

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,

and the number that are committed by those illegally in the country.

Now, over this same 3-month period, illegal aliens committed hundreds of violent, heinous crimes: 154 instances of domestic assault, 80 of aggravated assault, 21—21—convicted of child abuse, 9 of statutory rape, 8 of sexual exploitation of a minor, 7 of vehicular homicide, 4 of murder, 3 of rape of a child. And the list goes on and on.

As I said, over 2,700 illegally in the country that were convicted of more than 3,800 crimes.

Disturbingly, these numbers are likely an undercount. Only 73 of Tennessee's 95 counties reported data to the District Attorneys General Conference under Biden. National data showed illegal aliens were pouring in from countries all over the world, and the Tennessee Migrant Crime Report also reflects this. There were 92 unique countries of origin—from Mexico and Guatemala, Jamaica, Romania.

Here is the bottom line: Because of Joe Biden's open border policy that was supported by far too many of my Democratic colleagues, thousands of crimes were committed by thousands of criminal illegal aliens in the State of Tennessee over just a 3-month span. And this, my colleagues, is just one State. This is my State, but we know this is happening in communities all across this country.

More than anything, the report underscores the importance of President Trump's mass deportations which are underway. There are many ways that Congress can support these efforts. My CLEAR Act, which I have talked about many times on the floor, would ensure State and local law enforcement officials have the tools to help the Federal Government deport criminal illegal aliens. This is crucial, especially when you have got far-left leaders like the Chicago mayor refusing to turn over criminal illegal aliens to Federal custody.

Now, General Bondi is suing these sanctuary cities for allowing criminal illegal aliens who have no right to be in our great Nation to harm Americans. And thank goodness, she is being tough on crime.

I have also introduced the Preventing Violence Against Women By Illegal Aliens Act, which would allow the deportation of illegal aliens convicted of sexual offenses or domestic violence. Any illegal aliens who commit these heinous crimes should be removed from the country immediately, and I encourage all of my colleagues on each side of the aisle, support this.

And my CONTAINER Act would ensure that border States like Texas have the legal authority to place temporary barriers on Federal land to help stop the flow of traffickers, drugs, and criminals coming across the border.

There are thousands of criminal illegal aliens residing in Tennessee and across the country. We should be using every resource at our disposal to remove them from our country. In many

ways, the bills that I have mentioned would help President Trump to get the job done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

NOMINATION OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, it is not often that the stakes of a vote to confirm a Cabinet nominee are this high, but tomorrow, when we vote on the nomination of RFK, Jr., to be the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the stakes will be life and death.

Mr. Kennedy, in his words but more importantly in his actions, has proven over and over again that he is a unique danger to society, but he is on the edge of becoming the country's top health leader, with the power to unleash bygone diseases and undermine trust in science for generations to come.

For the first time ever, we will have a Health Secretary who has actively helped to cause outbreaks instead of to contain them. We will have someone in charge of medical research who has taken every opportunity to undermine science instead of promoting it. We will have someone who has never come across a crazy idea that he didn't like, whether it is that anti-depressants are the cause of mass shootings or that chemicals in the water are turning children gay. This is the Secretary of the Health and Human Services Department. Those two things right there should be immediately disqualifying. This should be 100 to 0.

This guy used to be a Democrat. This guy was pro-choice. This guy was for clean energy. This shouldn't be a partisan issue, except to say, for HHS, you need somebody who has devoted their life and hopefully has some expertise in the area of public health.

It is not just that we didn't get someone who has expertise in public health, we have someone who has caused disease and death. I say those words with precision. I understand that both sides of the aisle are prone to exaggerating their case and being apocalyptic when we describe a pending vote. I have been here for a while, and everything is always the most important vote that we will ever cast. I don't know if this is the most important vote we will ever cast. I do think—gosh, I hope I am wrong; I really do hope I am wrong—I do think this is likely the Cabinet Secretary vote that is likely to age the most poorly because this person has the potential to actually cause diseases like rubella, like mumps, like measles, like polio that have been gone for many generations because we have a vaccine regime.

I want to tell you what he did in Samoa. In 2019, he flew to Samoa to discourage people from taking the measles vaccine. The reason was that he wanted to run a "natural experiment" to see how people would fare against the disease without protections.

Some of you may know this. My father was the first whistleblower

against the Tuskegee experiments in which the U.S. Public Health Service did a similar thing. They knew that penicillin cured syphilis, and they knew that, for the most part, untreated syphilis caused death. But the U.S. Public Health Service decided to divide a cohort of African-American men into two parts. One would receive the medicine and be safe and be cured. Another cohort would receive a placebo and not get the lifesaving cure for syphilis. Why did they do that? To "observe the disease process." To observe the disease process.

When you investigate whether or not a medicine works, there is a whole process to it—the FDA, double-blind studies, all the rest of it. The basic idea is that you try to get to some level of reliability or statistical significance so you can project out into the population what is going to work and what is not. The sick-in-the-head way to do it is to say you can't achieve statistical significance until you just let a bunch of people get sick and figure out what happens.

