

Federal health programs he would be charged with running and a willful desire to mislead Senators about his views on science matters like vaccine safety.

The only conclusion I am left with is that he stands steadfastly by the outlandish views he has expressed over his two-decade career as an anti-vaccine crusader, and he is fully prepared to implement the Republican healthcare agenda.

That agenda boils down to putting Big Pharma and insurance companies back in charge, while leaving millions of American families to fend for themselves without affordable care.

And I want to be clear about this. Going back to my days as director of the Gray Panthers, which is what I did before I went into public service, I can just tell you, this is the least qualified nominee to ever be nominated for a position of this importance. So for the next day and night, Senate Democrats are going to be on the floor telling the American people why.

Our colleagues on the other side of the aisle still have an opportunity to turn away from this dangerous path. If they do not, my view is their legacy will be tarnished by setbacks in science that will echo in America for decades.

As I mentioned, I spent countless hours as a young man working with seniors to navigate the newly created Medicare Program and help them avoid predatory insurance company tactics that remain all too common today. To me and many other Americans, healthcare, colleagues, is the most important issue, because if you and your loved ones don't have their health, everything else goes by the boards.

The reality is we need to make sure that Americans have the best and most affordable healthcare possible, rather than having a handful of healthcare companies gobble up the entire market for health insurance, pharmaceuticals, hospitals, and even doctors.

The results have been great for shareholder profits and disastrous for American families. Costs keep climbing. The act of getting a doctor's appointment or filing an insurance claim seems to have become an Olympic sport in much of America. The system delays and denies care and rakes in profits, while patients are left wondering how they are going to get the care they need.

So the question before the Senate now is whether we want America's chief health officer to be somebody who is going to take on those corporate interests, somebody who is going to fight tooth and nail to lower costs and improve care, somebody who is going to work to protect and improve the Federal healthcare programs that tens of millions of Americans rely on and not gut them.

Everything I have seen and heard from Mr. Kennedy over these last few weeks has led me, colleagues, to conclude he is not the person that America needs. Americans have little reason to

take Mr. Kennedy at his word. They do, however, have every reason to believe Mr. Kennedy will continue to embrace and amplify anti-vaccine programs, every reason to believe that he will back up Donald Trump's abortion bans. Every reason to believe that he will be a rubberstamp for the Republican health agenda that would rip away the healthcare of so many Americans.

Over the course of the rest of the day and through the night, Democrats are going to show the American people why these concerns are so serious.

I yield the floor, and I urge my colleagues to oppose this nomination.

VOTE ON GABBARD NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time has expired.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Gabbard nomination?

Mr. WYDEN. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

The result was announced—yeas 52, nays 48, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 50 Ex.]

YEAS—52

Banks	Graham	Mullin
Barrasso	Grassley	Murkowski
Blackburn	Hagerty	Paul
Boozman	Hawley	Ricketts
Britt	Hoeben	Risch
Budd	Husted	Rounds
Capito	Hyde-Smith	Schmitt
Cassidy	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Collins	Justice	Scott (SC)
Cornyn	Kennedy	Sheehy
Cotton	Lankford	Sullivan
Cramer	Lee	Thune
Crapo	Lummis	Tillis
Cruz	Marshall	Tuberville
Curtis	McCormick	Wicker
Daines	Moody	Young
Ernst	Moran	
Fischer	Moreno	

NAYS—48

Alsobrooks	Hickenlooper	Reed
Baldwin	Hirono	Rosen
Bennet	Kaine	Sanders
Blumenthal	Kelly	Schatz
Blunt Rochester	Kim	Schiff
Booker	King	Schumer
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Coons	Lujan	Slotkin
Cortez Masto	Markey	Smith
Duckworth	McConnell	Van Hollen
Durbin	Merkley	Warner
Fetterman	Murphy	Warnock
Gallego	Murray	Warren
Gillibrand	Ossoff	Welch
Hassan	Padilla	Whitehouse
Heinrich	Peters	Wyden

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's actions.

