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Wyden Statement on Confirmation Hearing of HHS Secretary Nominee RFK Jr.

As Prepared for Delivery

The question before the Finance Committee this morning is whether Robert F. Kennedy Jr. should be trusted with the health and well-being of the American people. Committee staff have examined thousands of pages of statements, books, and podcast transcripts in a review of his record.

The receipts show that Mr. Kennedy has embraced conspiracy theories, quacks, and charlatans, especially when it comes to the safety and efficacy of vaccines. He's made it his life's work to sow doubt and discourage parents from getting their kids life-saving vaccines. It's been lucrative for him and put him on the verge of real power. This is the profile of somebody who chases money and influence wherever they lead, even if that means the deaths of children and other vulnerable people.

Mr. Kennedy is fond of saying he's not making recommendations about whether parents should vaccinate their children, he's just asking questions and giving people choices.

It's a slippery tactic to dodge any real responsibility for his words and actions, and it's absurd coming from somebody who's trying to win confirmation for a job that is entirely about making recommendations. Those recommendations will have life-or-death consequences for American families. Mr. Kennedy, if you are confirmed, your recommendations determine which vaccines seniors get for free through Medicare. Your recommendations will determine which vaccines are given to millions of children.

Peddling these anti-vaccine conspiracy theories as our chief health care officer will endanger the lives of kids and seniors across the country. Just look at what happened when Mr. Kennedy inserted himself into an anti-vaccination crisis in the island nation of Samoa. He traveled there himself to push his views and pour fuel on the fire of a measles outbreak that began due to low vaccination rates. In the end, 83 Samoans died, mostly children, from a disease that is easily preventable. Americans can't afford to import this experiment to communities across the country.

On other health care matters, from abortion to universal health care, Mr. Kennedy has changed his views so often, it's nearly impossible to know where he stands on the basic issues that will impact Americans' daily lives.

In a gobsmacking statement of irresponsibility, in November 2023 this nominee said he wanted to pause infectious disease research for eight years.

Mr. Kennedy has indicated he's open to restricting access to the abortion medication, Mifepristone, which remains a primary target of Republicans' crusade against reproductive freedom. I took this on back in 1990 when I chaired the first ever Congressional hearing on the topic. The science was clear then and it's even clearer today: Mifepristone is safe. The only reason it's under question in 2025 is because people with a political agenda are lying about it.

Women deserve to know if Mr. Kennedy will abuse his power as our country's chief health officer to essentially implement a national abortion ban by restricting access to this safe and legal medication.

Meanwhile, as the Trump budget office threw the Medicaid program into chaos yesterday, Republicans in Congress are proposing deep cuts to the program that will rip away health care from millions of Americans who count on this vital lifeline.

Cuts to Medicaid of this magnitude will jack up the cost of health insurance, shutter nursing homes and rural hospitals, and deprive seniors and Americans with disabilities of home-based care. That approach amounts to handing over our nation's health care system to for-profit insurance companies that have made a fortune delaying and denying care.

Mr. Kennedy has virtually no knowledge or experience in handling these issues, leaving him unprepared to take on a crisis like the nation witnessed yesterday when Trump's budget office shut down the federal Medicaid payment portal.

After a careful review of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s statements, actions, associations and views, I have reached the conclusion that he should not be entrusted with the health and well-being of the American people. When he's taken every side of every issue, how can this committee and the American public believe anything he has to say?

I believe more strongly now than at any other time in my public service that our country is at a turning point with regard to health care. If there's one word to describe Americans' feelings towards their health care today, it's "disillusioned." At every single turn, people feel like they are rolling a set of loaded dice when they try to get health care. Americans are justifiably angry, fed up, and tired of a system that puts profits over patients.

Instead of debating meaningful ways to improve Americans' health care, this Committee is being forced to relitigate settled science about vaccines and whether or not the federal government should help Americans get affordable health care.

I know where Democrats on the Finance Committee stand when it comes to our agenda to lower costs and improve care. I cannot say the same of the nominee sitting in front of me.

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