The U.S. Congress, led by someone with whom I served for a couple of years, Tom Harkin, when they found out about the Tuskegee experiments, they made a law against U.S. Public Health Service ever doing that again because it is immoral. It is bad science, sure, but more than that—they treated these African-American men as if they were worth experimenting on; as if this category of human beings in the United States was expendable for scientific research purposes. And that is exactly what happened in Samoa. That is exactly what happened in Samoa: 6,000 people got the measles, 83 people died, 79 of them were kids.

It is so chilling to contemplate the idea that someone as recognizable as a Kennedy would fly across an ocean to a small, developing country and basically tell everybody: Be afraid of this lifesaving medicine.

It is not like he did that once and said "I am sorry, I misunderstood" or "I am being misunderstood." This dude actually sells onesies on his website saying—I think it is like "Unvaxxed, Unafraid" for a little baby. This guy has views that are out of the mainstream of, I would guess, 99 out of 100 U.S. Senators.

I do understand the pressure that some of my colleagues are facing. They are being told: If you vote against one Trump nominee, you will be primaried.

That is not a small amount of pressure. But this one, I just promise you, is not going to age well.

Some of my colleagues are expressing reservations in private. I think that is better than not expressing any reservations at all. Some of them are getting private assurances from Mr. Kennedy that he does not, in fact, hate all vaccines; he just wants to answer questions and all the rest of it. I am not reassured. I think this person has demonstrated over a pretty long career that he says whatever is convenient in the moment.

This is like an unreconstructed—he is a Kennedy. He was running for President in the Democratic primary, and now he is a Trump guy like 10 months later. What does that mean? It means he has no core values. There is just no way to go from over here to over here politically in such a short period of time except that he was offered something, and he was offered this job. Why does he want this job? Because he has a very specific view about public health.

I just want to make one other point. The problem of our food system, the problem of the extent to which we subsidize ultraprocessed foods that are coming from commodities, that are subsidized in the farm bill and causing people to get increasingly diabetic and all the related health problems that happen related to that—that is a really legitimate place to do some good, bipartisan work. I would love to do that. It is also not what the HHS Secretary does. It is what the U.S. Department of Agriculture does for the most part, and it is what the Congress does.

The problem is the farm bill. The problem is, you get what you subsidize, and we are subsidizing all the corn products and all the soy products and all the sugar products that go into the lab-tested, extra-delicious, extra-bad-for-you, extra-addictive stuff that is making us all—even though we are the wealthiest country in human history—a very unhealthy country. If that is all this guy were working on, you could count me in.

But if your idea of public health has to do with healthy food, has to do with prevention, has to do with understanding that our food system and our agriculture system and our USDA and our farm bill process is essentially broken, you don't have to purchase this kind of crazy, evil stuff. You just don't. You don't have to do it. There are lots of good people on the food system side you can work with, work for, cheer on, organize with.

But this man is going around—he is not talking about the COVID vaccine. He is not talking about whether or not it is appropriate to require masks in public, and Democrats and Republicans are still arguing about stuff like that. He is talking about stuff that, like, if you are a parent and now you don't know whether, when your kid goes to school, they have reached herd immunity for stuff that is like way, way, way, generations back in the rearview mirror.

So I don't know if this is going to mark one of the most important public health moments in American history, but I can't think of another time where we actually have the technology, we have the medicine, we have the science, we have the distribution system, we have the public infrastructure to keep people safe, and we just decide by a vote of 53 to 47 to make people unsafe.

Secretary of Defense, DNI—all these are important—Treasury—every Cabi-

net position is important. It is going to be a little more challenging to know whether your vote is vindicated in the sweep of history. I think this guy is going to age very poorly in the job because I think we are going to see bad public health outcomes very, very shortly. This really is a matter of life and death.

I understand what I have learned over the last 10 days is, if Republicans are going to display courage, it is not going to be on the Cabinet. There are a few that have voted not with their party, but for the most part, they are in line, and Trump is going to get his Cabinet. But let this be a marker for everybody. Let today be a marker for everybody. Even if you voted for Trump, if you didn't vote for Trump, if you are not a voter—it doesn't matter. If you think it is a good idea to leave all of these diseases in the rearview mirror, then this is a very, very bad person to have running the Department of Health and Human Services.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. ALSOBROOKS. Mr. President, 2 weeks ago, I had the opportunity to question Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., the President's nominee to serve as the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I asked Mr. Kennedy, Jr., a simple question: What different vaccine schedule would you say I should have received?

I asked this question because just 3 years ago, Kennedy said:

We should not be giving Black people the same vaccine schedule that's given to Whites, because their immune system is better than ours.

When I asked him this question, Mr. Kennedy referenced a study by Poland, a study he assured me—and not just me but also my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and the American people watching—that this study asserted that, indeed, certain races required a different vaccine schedule.

That was a lie. In fact, the study's own author stated the data doesn't support a change in vaccine schedule based on race.