WAIVING MANDATORY QUORUM CALL

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to waive the mandatory quorum call with respect to the Kennedy nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 17, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

John Thune, John R. Curtis, Tommy Tuberville, Kevin Cramer, Ashley B. Moody, Mike Crapo, Markwayne Mullin, David McCormick, Mike Lee, Ron Johnson, John Barrasso, Jim Justice, Jon A. Husted, Bernie Moreno, Tom Cotton, Tim Sheehy, Rick Scott of Florida.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 53, nays 47, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 51 Ex.]

YEAS—53

Banks	Graham	Moreno
Barrasso	Grassley	Mullin
Blackburn	Hagerty	Murkowski
Boozman	Hawley	Paul
Britt	Hoeben	Ricketts
Budd	Husted	Risch
Capito	Hyde-Smith	Rounds
Cassidy	Johnson	Schmitt
Collins	Justice	Scott (FL)
Cornyn	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Cotton	Lankford	Sheehy
Cramer	Lee	Sullivan
Crapo	Lummis	Thune
Cruz	Marshall	Tillis
Curtis	McConnell	Tuberville
Daines	McCormick	Wicker
Ernst	Moody	Young
Fischer	Moran	

NAYS—47

Alsobrooks	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Baldwin	Hirono	Sanders
Bennet	Kaine	Schatz
Blumenthal	Kelly	Schiff
Blunt Rochester	Kim	Schumer
Booker	King	Shaheen
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Slotkin
Coons	Lujan	Smith
Cortez Masto	Markey	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Merkley	Warner
Durbin	Murphy	Warnock
Fetterman	Murray	Warren
Gallego	Ossoff	Welch
Gillibrand	Padilla	Whitehouse
Hassan	Peters	Wyden
Heinrich	Reed	

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). On this vote, the yeas are 53, the nays are 47.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

NOMINATION OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, as we begin this discussion that is so important to America, I thought I would just mention the conversation I had recently with a couple of young medical students who came up to me and said: We know you are interested in healthcare and have been involved in this.

I am so appreciative of Senator MURRAY, who is going to pick up on the healthcare issue—an area where she has very substantial experience and expertise.

I thought these medical students summed up this debate, because they said: The way we see this Kennedy nomination, it is not just a vote for next week or even next year; this is a vote with enormous impact for decades.

Because Mr. Kennedy, according to these young medical students, has a long record of essentially being anti-science.

What we are going to do in our discussion of his nomination is go into that and other issues.

Suffice it to say, during his confirmation hearings—and they have been in multiple committees now—he was given ample opportunity from members on both sides of the dais to clarify his views on science and vaccines and our Nation's biggest Federal health programs. We are going to, in the hours ahead, touch on each of these and why Mr. Kennedy's failure to demonstrate a basic understanding of these important issues that impact America's health make him a uniquely unqualified nominee to become our Nation's chief healthcare officer.

In beginning my remarks, I wanted to say that ever since my days with the Gray Panthers, I have always felt that healthcare is the most important issue. If you and your loved ones don't have your health, everything just goes by the board. So that just reinforces what these young medical students were saying about the decision we are going to make in future hours with respect to Mr. Kennedy.

I am going to start with perhaps the most dangerous aspect of his long history, and that is his embrace and amplification of vaccine conspiracy theories. He has made a lucrative career out of sowing doubt in the minds of parents when it comes to vaccinating their kids. His nonprofit, the Children's Health Defense, is solely dedicated to peddling these conspiracies. You can even get merch. There are baby onesies, apparently, that read "Unvaxxed, Unafraid," "No Vax, No Problem."

He has been the attorney of record on at least five cases against drug companies for their vaccines, which he didn't

disclose to ethics officials and refused to answer questions about. He also refused to give up his 10 percent stake in any settlement agreements—instead, passing them off to his son. He refused to recuse himself from taking any actions that might affect his family's financial interests.

