H5N1 and mpox are arising, and COVID-19 still persists as a major killer. Besides Kennedy, who opposes virtually all forms of vaccination, COVID-19 denialists like Florida Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo and Stanford University Professor of Medicine Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, a co-author of the anti-public health Great Barrington Declaration, are reportedly on the short list to head agencies like the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Oz is also a fervent supporter of private profit in healthcare, backing Medicare Advantage, the privatized version of Medicare established through bipartisan legislation under the George W. Bush administration. He has hailed efforts to "expand access to private sector plans expanded by President Trump" for Medicare recipients, which have had the effect of boosting the profits of insurance companies by giving them access to a guaranteed stream of billions of dollars from the federal government.

Senator Fetterman, the Democrat who defeated Oz in 2022, said he would vote to confirm him provided he made a commitment "about protecting and preserving Medicare and Medicaid," something which any HHS nominee promises whatever his intentions. His comment is typical of the response of congressional Democrats, who have refused to mount any systematic opposition to the incoming ultra-right regime, confining themselves to scandal-mongering against a handful of the most provocative nominations, such as former Congressman Matt Gaetz for attorney general. US President Joe Biden, meeting Trump at the White House, promised a "smooth transition" and vowed to "do everything we can to make sure you're accommodated."

The sinister subtext of Trump's HHS nominations is that the second Trump administration is preparing massive cuts in vital healthcare programs, particularly Medicaid, which was expanded significantly as a consequence of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), despite the refusal of a number of Republican-ruled states to participate. According to a report Wednesday in the *New York Times*, "conservative lawmakers and policy experts who could advise the next Trump administration are discussing long-sought cuts to Medicaid, the government health program that covers roughly a fifth of all Americans and makes up about 10 percent of the federal budget."

Changes could include imposing work requirements on Medicaid recipients or turning the program's funding into block grants for the states, which they could use for other purposes if they deny eligibility to enough people. Trump indicated his support for such efforts, declaring that Dr. Oz would "cut waste and fraud within

our country's most expensive government agency."

Even more dire is the prospect for federal support to public education, both K-12 and at the college and university levels. Trump announced Tuesday he was appointing Linda McMahon, the billionaire co-owner of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) and a longtime crony and political backer, to be secretary of education. McMahon headed the Small Business Administration during his first term and pumped millions into Trump's election campaign this year, then served as co-chair of his "transition team," which drew up lists of potential nominees for top posts in the new administration.

To say that McMahon has no qualifications to head the Department of Education is an understatement. Her background in professional wrestling, from which she and her husband Vince made their fortune, identifies her as a promoter of cultural backwardness, a carnival barker and con artist rather than an educator. In that, of course, McMahon and Trump are birds of a feather.

The Department of Education is only a subsidiary source of funding for public schools, which are mainly paid for and administered at the state and local levels. It also manages the vast \$1.6 trillion college student loan portfolio, which is a significant source of revenue. Trump and the Republicans have opposed efforts to alleviate the loan burden on millions of former college students, many of them eking out a living and unable to do more than make minimum payments on their debts, if that.

McMahon's only past comments on the topic of education have involved support for "school choice," the effective demolition of public education through vouchers that would shift funding to private "charter schools," including religious schools, violating the constitutional separation of church and state. But the America First Policy Institute, which she heads, has published papers calling for promoting "patriotic" education, home schooling, the suppression of "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion" (DEI) efforts in education, and the strengthening of repressive measures against students. Her appointment was hailed by the association of for-profit colleges and by Moms for Liberty, the billionaire-backed right-wing campaign that seeks book-banning and other forms of censorship in public schools, under the false slogan of "parents' rights."

Beyond the policy changes and program cuts, however, Trump has pledged support for the outright abolition of the Department of Education, which was established in 1977 by federal legislation during the Carter administration. In a statement issued Monday, billionaires Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, who head Trump's unofficial "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE), called the abolition of the department a "very reasonable proposal." Trump himself, in nominating McMahon, said, "We will send Education BACK TO THE STATES, and Linda will spearhead that effort."

In an op-ed column published Wednesday evening by the *Wall Street Journal*, Musk and Ramaswamy declared their determination to "cut costs" like a private business—that is, by slashing jobs and forcing more production from fewer workers. Underscoring the dictatorial thrust of the incoming Trump regime, they wrote, "We will focus particularly on driving change through executive action based on existing legislation rather than by

passing new laws."

Citing several recent decisions by the ultra-right majority on the Supreme Court—with three of the six appointed by Trump—the two billionaires embrace a bonfire of regulations on corporate America. This would free corporations to endanger their own workers and the public, as well as creating the conditions for slashing the jobs of federal workers.

They wrote: "A drastic reduction in federal regulations provides sound industrial logic for mass head-count reductions across the federal bureaucracy. DOGE intends to work with embedded appointees in agencies to identify the minimum number of employees required at an agency."

They suggest methods ranging from "large-scale firings" to forcing "a wave of voluntary terminations that we would welcome" by relocating federal agencies out of Washington and ending remote working, which the billionaires demean as "the Covid-era privilege of staying home."

This is a program for social counterrevolution. Trillions will be poured into the military and into the repressive agencies which will initially wage war on immigrants, and then on the democratic rights of the working class as a whole. At the same time, the cost of militarization and repression will be paid for by the working class, through the destruction of what remains of public social services like healthcare, education and Social Security.



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