Mr. Kennedy's response was damning, and his response was dangerous. So I followed up following the hearing with a letter and with questions. I wrote to Mr. Kennedy:

During your testimony, you cited "a series of Poland studies" that underlie your claims that Black people and White people should have different vaccine schedules. You ended by saying—

In that hearing—

"You don't believe the science? The peer-reviewed studies?" Well, Mr. Kennedy, I do believe in science and [I] did some digging into the studies you referenced. NPR interviewed the authors of the studies you cited—medical experts with years of experience—and they universally disagreed with your assertions. In fact, Dr. Richard Kennedy of the Mayo Clinic, who was involved in a study you mentioned, made clear that "the data doesn't support a change in vaccine schedule

based on race." Dr. Kennedy also stated that your suggestion would be "twisting the data far beyond what [the studies] actually demonstrate."

Dr. Gregory Poland, who you mentioned by name during the hearing as doing research supportive of your claim, told NPR that his team "found 'no evidence of increased vaccine side effects' and that any claim of 'increased vulnerability' among African Americans who receive the rubella vaccine is 'simply not supported by either this study or the science.'"

NPR quoted Dr. Carlos del Rio of Emory University as saying [that] your conclusion was "taking it to a very unsafe place" because Black children already have lower vaccination rates than their peers. That is why I said your claims on this issue were dangerous.

[I have to ask you, Mr. Kennedy]: Do you still believe that Black and White individuals should have different vaccination schedules?

Now, you would think that the man who wants to serve as the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the man who wants to be tasked with the mission of HHS, which is improving the health, safety, and well-being of America, would provide a thoughtful and nuanced response. It was anything but because, let's be clear, Mr. Kennedy is not a doctor; he is not a scientist. In fact, his only tangential connection to the world of health and science is decades-long activism in questioning the efficacy and safety of vaccines. Maybe I shouldn't have been surprised at his curt and dismissive response.

Mr. Kennedy wrote:

If confirmed, I will do nothing as HHS secretary that makes it difficult or discourages people from taking the vaccines but instead seek transparency in these products.

Yet another lie.

Mr. Kennedy's life story is one riddled with quackery and laden with conspiracy theories.

I quote him; when he said:

There's no vaccine that is safe and effective.

I quote:

None of the childhood [vaccines] have ever been studied.

He also said:

They get the shot; that night, they have a fever of 103; they go to sleep; and 3 months later, their brain is gone. This is a Holocaust, what [this country is doing].

I quote:

Autism comes from vaccines.

The polio vaccine given to his generation caused cancer that "killed many, many, many, many more people than polio ever did."

The COVID vaccine was the "deadliest ever made."

He also said:

COVID-19 is targeted to attack Caucasians and Black people. The people who are most immune are Ashkenazi Jews and Chinese.

He also said:

There's no vaccine that is, you know, safe and effective.

These are all statements made by a man who is asking to be held responsible for a singular mission. The mission of the U.S. Department of Health

and Human Services is to enhance the health and well-being of all Americans by providing for effective health and human services and by fostering sound, sustained advances in the sciences underlying medicine, public health, and social services. It is a task of epic responsibility; a serious job that, when done well, can save hundreds of thousands of lives; a job that, when done poorly, will most certainly cost American lives.

Let us not speak of Mr. Kennedy in a vacuum. We have now held the floor multiple times over the past week over a string of nominees that are dangerous to the American people not because—and I cannot stress this enough—we disagree with their politics or their worldviews. We can have robust policy debate. We can have robust scientific debate. In fact, robust debate has the potential to move us forward as a country. Respectful debate is the hallmark of this body. It is a crucial component of free speech.

I went to law school, and I spent years in the courtroom trying cases and making my arguments before a jury of my peers. Grounding my arguments was a basic set of evidentiary facts. But what we are dealing with here isn't a debate; it is a popularity contest and a test of loyalty.

Mr. Kennedy is not in this position today as the nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services because of his vast experience in medicine. Mr. Kennedy is not in this position today because of his deep scientific knowledge. Mr. Kennedy is not in this position today because he has respect for the scientific method. Mr. Kennedy is not in this position today because he respects medicine. Mr. Kennedy, like many of his fellow nominees, is in this position today because of his deep loyalty to the President of the United States.

What makes our job increasingly difficult as Members of the U.S. Senate is that we have the duty to advise and consent. It isn't just a privilege of this Chamber; it is a responsibility to speak for the people of our States as well as the American people as we evaluate the qualifications, the experience, and the temperament of a President's Cabinet nominees.

What is happening on the part of my Republican colleagues is not advice and consent. The sole qualification being assessed is loyalty—not loyalty to country, not loyalty to the American people, not loyalty to the duties and responsibilities we have been entrusted with by the voters in each of our States. The sole qualification up for assessment is loyalty to the President, and Mr. Kennedy has that in spades.

But loyalty to this President comes at a cost—not a cost to the billionaires, not a cost to the people in this body but at a cost to the American people—Democratic Americans, Republican Americans, Independent Americans, Americans who voted for this

President, Americans who did not, and Americans who did not vote at all.

The President has been consistent that he believes the American people delivered him a mandate to carry out his agenda. With respect to the health, safety, and well-being of America—the purview of Health and Human Services—the President believes that cutting funds for medical research into things like cures for cancer is apparently a part of that mandate.

Just this weekend, the President announced massive cuts to NIH—an Agency which I am proud to say has its home in Maryland. The mission of the National Institutes of Health is to seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability. It falls under the very Agency Mr. Kennedy is seeking to run.