A vaccine that became routine for young people about 20 years ago is involved here, and since then, it has successfully cut cervical cancer rates into just a fraction of what they were before the drug came out to market. All of this adds up to a future HHS Secretary who stands to profit off of undermining this vaccine and, as a result, raise cervical cancer rates.

To quote my Republican colleague Senator CASSIDY, a physician, Mr. Kennedy is "financially vested in finding fault with vaccines."

He also played a big role in one of the most deadly measles outbreaks in recent history. In 2019, he traveled to Samoa and used his platform to promote his anti-vax agenda, taking aim at the measles vaccine. The vaccine rate in Samoa plummeted. By 2019, measles had torn through the population, making more than 5,700 people sick, and 80 people were killed, most of them young kids.

During his confirmation hearing at the Senate Finance Committee, Mr. Kennedy told me, "We don't know what was killing them," speaking about those 83 deaths. But just last week, the Director General of Health for Samoa called this claim by Mr. Kennedy "a total fabrication."

So, Mr. President and colleagues, just put that in your thinking about this consideration—Mr. Kennedy saying that he didn't know what was killing these young people in Samoa and the Director General of Health of Samoa calling Mr. Kennedy's claim "a total fabrication."

A recent analysis showed that Mr. Kennedy has made 114 separate appearances in the last 4 years where he took anti-vaccine views or spread misinformation about the efficacy of vaccines. In 36 of these instances, Mr. Kennedy directly linked vaccines to autism.

Instead of providing the committee with clarity or reassurances about his decades-long career peddling vaccine conspiracies, what did Mr. Kennedy do? He dodged, he weaved, he bobbed and gave no indication that as Health and Human Services Secretary, he would stand by settled science that surrounds vaccines.

As HHS Secretary, Mr. Kennedy would have a huge amount of control over how vaccines are promoted and administered in our country. He could issue orders that discourage doctors from sharing information with parents and patients about lifesaving vaccines. He could issue an order that discourages schools from talking about or even requiring vaccines. He could rubberstamp an Executive order from Donald Trump that defunds the Cen-

ters for Disease Control, which is essentially the Agency in charge of getting Americans up-to-date information about vaccines and when to get them.

Just imagine you are a parent scrolling on Instagram or listening to a podcast. You hear this gentleman speaking passionately about the danger of vaccines. Maybe you do a bit of research, and lo and behold, you find this is the Secretary of Health and Human Services, America's chief healthcare guy. You think to yourself: Huh, this guy must know what he is talking about. Maybe he is right in his questioning of whether vaccines are safe and effective.

So the seed of doubt on vaccines gets planted. Then, at your kid's next wellness exam, you decide not to get them their next round of vaccinations. A few months later, you are taking them on a trip to Disneyland, say for spring break, where countless other parents like you have heard the same medical advice from the same person and they, too, decided against vaccinating their kids.

It only takes one of those kids carrying a deadly disease like measles for an outbreak to begin, and pretty soon, after what was supposed to be the spring break trip of your dreams, your kid, sadly, is showing symptoms.

What follows then is a slew of doctor's appointments, maybe even a stay in the hospital, sleepless nights, missed days of work and school, not to mention dread and fear for your child's very well-being. Meanwhile, countless other parents around the country that went on the same trip to Disneyland are now experiencing the same exact nightmare you are.

Sowing the seed of doubt in the minds of just a few people can have massive consequences for communities across the country, and it is not hypothetical. Right now, there is a measles outbreak in Texas that has sickened more than a dozen kids. The number of kindergartners showing up with an exemption for required vaccinations jumped to a record high last fall. The two facts are connected, and Mr. Kennedy and his allies can take the credit for it.

Now, Mr. Kennedy is fond of saying he is not making recommendations about whether parents should vaccinate their kids; he is just asking questions and giving people choices. That is a slippery tactic used by conspiracy theorists to dodge any real responsibility for their words and actions, and it is absurd coming from somebody who is about to be confirmed for a job that is entirely about making recommendations.

