

# Kennedy escalates war on health in congressional testimony

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Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Robert F. Kennedy Jr. testified to Congress on Wednesday for the first time since being confirmed to the role. The hearings before the House Appropriations Committee in the morning and the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee in the afternoon were held for the purpose of discussing the Trump administration's proposed budget for HHS.

In the days immediately prior to the hearings, HHS rescinded layoff notices for the Director of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and a few teams at the agency, in a move clearly designed to deflect criticism at the hearing. This action gave cover to senators like Lisa Murkowski (Republican-Alaska), who praised Kennedy for the limited action.

Underscoring that the action was a fig leaf, however, most of the laid-off scientists and engineers at the Spokane and Pittsburgh Mining Research Divisions of NIOSH were called back to work only to shut down their laboratories and research over the coming weeks. These two mining divisions conduct studies to improve mine safety, with a goal of eliminating fatalities, injuries and illnesses across all mining sectors.

The hearings also took place on the same day that the *New York Times* published an op-ed co-authored by Kennedy that promotes the administration's intent to implement work requirements for Medicaid and other social programs, an open endorsement of the Republicans' proposed plans to slash Medicaid by a staggering \$715 billion over the next decade. His co-authors were Dr. Mehmet Oz, recently confirmed as Director of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; Brooke Rollins, Secretary of Agriculture; and Scott Turner, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

At the hearings, Kennedy was questioned on multiple issues, including the planned Medicaid cuts, vaccines, the

ongoing Texas measles outbreak, fluoridation of drinking water, and cuts to research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). In response, Kennedy doubled down on nearly every major anti-scientific, anti-health position he has taken both prior to and since becoming Health Secretary, while attempting to falsely portray the Medicaid cuts as eliminating "fraud and abuse."

He also promulgated a major new fraud, that the US national debt constitutes a "social determinant of health." This position attempts to portray the debt as directly responsible for harming Americans' health, as opposed to the ruling class and its criminal policies that have caused grotesque increases in social inequality and eviscerated workplace safety protections.

The Republicans plan to slash Medicaid in order to offset ongoing tax cuts for the wealthy. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the budget bill as currently written will cause an estimated 8.7 million people to lose Medicaid coverage this year and 7.6 million more people to lack insurance over the next decade.

The work requirements, and the ways in which beneficiaries' compliance with them are assessed, disparately impact the poorest Americans unable to complete increasingly onerous and bureaucratic paperwork. Furthermore, the process is deliberately complicated in order to frustrate proper reporting of employment.

At both hearings, Kennedy doubled down on undermining confidence in the measles vaccine. In fact, Senator Chris Murphy (Democrat-Connecticut) directly asked Kennedy if he understood that a consequence of constantly undermining faith in the vaccine was that fewer people get the vaccine. Kennedy dodged the question.

Noting Kennedy's lies about the measles vaccine, Murphy stated:

You told the public that the vaccine wanes very quickly ... and said that the measles vaccine was never properly tested for safety. You said there's fetal debris in the measles vaccine.

Unable to control himself, Kennedy shouted angrily, "All true!"

In response to questions about whether he recommends the measles vaccine, Kennedy responded with non sequiturs. When told that he was, in fact, not recommending the vaccine, Kennedy lied and claimed he said at the House hearing in the morning that he was recommending the vaccine, when in fact he said no such thing.

During the hearing, Kennedy also lied about which vaccines had been tested against placebo, saying that only the COVID-19 vaccine had been so tested. Senator Bill Cassidy (Republican-Louisiana) issued a statement later during the hearing correcting the record, noting that multiple vaccines have been tested against placebo, including the measles and human papillomavirus vaccines.

Responding to criticism of his agency's handling of the ongoing measles outbreak centered in Texas, Kennedy improperly compared total measles cases this year per capita against Mexico, Canada and Europe. The proper comparison is the United States in the past. The current situation is a significant step backward relative to the 1990s, when cases and deaths were far lower than 2024 and 2025 to date. Furthermore, the European numbers include several low- and middle-income countries that never eliminated measles like the US, as well as more advanced nations of Western Europe.

Kennedy also erupted in anger when Senator Maggie Hassan (Democrat-New Hampshire) inquired about the role of anti-vaccine quack David Geier in HHS's plans to study autism. He accused Hassan of slandering Geier, claiming that Geier had successfully challenged the charges lodged against him by the Maryland Board of Physicians and won a \$5 million settlement.

Geier was found by the Maryland Board of Physicians to have practiced medicine without a license. The board fined him \$10,000. The decision was upheld on appeal. Ultimately, Kennedy never answered the question about Geier's role in plans for a new study on autism.

In summary, Kennedy reacted to the questioning at the House and Senate hearings with visible agitation and lies when challenged on the administration's plans to gut life-

saving social services, including Medicaid. He doubled down on blatant lies and misinformation about vaccines and numerous other topics.

Since April 1, when HHS announced cuts to 20,000 workers, or nearly 25 percent of its workforce, Kennedy and the Trump administration's other charlatans have waged an all-out war on science and public health. The result is the explosive return of childhood infectious diseases like measles and pertussis, with 2025 on track to be the worst year for pertussis in over 70 years and the worst year for measles since it was declared eliminated in the US 25 years ago.

Not so long ago, the healthcare and public health leaders of the federal government, including the heads of HHS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), among others, were, for the most part, respected experts. Now, they are a band of charlatans spewing fascistic rants on a daily basis.

Next on the target list in the Trump administration's war on workers is Medicaid. The brutal cuts planned for the program—coming on the heels of Biden falsely declaring that COVID-19 was over in May 2023 and thereby allowing states to kick over 20 million people off Medicaid—will leave millions without health coverage. Millions more will face increased costs for the program or reduced coverage.

The American ruling class is determined to return workers to conditions of industrial slavery not seen since the Nazi regime, sending them to an early grave as soon as they are no longer able to be exploited for profit. The working class must respond with its own independent political program to replace capitalism with socialism, placing their lives and social needs over private profit.



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