Here are what some scientists—people I implore Mr. Kennedy to listen to despite his apparent distaste for the profession—had to say about these massive cuts:

Dr. Richard Haganir, professor and chairman of the Department of Neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in my State of Maryland, said:

We were all just dumbstruck. I'm calling it the apocalypse of American science. This will basically change science as we know it in the [United States]. . . . The bottom line is that we are going to have a lot less resources, which obviously means we are going to have to lay people off and research will be slowed down.

Dr. Otis Brawley, professor of oncology and epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and the Bloomberg School of Public Policy, said:

We're going to see health research kneecapped.

Dr. Brawley has actually overseen grants at the National Cancer Institute, which is part of the NIH, as well as received them for his cancer research.

He went on to say:

People who are getting treated in clinical trials now for cancer will find many of those trials will close down.

Dr. David J. Skorton, president of the Association of American Medical Colleges, said:

These are real consequences—longer waits for cures and for diagnosis, slower scientific progress, losing out to competitors around the world, and fewer jobs. Those who are facing any health challenges will suffer from less biomedical research.

Dr. Robert Lefkowitz, a Duke University—my alma mater; go Blue Devils!—professor of medicine who won the Nobel Peace Prize in chemistry in 2012, said:

I think the American people need to understand how devastating it would be if this goes through. A lot of research would just have to stop; I can't imagine that the shortfall could be met from other sources.

NIH funding supports over 600 current and ongoing clinical trials at

Johns Hopkins in Maryland. The NIH supports hundreds more critical research projects and clinical trials at the University of Maryland—clinical trials in cancer, pediatrics and children's health, heart and vascular studies, and the aging brain; research on traumatic brain injury to members of the military, suicide prevention, addiction, and patient safety.

Clinical trials support over 23,000 jobs and \$5.7 billion in economic activity in Maryland. These massive cuts will lead to over \$200 million in losses to Hopkins and over \$50 million in losses to the University of Maryland.

I may not be a Republican voter, but I can assure you, Republicans across our country aren't seeking to stymie progress on a cure for cancer.

By putting the NIH in his crosshairs, the President is targeting some of the most vulnerable Americans: the young child suffering from sickle cell disease; the working mom who is also struggling to care for a parent with Alzheimer's; the family member suffering from an opioid addiction; the father dying of lung cancer—all diseases being actively researched by the NIH.

Disease and suffering do not respect the boundary of partisan politics; they impact each and every American family. It falls in part to the Secretary of Health and Human Services to do everything in his power to get us closer to cures. Instead, I fear we have a nominee before us who is more interested in getting us closer to conspiracies.

With loyalty to the man in the White House as opposed to the health and well-being of the American public, Mr. KENNEDY is likely to follow his boss in supporting attacks on Medicaid. This administration and my Republican colleagues are seeking to upend Federal Medicaid financing and are considering per capita caps and repealing Medicaid expansion funding.

Let me make this simple. The Republican framework to cut Medicaid puts nearly 435,000 Marylanders at risk of losing coverage. It will lead to major gaps in healthcare coverage and undermine family economic security. It will put quality care out of reach for more families.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, these are Democratic families; these are Republican families. That shouldn't matter to the President or to the nominee for the Department of Health and Human Services. All that should matter is that these are proud American families.

The administration's attacks on Medicaid would kick millions of people off their health coverage and force States to make deep cuts to benefits, eligibility, and reimbursement rates. My State can't afford these cuts. Maryland's families can't afford these cuts, as 96 percent of eligible children in Maryland are supported by Medicaid and/or CHIP. Cuts would disproportionately hurt children with the lowest incomes and the highest healthcare needs.

At a time when Americans are struggling under the weight of inflation—scraping to pay for food, gas, and housing—we cannot strip away or cut their health coverage. That is a cruel move that will certainly bankrupt many individuals and families. Many Americans are one catastrophe away from financial ruin, and if you take away their coverage and access to affordable care, it will be realized.

Don't just take it from me; Marylanders have been calling and writing in, demanding that Congress do everything it can to fight against attacks to Medicaid.

Jacqueline from Baltimore shared this with us:

One day, I was at work and passed out in the bathroom. Had to be cut out of the restroom by the firemen. After being in a coma for 12 days, it was determined that I am a diabetic. Having Medicaid saved my life. If I did not have Medicaid or any insurance, I would have been sent home, and who knows what would have happened?

Another constituent from Ellicott City shared this:

My 22-year-old son has autism and a significant cognitive disability. He is a happy, affectionate person who loves being around people and being physically active. Due to behavioral challenges at home, he lives in a group home. This environment is one in which he can be safe and thrive. He also attends a program licensed by the state's Developmental Disability Administration Mondays through Fridays, 9-3. This program provides meaningful day services. Both his group home and day program services are funded through DDA's Medicaid Waiver. Given the cost of my son's services and the services of many other individuals with developmental disabilities, a limit on federal Medicaid dollars would no doubt force Maryland to reduce services. If my son was not able to continue living in his group home, he would become homeless. Another impact of Medicaid cuts could be his healthcare, as he is fully reliant upon Medicaid for his health insurance. He will never be able to work enough hours to draw health insurance benefits, due to his disability.