Mr. Kennedy is also fond of saying that if somebody shows him the science to prove he is wrong, well, then he will apologize and retract his statements, but when somebody does show him the science proves him wrong, he just brushes it aside and basically will not accept it as fact.

Once again, to quote my Republican colleague BILL CASSIDY directly: "to

improve the health of Americans, or undermine it, always asking for more evidence and never accepting the evidence that is there”—that is why, BILL CASSIDY told Mr. Kennedy, he was struggling with his nomination.

Even Republicans like Senator CASSIDY—someone I work with frequently on the Finance Committee and respect his opinion—he notes how dangerous this guy is.

It is not hyperbole to say that when Mr. Kennedy becomes Health and Human Services Secretary, if he does, and has control over how our government rolls out vaccines or makes them available, I believe kids in America will die.

When disease rates for illnesses that have effective vaccines start to rise in States across the country and hospitalizations and death tolls mount, my Republican colleagues are going to regret voting, if they do, for Mr. Kennedy today or early tomorrow.

When disease rates for illnesses that have effective vaccines start to rise in States across the country and death tolls mount, again, we will see Republicans say: This is something that could have been prevented. What else should we have done?

Republicans will be responsible for every child that dies as a result of not being vaccinated because it seems they care more about staying in the good graces of Donald Trump than they do about protecting the lives of kids. Again, this is something they will regret for years to come.

Now, before we turn to Senator MURRAY's remarks, I would just like to touch on Mr. Kennedy's stance on reproductive choice—an area where Senator MURRAY has been our leader for years and years in the Senate.

In the lead up to and during his failed Presidential campaign, Mr. Kennedy repeatedly claimed he supported a woman's right to make her own healthcare decisions. Less than a year ago, in an Instagram post on June 14 last year, he stated that he supports the emerging consensus in this country that abortion should be legal up to a certain number of weeks.

Fast-forward to his confirmation again at the Senate Finance Committee a few weeks ago. He was pressed repeatedly by Democrats about his stance on abortion. Instead of clarifying, Mr. Kennedy defaulted to a clearly rehearsed talking point that he repeated over and over again:

I agree with President Trump. Every abortion is a tragedy.

While that answer doesn't give us much clarity, it is certainly telling. Mr. Kennedy has a long history of changing his stance on healthcare issue after healthcare issue to whatever position benefits him at the moment. As long as it earns him power or it earns him a paycheck, as far as I can tell, Mr. Kennedy will believe—or at least pretend to believe—whatever you want him to. He is willing to give up his principles and all his beliefs that

women and mothers are better equipped to make their own healthcare decisions than politicians, and it is all about, as we have talked about on this floor, staying in Donald Trump's orbit of power.

While Mr. Kennedy recites rehearsed talking points on the subject, this is an issue that has had real, deadly consequences for women, as Senator MURRAY has said again and again.

Donald Trump spent his first term packing the Supreme Court with right-wing extremists willing to rip away the reproductive freedoms guaranteed to us under *Roe v. Wade*. In the wake of the Supreme Court's gutting *Roe*, millions of women living in red States have had their reproductive freedoms ripped away from them, all due to Donald Trump.

In the years since the overturn of *Roe*, there have been countless headlines about the consequences of these abortion bans: women bleeding out in parking lots or in emergency rooms because they were denied care; women becoming infertile and losing their ability to have kids in the future because they couldn't get care; and, in the very worst cases, women dying.

So it should horrify every American that we don't actually know where Mr. Kennedy stands. The man who could become our Nation's chief healthcare officer—we don't know where he stands on reproductive health, short of perhaps just saying he is a “yes” man for anything Donald Trump tells him to do.

So I think at this point, Mr. President, I want to yield the floor to my friend and colleague from Washington State because she knows so much about the challenge of ensuring that women's reproductive health services are being protected. As Secretary of Health and Human Services, Mr. Kennedy could do so much damage to the well-being and health of women.

