

An accomplice visits his own crime scene

Kennedy tours epicenter of US measles outbreak to promote anti-science quackery

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Anti-vaccine zealot Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s trip this week through the Southwest of the United States—Texas, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico—can only be characterized as snake oil salesmanship. Visiting the epicenter of the deepening nationwide measles outbreak, which has now reached 607 confirmed cases in the U.S. (505 in Texas), Kennedy peddled miracle cures for measles while promoting his agenda to end the fluoridation of drinking water across the U.S.

Kennedy's tour came on the heels of the unprecedented mass layoffs of over 10,000 public health workers across all HHS agencies, centered on the CDC, FDA, and NIH, which is already having far-reaching implications for public health across the U.S.

Considering the recent death of an eight-year-old girl from measles-related pulmonary failure in West Texas, it would be more accurate to describe Kennedy as a merchant of death who has come to inspect the results of his dangerous quackery and promotion of hermeticism.

Indeed, on Sunday Kennedy attended the funeral of eight-year-old Daisy Hilderbrand who died of measles because she was unvaccinated. His stated intention was “[to quietly] console the families and to be with their community in their moment of grief.”

Kennedy's attendance at Daisy Hilderbrand's funeral exemplifies a stunning moral perversion. As arguably the world's leading anti-vaccine conspiracy theorist for decades before assuming public office, his rhetoric has directly fueled the vaccine hesitancy that left these children defenseless against a preventable disease. His presence at the funeral is nothing short of an accomplice to murder returning to the scene of his crime, feigning sympathy while meeting with the families of victims whose deaths his propaganda helped orchestrate. The blood of these children stains his hands as surely as if he had denied them medicine himself.

While Kennedy may now publicly acknowledge vaccine efficacy out of political calculation, his years of undermining

immunization campaigns and privately supporting parents' decisions against vaccination reveals his true position. These deaths are not unfortunate accidents but the predictable, even inevitable consequences of the dangerous anti-science movement Kennedy has championed throughout his career—a movement that has now been grotesquely legitimized by his appointment to oversee the nation's public health infrastructure.

While in Texas, Kennedy praised two quack doctors—Richard Bartlett and Ben Edwards—as “healers” who have “treated and healed some 300 measles-stricken Mennonite children using aerosolized budesonide and clarithromycin.”

Numerous experts have stated unequivocally that these treatments do nothing to address a measles infection. Vaccine scientist and advocate Dr. Paul Offit has noted the irrelevance of these therapies to measles, which is a viral infection unaffected by antibiotics. Kennedy's promotion of these quack remedies is in line with his prior advocacy of cod liver oil and vitamin A instead of mass vaccination, which resulted in multiple children being admitted to hospitals with acute liver injury and vitamin toxicity.

These “healers” have dubious pasts. Dr. Richard Bartlett was disciplined by the Texas Medical Board in 2003 for using unconventional treatments and unusual risk-filled medications. He had misdiagnosed patients and mismanaged their care, according to the board. In 2021, he received a criminal trespass warning at Medical Center Hospital in Odessa, Texas, after being caught rummaging through trash and restricted patient areas claiming to be looking for “COVID bags” supposedly placed over patient heads. Bartlett has promoted what he called his “silver bullet” treatment for COVID, which is the same budesonide (debunked by subsequent studies) that he is now giving to hospitalized measles patients.

Dr. Ben Edwards, a vocal anti-vaccine advocate and co-founder of Veritas Medical in Lubbock, operates a “wellness

clinic” that emphasizes “root cause” resolution over conventional symptom management. Completely opposed to germ theory, like Kennedy he prioritizes unproven holistic remedies like vitamin C, cod liver oil, and dietary changes. He has openly repudiated measles vaccinations, described measles outbreaks as “God’s version of measles immunization,” and advocated for natural infection over vaccination.

From Texas, Kennedy pivoted to Utah, celebrating the state’s recent ban on fluoridated drinking water as part of his “Make America Healthy Again” agenda. Fluoridation, hailed by the CDC as one of the 10 greatest public health achievements of the 20th century, has reduced tooth decay by 25 percent in the U.S., particularly benefiting low-income families who lack access to dental care. Kennedy, however, labels fluoride “industrial waste” linked to IQ loss and thyroid disease—claims debunked by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and the American Dental Association (ADA).

The National Toxicology Program (NTP) monograph Kennedy cites to justify his stance has been widely discredited. Peer reviewers noted its reliance on studies from regions like China, where fluoride levels in groundwater are 10 times higher than U.S. recommendations (0.7 mg/L). The NTP omitted data from Australia, New Zealand, and Spain, where fluoridation programs showed no cognitive harm. Even the NAS, which flagged methodological flaws in the NTP report, reaffirmed that fluoridation at U.S. levels is safe and effective.

By attacking fluoridation, Kennedy targets a pillar of public health infrastructure: a low-cost intervention benefiting all, regardless of income. His agenda aligns with right-wing efforts to dismantle social programs, framing them as government overreach rather than essential services. The result is a direct assault on the working class, who rely on such programs to mitigate healthcare inequities.

Kennedy’s rise as a “public health” authority has been facilitated by corporate media outlets that legitimize anti-science rhetoric under the guise of “balance.” Upon Trump’s nomination of Kennedy as Health Secretary, the *Washington Post*’s Dr. Leana Wen and the *New York Times*’ Emily Oster—who both downplayed COVID risks justifying school reopening—advocated “nuanced” dialogues with anti-fluoridation and anti-vaccine activists. Wen described Kennedy’s fluoridation stance as “not an entirely crazy idea,” while Oster suggested accommodating raw milk advocates to “save some lives” through compromise.

This false equivalence between science and conspiracy erodes public trust. It reflects a broader capitalist media logic that prioritizes controversy over truth, enabling figures like Kennedy to rebrand fringe ideas as legitimate dissent.

The consequences are dire. As H5N1 “bird flu” looms as potentially the next pandemic, such normalization of anti-science rhetoric jeopardizes preparedness and amplifies vulnerabilities for the working class.

Kennedy’s tour cannot be divorced from the capitalist system that produced him. His anti-science agenda thrives in a society where public health is subordinated to profit motives, enabling corporate interests to manipulate research, defund institutions, and propagate disinformation. The fluoridation debate echoes mid-20th century red-baiting campaigns that framed public health measures as communist plots. Today, the same reactionary forces attack vaccines, climate science, and anti-COVID mitigation efforts, leveraging distrust in institutions to consolidate power.

The working class bears the brunt of these assaults. Low-income communities, already marginalized by privatized healthcare, face compounded risks when fluoridation is eliminated or vaccine uptake declines. The Texas measles outbreak, like COVID disparities, exposes how capitalism weaponizes ignorance, sacrificing lives to uphold a system that values profit over people.

Defending science and public health requires a socialist perspective that places public well-being and safety over fallacious individualistic ideologies. Fluoridation, vaccines, and universal healthcare are not merely technical issues but political ones—manifestations of the class struggle over resource and knowledge control.

Kennedy’s Southwest tour epitomizes the convergence of right-wing ideology and capitalist decay, exploiting crises to erode trust in science and solidarity. His anti-fluoridation and anti-vaccine rhetoric, amplified by media complicity, threatens decades of public health progress. It underscores the urgency of the need to fight for a socialist public health program, which will only develop through the building of a mass movement in the working class.



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