Such an anecdote should stir all of us to action. It should stir the Members of this body to take more seriously our duty to advise and consent, to push back against a nominee who sees his role as a loyal foot soldier to one American who sits in the White House and not the millions of Americans whose health and healthcare are on the line.

Last week, I looked Mr. Kennedy in the eye, and said I would not be supporting his nomination. I said that his views are so dangerous to our State and to our country; that his voice would be a voice that parents would listen to.

I honored my constitutional duty of advice and consent.

On behalf of every single Marylander who has lost a loved one to disease, every single Marylander who works at NIH or is actively researching cures, every single Marylander who has been led astray by a snake-oil salesman peddling quackery instead of science, I will be voting no on Mr. Kennedy for them.

To my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, I urge you to think long and hard about the phrase that you believe encapsulates your mandate—"America First." If we are not putting the people of this country first, then we are most certainly not putting this country first. "America First" cannot exist if the people in this country are too sick to be strong. And when you have someone like Mr. Kennedy responsible for the health of our citizenry, I fear that is where we are headed—dead last, literally and figuratively.

I may not be able to stop this nominee from being confirmed, but I want every Marylander to know that I will never stop fighting for your health and for the health of your loved ones.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor to join my colleagues with a great deal of concern to discuss the Trump administration's nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., to be the next Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

To put it very simply at the outset, Robert F. Kennedy—RFK, Jr.—is unfit to lead the highest health office in our Nation.

First of all, RFK has no—let me repeat, no—health or medical experience. That, in and of itself, should be a redflag on this nominee, who is supposed to be tasked with leading our Nation's health Agency.

But, sadly, that is not where the redflags end.

From his radical and dangerous opinions on vaccines and public health to his promises to cut medical research, to his ever-changing position on women's rights to access reproductive healthcare, he has proven that he lacks the credibility, the knowledge, and the capability to be the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Let's take a step back. When President Trump ran his campaign, he ran a campaign on lowering costs for working Americans. Well, where has that promise gone?

We saw today that inflation has gone up in the last quarter. It is over 3 percent now. And we have seen nothing from President Trump's first weeks in office that addresses the high cost of healthcare, of food, of housing, of childcare.

Two weeks ago, this administration, including the Health and Human Services Agency, halted funding across the board for programs like our community health centers and substance use treatment programs. These centers are often the main source of healthcare for their communities. They serve the people across the States of this country.

In our office, I heard from programs like Coos County Family Health, a community health center that provides lifesaving care to rural patients across the northern part of New Hampshire, what we call the North Country. Their programs for training new doctors and

providing services for victims of domestic violence were, and still are, at risk, thanks to Trump's Executive orders and funding freeze.

I heard from Navigating Recovery in Laconia. That is a substance use treatment service that depends on Federal funding for more than 50 percent of its budget. They are worried about keeping their doors open. This is an organization with providers who will literally sit with a patient by their hospital bed, following an overdose, to make sure they are getting the best guidance, the best treatment, and the follow-on services, like housing and childcare, that allows them to start their recovery.

This is a real issue for us in New Hampshire, where we have been hit very hard by the opioid epidemic.

The Trump Executive orders and funding cuts will force Navigating Recovery to lay off staff and to curtail assists, should those funding cuts continue.

These are actions on the part of the White House that don't lower costs for family. They do just the opposite. They put people out of work, and they weaken our ability to care for our most vulnerable populations.

But when he was asked if he would reverse this policy of cutting funding for programs like substance use recovery, RFK refused.

The thing is, we should be taking steps right now to lower costs for families and children. Half of the uninsured Granite Staters site costs as their reason for not being able to afford health insurance. More than two-thirds of people in New Hampshire have delayed care, and another 25 percent have delayed buying needed prescriptions or said they have to ration their meds.

We could help these people right now. We could pass the Healthcare Affordability Act, which would make permanent premium tax credits in the Affordable Care Act that have cut healthcare costs for 24 million Americans, nearly 70,000 from New Hampshire.

Passing that bill would directly help constituents like the man in Newmarket who contacted our office. He is 55 years old. He is a patient at Lamprey Health Care, which is a community health center. He had been uninsured and avoided going to a doctor his whole life. But, sadly, he was recently hospitalized for 10 days because of complications from untreated diabetes. He had sepsis, and he had an infection in his foot.

Unfortunately, he didn't have insurance when he was hospitalized. But, luckily, Lamprey Health Care sat with him and helped him purchase health insurance on healthcare.gov, helping him avoid potentially devastating medical debt.

These tax credits are vital to his and to millions of Americans' ability to afford healthcare. But, again, when asked about these tax credits, RFK refused to say that he would support extending them—so much for any concern about lowering costs for families.

Now, if this administration is not trying to lower costs, what are they doing to help the people they swore an oath to serve?

Last Friday, our research institutions got a notification almost overnight that their funding through the National Institutes of Health would be gutted. This decision threatens our ability to find cures for diseases, to get ahead of public health crises, and to hire and retain talent. I think it was made rashly and irresponsibly, without really understanding what the impact would be.