I am very pleased to be able to yield the floor to Senator MURRAY to discuss that and other pressing issues.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, thank you to my colleague from Oregon, who has very clearly stated why this nominee is not someone who should be holding the title of Secretary of Health and Human Services, and I appreciate all of his work on this, and his wife's work. I hope everyone heeds them.

The American people are watching now with alarm because the vast majority of people know vaccines are safe, they are effective, and they are life-saving. But we are now on the verge of confirming as our Nation's highest health official a man who has spent considerable time, money, and effort undermining that basic fact; a man who has abused his platform by refusing to acknowledge the well-established science that shows that vaccines are not linked to autism.

Fear about that point—fueled by RFK, Jr., and others peddling misin-

formation—is a leading reason that parents do not get their kids vaccinated against preventable, dangerous diseases. That is why elevating a man like RFK, Jr., to lead HHS would be so dangerous. Just giving him any platform to spread vaccine doubt is dangerous. But to give him one of the biggest megaphones in the world?

It is truly shameful that we even are debating this. My colleagues should know better. They actually do know better. They are looking the other way. They are choosing to pretend like it is in any way believable that RFK, Jr., won't use his new power to do exactly the thing he has been trying to do for decades: undermine vaccines.

Never mind the fact that CDC has already modified web pages with information about vaccines and other vital public health information, which a Federal judge has now ordered the Trump administration to restore. Never mind that the Trump administration is also reportedly planning widespread and significant layoffs—layoffs—at CDC and across HHS. This is how RFK, Jr., substitutes his own beliefs for science.

So when the vaccine conspiracies start swirling, and RFK, Jr., turns HHS into ground zero for misinformation, “I had no idea” is not going to be an excuse for confirming him, because at the HELP Committee hearing, the chair pressed him repeatedly about the debunked claims that vaccines cause autism. And when RFK, Jr., said he needed to “see the evidence,” he was shown the evidence, but to no one's surprise, he did not keep his word, admit he had been wrong, and spread the good news that vaccines do not cause autism.

He has had 2 weeks since that hearing to look at the same settled science as everyone else—crickets. But he won't hesitate to quote the latest anti-vax conspiracy. He is totally up to speed on that front.

Are my colleagues really buying that this guy will take an impartial look at the science?

If you think RFK, Jr., will change who he is, you are lying to yourself. He has given no evidence to suggest that and all the evidence in the world to the contrary.

Given his long and growing track record, we cannot just pretend, if RFK, Jr., finally gets power to undermine vaccines—a cause he has dedicated a considerable amount of time and effort to—that he will just give up. That is not believable.

And I know I have been talking a lot about vaccines because it is so obviously alarming, but the responsibility he would have goes far beyond that.

So let's break some of this down, both the ways he could undermine vaccines as HHS Secretary and the other responsibilities that would be at stake.

To start with, the CDC is under HHS. That means that the Secretary directly appoints people to CDC's vaccine advisory board. That board is responsible for making recommendations about

vaccines, and it is those recommendations that determine whether or not certain vaccines have to be covered by insurance.

So simply put, changing those recommendations will change what vaccines millions of Americans—including kids—will be able to get from their healthcare provider. If he is confirmed, there would be nothing stopping RFK, Jr., from firing the entire board and replacing them all with vaccine skeptics. After all, he has said many times and in many ways that he thinks CDC is corrupt and bought by Pharma—as usual, by the way, without any evidence.

RFK, Jr., would also oversee the Food and Drug Administration—that is another Agency he has repeatedly tried to discredit and attack—where he says he plans to fire—fire—hundreds of scientists on day one, at an Agency that plays the crucial role of making sure our drugs and our treatments, including vaccines, are safe and effective when we purchase them.

Not only would Mr. Kennedy have a key perch from which he would undermine vaccines, on a scale like never seen before, he could also use that platform to peddle quack treatments with no basis in science.

