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## **Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Vote on RFK Jr.'s Nomination to be HHS Secretary**

*As Prepared for Delivery*

This morning the Finance Committee will vote on Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s nomination to serve as our nation's chief health care officer.

Before we get to Mr. Kennedy and why I believe he's unfit to serve as HHS Secretary, I'd like to say this: the last several days we've witnessed an authoritarian takeover of our federal government by Donald Trump and Elon Musk. They've set their sights on a full purge of anyone in government that doesn't bend the knee and follow their orders.

They've taken over the Treasury Department's payments system, which affects major programs within our committee's jurisdiction that include Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid payments. This committee voted for a major reform of pharmacy benefit managers passed 26-0 but Trump and Musk killed it. Think what they could do with abuse of this payment system.

Much of this is of dubious legal and constitutional authority, and flies in the face of Congressional authority. I hope our colleagues on the other side of the aisle will not sit by while Trump and Musk make a mockery of the power Republicans hold in their congressional majority.

Now more than ever, the American people need leaders that will stand up to Donald Trump and Elon Musk.

That brings us to Mr. Kennedy.

A recent analysis showed that Mr. Kennedy has made 114 separate appearances in the last four years where he espoused anti-vaccine views or spread misinformation about the efficacy of vaccines. In 36 of those instances, Mr. Kennedy directly linked vaccines to autism.

Last week, Mr. Kennedy was given ample opportunity on a bipartisan basis to recant his decades-long career peddling anti-vaccine conspiracies.

Instead, he dodged and weaved, and gave no indication that if confirmed as HHS Secretary, he would stand by the long-settled science surrounding routine vaccinations. Just take the Samoa measles outbreak as an example. Mr. Kennedy told me "We don't know what was killing them," speaking about the 83 measles deaths during an outbreak of the disease in 2019. Just yesterday, the Director-General of Health from Samoa called this claim "a total fabrication."

Peddling these conspiracy theories as the nation's chief health care officer will be deadly for kids across the country.

On abortion, Mr. Kennedy's answers once again only raise more questions.

He refused to tell us whether he would blindly follow a directive from Donald Trump to break the law and end access to mifepristone, and seemed to have no understanding of his role in enforcing existing federal laws that guarantee women the right to life-saving abortion care.

Mr. Kennedy also failed to show a basic understanding of the Medicare and Medicaid programs he'd be tasked with overseeing. That alone should be disqualifying.

Mr. Kennedy has given us no reason to believe he'll be anything other than a rubber stamp for plans to gut Medicaid and rip health care away from the American people, and a yes-man if ordered by Trump or Musk to take an illegal action.

Today the committee will make a judgement about the future of science in this country that will impact the health and well-being of Americans for years to come. I agree that the health care status quo needs substantial changes to better serve patients. So the question in front of us this morning is pretty simple. Do Senators want their legacy to include disregarding basic health science and instead of elevating conspiracy theorists?

Making Robert Kennedy Secretary of Health and Human Services would be a grave threat to the health of the American people. I urge my colleagues to vote 'No'.

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