Slashing those funds won't make research more efficient. Instead, it is going to cripple our ability to treat and cure horrific diseases.

Dartmouth College, which is in Hanover, NH, is one of our preeminent research institutions in the country. Last year, Dartmouth received nearly \$100 million in NIH funding to help with its cutting-edge research to treat diseases like diabetes, cystic fibrosis, and Alzheimer's. This NIH decision—this decision by the Trump administration will cut Dartmouth's funding by \$38 million. And we don't know what the future impact of that would be.

Will we miss the next cure for pediatric cancer? Will we fail to advance treatments in Alzheimer's?

What we do know is that this has an immediate impact on the people living in the Upper Valley of New Hampshire. More than 1,300 employees are supported by Federal grants at Dartmouth, and the vast majority of these are supported by the National Institutes of Health. The job loss, the economic impact that will result from this decision will be devastating.

And, sadly, once these jobs are gone and the researchers leave, there is no going back because they are going someplace else. They are going overseas.

But we, unfortunately, know that RFK supports this decision because he has publicly supported gutting NIH staff and research. If Robert Kennedy is confirmed, I fear he will do nothing to push back or to reverse these reckless decisions.

The Secretary of HHS also holds immense power over ensuring that women in our country have the ability to access reproductive health services, including abortion. Interestingly, I thought this was something that RFK and I agreed on, but now I am not clear what he supports.

He used to proudly say that he was pro-choice, but since being nominated, that belief seems to have disappeared overnight. The only thing I think he truly believes is in his desire to do whatever Trump wants, even if it means compromising his own values.

Women in this country need to know that the Secretary of Health and Human Services will defend our rights to access all the healthcare we need. But at every turn, Republicans and the Trump administration have pushed forward dangerous policies intended to

threaten access to full reproductive care.

They put on the Supreme Court the Justices who overturned *Roe v. Wade*, and at the State level, they have instituted draconian abortion bans that threaten the lives of mothers.

Women are literally dying—dying—from a lack of care because of these bans on our health. This is 2025. How did we get here? I remember before *Roe v. Wade*. I remember when hundreds of thousands of women died from back-alley abortions. Are we back to that point?

Everyone knows that banning abortion and making women seek dangerous options does not stop abortions. It makes them more deadly. But with RFK at the helm, that is the grim reality we face.

He is not someone I trust to defend a woman's right to access reproductive healthcare. He is not someone I want leading Health and Human Services.

One of the few issues that we have some actual insight into are his views on public health. His dangerous, radical, and wrong beliefs about vaccines are well documented. Every child who gets sick or dies from a disease that could be prevented by a vaccine is a tragedy.

RFK will not only undermine public confidence in vaccines; he indicated that he intends to continue to profit from anti-vaccine lawsuits. It is shameful, and it is corrupt.

We have also heard reports that the Trump administration plans to cut as much as 50 percent of Health and Human Services' staff and decimate the work of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC is our first line of defense for public health, most importantly tracking and responding to outbreaks of diseases not only domestically but abroad as well. The Trump administration has already taken steps to gut our global health and aid efforts, from withdrawing from the World Health Organization to cutting the CDC and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

They argue that these efforts are wasteful and unnecessary. But just last Friday, we were notified in New Hampshire that we had only the third confirmed case ever in the United States of clade I monkeypox, or Mpox. The case is travel-related, meaning the patient caught the disease abroad and brought it home.

Sadly, these diseases don't just stop at countries' borders. They don't just happen overseas. They affect us here at home. The Trump administration's efforts to eliminate our public health infrastructure doesn't make America safer, it doesn't make America stronger, and it doesn't make America more prosperous. It does the exact opposite.

And Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., is complicit. He is complicit in these efforts, and he will only continue them should he be confirmed.

America deserves a leader at HHS who values science, who protects public

health, who defends women's rights to reproductive care—to the full range of reproductive care—and who upholds the integrity of our country's core health systems. RFK, Jr., has shown time and again that he is not that leader.

His dangerous rhetoric on vaccines, his reckless plans to gut critical Agencies, and lack of understanding of basic healthcare make him uniquely unqualified to advance the well-being of all Americans. I urge my colleagues to reject his nomination for Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BANKS). The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I yield 30 minutes of postcloture debate time to the Democratic leader.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise today in opposition to Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.'s nomination to serve as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, also known as HHS.

Throughout his entire nomination process, it has become clear that Mr. Kennedy is wholly unprepared to lead this Department, which is charged with promoting, as well as protecting, the health of all Americans.

If confirmed as Secretary, he would be tasked with managing programs that millions of Americans depend on each and every day, including Medicaid and Medicare; the Centers for Disease Control, or CDC; the Food and Drug Administration, or FDA; the National Institutes of Health, or NIH; as well as a number of other initiatives aimed at preparing for and responding to public health and medical emergencies. In total, HHS has a nearly \$2 trillion budget and manages more than 90,000 employees. HHS is an extremely, extremely complex organization that requires a leader with expertise on how these critically, critically important programs are actually administered.

Yet, during his hearings before the Senate Finance and HELP Committees, Mr. Kennedy showed his severe lack of knowledge and understanding about the most basic of Federal health programs. Mr. Kennedy could not answer the most basic questions about how the Medicaid Program works or how it benefits more than 70 million Americans who depend on health insurance.