RFK, Jr., would also have jurisdiction over NIH. That alone means influence over billions of dollars in medical research—research that is responsible for a significant portion of our economy and, more importantly, research that patients are desperately hoping will help them find cures. But RFK, Jr., could redirect those funds to promote his favorite pet conspiracies instead of promising cures, or he could make good on his plans to fire hundreds of researchers and pause infectious disease research for 8 years.

It should go without saying that viruses aren't going to take a break.

And here is the thing: The attacks on medical research are now already happening under Trump. From his day one Executive orders, President Trump has already been threatening medical research. Suddenly, all of our grants are at risk because they are looking at addressing barriers to care or understanding why Black and Native American women have higher maternal death rates.

And now President Trump is also trying to illegally, arbitrarily, and suddenly change NIH guidelines to set an unrealistic low cap on indirect cost rates. That will mean researchers laid off, studies canceled—including lifesaving clinical trials—and kids not able to get the treatment they need, all because President Trump and Elon Musk don't seem to understand how we actually fund important research and couldn't even be bothered to find out before taking an ax to our medical research labs.

At a time when lifesaving research like this is already under attack by the President and the richest man in the world, no one who truly values medical

research should vote to install one of the biggest attackers of medical science as the Secretary of HHS.

Insurance is another huge portfolio for HHS. Last time Trump was in office, we saw millions of people lose their healthcare coverage. The uninsured rate went up after years of hard-won progress. And we all know he still wants to rip up the Affordable Care Act, which will drive up costs and kick people off their coverage.

There is no reason to think Mr. Kennedy will stand up to that effort. Indeed, there is no reason to think he has the experience and understanding of the system to actually do so.

During his committee hearings, RFK, Jr., confused Medicare and Medicaid. This is basic stuff. He failed to describe the components of Medicare.

And, yes, Mr. President, I do absolutely have to talk about abortion care. This is of grave importance right now.

In his hearings, not only did RFK, Jr., confess to having no real understanding of EMTALA—that is a law which requires patients have access to lifesaving, emergency care, including, in some cases, abortion care—he also showed that he will be totally open to Republicans' fact-free efforts to rip away access to medication abortion.

Like so many other issues that RFK, Jr., is simply wrong about, the science on that has been settled for many years now. Mr. Kennedy made clear, though, he is very open to revisiting access to the abortion pill, based on a Republican argument against the science that basically boils down to “nuh uh”—“nuh uh.”

Putting up barriers to accessing the abortion pill or ripping it off the market completely, as Republicans have made very clear they want to do, would be absolutely devastating.

And let's not forget about pandemic threats. The lies that RFK, Jr., spread during the last pandemic already made clear he is not the man to do this job. But if that weren't enough, when there was a pandemic threat response planning session for this new administration, he skipped it. He didn't go. It would be almost comical if this wasn't so serious.

Everywhere you look, everything about this nominee is so concerning. We cannot take this man at his word—something he has changed and gone back and forth on time and time again. But we can take him on his record, which is that he has consistently undermined vaccine confidence, and, by the way—note—he profited from that. And we can take the threat of what he might do seriously, especially given the alarming things that are already happening.

If RFK, Jr., gives you his word of honor that he won't freeze research, guess what. We are already seeing the Trump administration totally upend medical research. Thanks to the Trump funding freeze, NIH hasn't issued any grant awards in weeks.

If RFK, Jr., swears he is not going to take down information about vaccines, he is not going to silence experts, well, don't look now, but the Trump administration has already taken down or changed CDC pages about vaccines. They have already silenced public health experts.

If RFK, Jr., pinky-promises you that he won't undermine medical science or studies and he won't ignore global health threats, well, you might want to sit down for this, but President Trump has completely demolished our global health aid work. He has already completely demolished it.

The fallout is utterly heart-wrenching. Already we know of a woman who died because the USAID-supported hospital she went to for oxygen was forced to discharge her because they got a “stop work” order from the Trump administration.