At a time when Republicans are proposing drastic cuts to the Medicaid Program to pay for their tax cuts to billionaires, we need a Secretary who not only knows how the program works but will protect the access to healthcare services it provides for children and some of the most vulnerable people in our country. It is very clear Robert Kennedy, Jr., is not that Secretary.

During his nomination process, Mr. Kennedy also made it clear he does not understand the differences between the



various components of Medicare, a program that keeps our seniors cared for well into their golden years and often plays a key role in a person's decision about whether or not they can retire with dignity.

Amid ongoing threats from Republicans to privatize Medicare, we need a Secretary who will protect this program that generations of seniors have counted on to get care and generations to come that are paying into that fund for their future.

Mr. Kennedy's lack of experience and basic understanding of our Nation's healthcare system is, to say the least, extremely alarming. We cannot confirm a nominee who doesn't even know the most basic answers about programs that he is actually in charge of administering.

Since Mr. Kennedy was nominated to lead HHS, I have heard from thousands of my constituents from every corner of Michigan—from densely populated cities to some of the most rural areas in our State—who are deeply concerned about how his plans for the Department would impact families. For example, I have heard from countless folks about the rising cost of healthcare that is squeezing Michigan families' budgets. Healthcare prices are rising faster than inflation, making it even harder for people to get the care that they need.

I have heard from a constituent who has operated a food pantry in her community for 13 years. She worries about what will happen to the people that she serves if they do not have access to the food security programs made possible by HHS. In her letter, she shared that most of the people in her pantry services are literally one ER visit or one car breakdown away from being able to feed themselves or their families.

Public health initiatives are a lifeline for so many in Michigan as well as across our country. When our neighbors have access to basic health resources, it allows them to focus on improving their lives, whether that is gaining meaningful employment or getting an education. So we need an HHS Secretary who is focused on improving access to Medicaid and expanding the premium tax credits for the Affordable Care Act that allows millions of Americans to access affordable healthcare.

That clearly is not Robert Kennedy. He would not be that Secretary. Instead, he believes that Americans would rather be on privatized, for-profit healthcare.

HHS is also in charge of providing mental health services and support to communities all across our country. Unfortunately, we have a mental health crisis impacting Americans today, with record high levels of mental illness and suicides, especially among our youth.

I received a letter from a social worker in Michigan who helps students who were traumatized by the horrific shootings at Oxford High School in

Michigan and at Michigan State University. She is worried that, without proper mental health resources, Americans who have been impacted by senseless gun violence—whether at school, at their places of worship, at nightclubs, or at shopping malls—will grieve and struggle alone.

Unfortunately, Mr. Kennedy has only further stigmatized these important resources, even making comments during his confirmation hearing linking an increase in school shootings to an increased use of antidepressants. Mr. Kennedy's ideas would only worsen the mental health crisis that we are seeing today.

Instead, we need a Secretary who will invest in SAMHSA, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. We need a Secretary who will ensure that everyone has access to the programs and health professionals needed to address this mental health crisis. Robert Kennedy, Jr., is not that Secretary.

HHS oversees our Nation's major medical research, helping to advance breakthroughs in science and development of new treatments for deadly diseases, from childhood cancers to Alzheimer's. Research institutions across my home State of Michigan are conducting critically important research to improve health outcomes for Americans who suffer from these diseases.

A Michigan scientist who specializes in CDC research contacted my office. They fear that if Mr. Kennedy is confirmed, it could impact their ability and the ability of thousands of researchers all across our country to conduct medical research that is literally saving lives.

In a matter of weeks, we have already seen the Trump administration freeze funding and halt critical work at the National Institutes of Health and its research partners across the country. We need a Secretary who will fight to do this important research moving forward, research to cure cancer, to treat deadly viruses, and to address cardiovascular disease. Mr. Kennedy is not—he is not—that Secretary.

Advancing medical research is especially important today as we face increased cases of vaccine-preventable infectious diseases like measles. And despite this, Mr. Kennedy has time and time again sown doubt and promoted dangerous lies about the safety of vaccines.

My constituents are alarmed at what that will mean for their families. A concerned mother-to-be—who wrote to me and my office when she was 38 weeks pregnant—told me that Mr. Kennedy's long history of spreading dangerous medical disinformation and undermining public health initiatives is directly at odds with how she plans to keep her future child from infectious disease.

I also heard from a constituent who was born before the polio vaccine was approved. She said that, to this day, she can still remember the relief on her

mother's face when the polio vaccine became available. This moment has stuck with her throughout her 30-year career as a registered nurse, where she has made it her life's work to study and safely administer vaccines in her community.

Let's be clear. Let's be absolutely clear. Vaccines are scientifically proven to protect against diseases like chickenpox, polio, influenza and, yes, COVID-19.

We have eradicated deadly diseases and protected our children due to incredible scientific advances in vaccine research. But now vaccine skeptics like Mr. Kennedy have risen to prominence, discouraging people from getting safe, proven vaccines, and putting every American's health at risk when it comes to infectious diseases.