It is not clear if she was the first death caused by Trump's complete freeze, but there is no question she will not be the last.

Let me make a really important point here: It is not just people across the world who will be affected by this. There was a study being done on a new HIV treatment with thousands of volunteers—a study being done, already having thousands of volunteers doing the treatment—but now, without their regular injections, which are cut off by Trump's move, there is going to be too little of the drug in their system to protect those people from HIV, but enough of the drug that, if they contract HIV, it could mutate to become drug resistant.

So for all of the absolutely unhinged conspiracies we have heard about medical research from RFK, Jr., and the like, where is the concern of this actual risk in this actual study happening right now, all because President Trump cut off foreign assistance?

RFK, Jr., has been silent about that risk, silent about how wrong that is. And so even as he is making these empty promises on one hand to some of our colleagues, he is already standing by as President Trump breaks them on the other hand.

Oh, and here is one more: If RFK, Jr., says he is going to consult you on healthcare personnel, please do not be fooled.

Look, I don't know why my colleagues need me to tell them this. I like to think we have some pretty smart people around here. But this vote—RFK, Jr.'s own nomination—this is your consultation on healthcare personnel, not some made-up promise for later. This is the point when you have the most power.

Whatever he might say, you don't get to choose who RFK, Jr., will appoint to this or that. Heck, he doesn't get to choose who President Trump appoints. The decision you get to make—that all of us on this floor get to make—is the decision before us right now.

You get to choose whom you vote to confirm, and you will have to live with

that decision. And if you ignore the warning signs and confirm RFK, Jr., then, when the wheels fall off the wagon, you may try to tell yourself you were lied to. But you knew who you were dealing with. You knew who he said before and what he has refused to say. You had all the knowledge you needed to do the right thing.

I cannot tell my colleagues enough: This is not a game. This is not a political role without consequence. The Health Secretary has real power over whether Americans can get basic information and care that impacts whether they live or die. As I have tried to drive home throughout this process: Vaccines save lives. That is not a question. It is not a slogan. It is a fact.

If, when parents look to you worried about their newborn, wanting to do what is best for their baby and trusting your advice as a public health leader, if you cannot tell them the same truth that centuries of science and experience tells us, which is that vaccines are safe and effective and lifesaving, then you have absolutely no business leading the Department of Health and Human Services—none.

And so just as I did at the hearing, I want to warn all of my colleagues. By merely voting to confirm Mr. Kennedy, we would be telling our constituents: He is worth listening to on vaccines. That alone will get people killed before he even lifts a finger, because he does not even need the levers of power to get people killed, all he needs is that megaphone to affirm his views by voting to confirm him as our highest health official.

Let's not mince words about what that will mean. When babies die from whooping cough because parents weren't sure if the vaccine was safe, will you be able to look them in the eye? when the flu sweeps our nursing homes? when measles sweep through our communities? Will it be worth it?

I will end on this: I am sure there are plenty of Members who know perfectly well just how dangerous it would be to confirm RFK, Jr. They don't need to hear it from me. In fact, some of them even know the danger better than I do.

Here is what I do know: Conscience is a muscle. Courage is a muscle. The less you use them, the more they fade away. So if my colleagues are feeling the pressure from President Trump or if they are feeling the weight of the richest man in the world on their backs on this vote, I would warn them: This will certainly not be the last test we face here in the Senate. Giving in to this pressure now won't make it go away. It won't soften the pressure you face later, and it will not strengthen your resolve when the stakes are higher. It will just show pressure works.

If you do not draw a line somewhere, you will cross every line you could ever imagine. You will be pushed further and further into accepting things you thought you never would, things you thought you never could.

I think most of my colleagues know what is really at stake here. I think most of my colleagues know what sort of man RFK, Jr., is and what sort of damage he could do if he is confirmed.

There are political realities. We all get that. But there is also right and wrong. There is fact and fiction. There is people staying healthy, and people dying pointlessly, kids dying pointlessly from diseases that we can prevent because they thought Congress took its job of vetting our healthcare Secretary seriously.

So I urge my colleagues to show some courage. I urge them to show some conscience. I urge them to vote no on RFK, Jr.'s nomination.

Mr. President, I yield 3 minutes of postclosure debate time to the Democratic leader, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). The Senator has that right.

The Senator from Tennessee.

BORDER SECURITY

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I find it so interesting how people are watching so closely to see what this administration does, and I have been so pleased to see that the polling shows, by an overwhelming amount, 70 percent of the American people agree with how President Donald Trump is carrying out his job, getting things done for the American people, things that they voted to see done, and he is keeping those promises.

Now, when we look at the issue of illegal immigration, we see that in his first weeks back in office, what he has done at the top of his to-do list has been to take action to secure this border. The numbers that we are seeing, how they have dropped with the number of encounters, with the number of "got-aways," this is encouraging. The message is out there. The United States is going to protect and defend its sovereignty. We are going to protect and defend our people. That is important, and we are seeing it.

Now, the President has taken some Executive actions that have yielded results. By Executive order, he restored the "Remain in Mexico" policy. He restarted the border wall construction—which, by the way, this is something the Border Patrol has told us not for just a few years, but for decades: We need a border wall. That is where the phrase "build the wall" came from; it came from people that are down there every day protecting this country from harm.

The President has also ended catch-and-release. Now, that is that practice where somebody comes across, and then they get their paper that they are claiming asylum, and they are told that they can go on into the country and go wherever. And there are non-profits down there on the border, and they give them a plane ticket and food and a phone and off they go to their desired destination at taxpayer expense. So that has ended.

The President has also sent troops to the southern border and, thank good-

ness, we are seeing these deportations of criminal illegal aliens taking place.

Yesterday in Nashville, we had eight that were apprehended in a human trafficking ring—eight. Two of them are linked to Tren de Aragua. They were Tren de Aragua gang members.

Now, these are all things that the President is doing to make this country safe, and we have security moms all across this country—and certainly across Tennessee—who are reaching out to us and saying: Keep it going. Deport those who are criminally in this country. Let's carry this out. We are seeing such good results.

In operations across the country, ICE, which is Immigration and Customs Enforcement, has arrested 11,000 criminal illegal aliens, including many violent offenders and gang members. Since inauguration day, migrant encounters at the southern border have reportedly dropped 87 percent. As I said, we are seeing results.

We know that for years, former President Biden allowed more than 10 million illegal aliens to enter the country, including tens of thousands of convicted criminals and more than 1.7 million known "got-aways." And for 4 years, Tennesseans and Americans across the country have suffered the tragic consequences, including rampant migrant crime.

Recently, our Tennessee District Attorneys General Conference released a report documenting the widespread migrant crime in our State during the final months of the Biden administration. Now, the report confirms what we already know, that during the Biden years, every town was a border town; every State was a border State.

So our Tennessee District Attorneys General took the last 3 months of 2024 and they said: Let's look at what is happening in these last 3 months and see how this has escalated.

Now, of course, we know that under Joe Biden violent crime rose 43 percent his first year that he was in office. And what we saw from the District Attorneys' General report is that there were, in 3 months—now this is a 3-month number—there were 2,719 reports of illegal aliens being charged or convicted of 3,854 offenses in the State of Tennessee. Among them, the most common offense was driving under the influence. There were 654 arrests of those illegally in the country driving under the influence. These offenses accounted for more than 13 percent of all DUI arrests across the entire State.

And this problem is a big reason why, last year, my Republican colleagues and I introduced the Protect Our Communities From DUIs Act. This bill would automatically deport any illegal alien who is charged with driving under the influence.

As I have gone across our State, in each of our 95 counties—which I visit every year—in each of these counties, I have heard from law enforcement, from police chiefs, from sheriffs that these DUIs are such an incredible problem,