We need a Secretary who understands the effectiveness of vaccines and who will do more to prevent these diseases through routine childhood immunizations. Mr. Kennedy is not that Secretary, and, if confirmed, Mr. Kennedy has made it perfectly clear that he will stand in direct opposition to this evidence-based medicine.

Mr. Kennedy's falsehoods about basic public health practices have impacts that stretch far beyond our physical health. Another constituent, a clinical therapist, said she is seeing firsthand the devastating impacts that misinformation can have on mental health, adherence to treatment, and overall patient well-being. Specifically, she mentioned that "the spread of falsehoods about vaccines, psychiatric care, and medical service fuels distrust in lifesaving interventions, exacerbates existing mental health crises, and hinders efforts to connect patients with effective, evidence-based treatments."

I have even heard from parents who are concerned about Mr. Kennedy's narrative suggesting vaccines cause autism. Because he has given credibility to these lies and questioned facts from scientists and doctors, these parents worry that their children will not receive the most basic, routine care they deserve.

In the midst of so many healthcare challenges, from prescription drugs to mental health, to various public health threats, we cannot afford to have someone as unprepared as Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., in charge of all these public health Agencies.

Even well-respected organizations know that Mr. Kennedy would be an absolute disaster for our public health. Take the American Public Health Association, for example. In a letter, they said:

To effectively lead our nation's top health agency, a candidate should ideally be trained in health administration, clinical care, or a related field and must believe in and follow the scientific evidence that serves as the basis of our nation's system to protect and to promote the public's health from the many threats we face.

We simply cannot afford to have someone as unqualified as Robert Kennedy, Jr., be in charge of our top public

health Agency. He has failed to exhibit even the most basic knowledge of how HHS programs are administered to the millions of Americans who depend on them each and every day. He has misrepresented scientific evidence that is at the foundation of what HHS sets out to accomplish, which is keeping Americans healthy and protected from disease. He has demonized doctors, scientists, researchers, and medical professionals who, unlike him, have actually done the important work to keep our communities safe.

I urge my colleagues to judge Mr. Kennedy on his lack of qualifications. It is clear he simply does not have the expertise, the training, or even the leadership skills necessary to lead a Department as important as HHS.

We need a Secretary who will protect the health of Americans. Robert Kennedy is not that Secretary, and if he is confirmed to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, the American people will ultimately pay the price with their health.

I urge my colleagues to join me in voting no.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, just over 5 years ago, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., traveled to the Pacific island Samoa. Mr. Kennedy was on a mission to spread baseless and debunked conspiracy theories about the safety and efficacy of children's vaccines.

Trading in his esteemed family name and peddling himself as some sort of expert, Mr. Kennedy discouraged parents in Samoa from vaccinating their children. The impact of Mr. Kennedy's visit was undeniable. Health providers in Samoa reported that anti-vaccine voices "got louder" after his visit, and the rate of measles vaccinations for eligible 1-year-olds in Samoa fell to under 33 percent—well below herd immunity.

Five months after Mr. Kennedy's visit, Samoa had a massive measles outbreak, with 5,000 of its citizens contracting the disease and 83 Samoans dying, the vast majority of whom were children under the age of 5.

During his recent Senate confirmation hearings, Mr. Kennedy doubled down on his denialism, claiming, "We don't know what was killing" those children in Samoa.

Mr. Kennedy also claimed in written responses to Senate questions that "my words had nothing to do with vaccine uptake in Samoa or with the 2019 epidemic." But the current top health official in Samoa has denounced Mr. Kennedy's characterization of the measles outbreak in his country and Mr. Kennedy's role in it as "an outright lie" and "a total fabrication."

As someone with a background in science but more importantly, just as a father of two young men, I am horrified by this story. The measles vaccine has been one of the most successful public health and science stories of the last century. One vaccine administered

in two doses now provides protection against four devastating diseases: measles, mumps, rubella, and chickenpox.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, nearly twice as many young people died from measles as from polio. Thanks to incredible scientific research and medical advances, we now have a vaccine that is proven to be safe and effective at protecting our kids from these deadly diseases. This vaccine has largely eradicated the measles outbreaks that used to result in the devastating loss of babies and young children—that is, until anti-vaccine crusaders like Mr. Kennedy started promoting phony science and conspiracy theories in places like Samoa.

Over the last two decades, thanks in large part to Mr. Kennedy, this anti-science movement has moved from the darkest corners of the internet into the mainstream. The Samoan story provides us a heartbreaking example of just what is at stake if we give this movement's leader a national platform to spread his junk science.

I hope all of my colleagues take seriously what it would mean to confirm this anti-vaccine, anti-science, snake oil salesman as our next Secretary of Health and Human Services.

As the leader of the largest anti-vaccine organization in the country, the so-called "Children's Defense Fund"—and I use air quotes for a reason—Mr. Kennedy has repeatedly pushed junk science studies to spread fear and skepticism of vaccines. And it is not limited to the measles. Mr. Kennedy has repeatedly and falsely alleged that safe and effective vaccines for tetanus, for the flu, for COVID, for HPV are dangerous to human health.

Mr. Kennedy has even promoted the completely discredited conspiracy theory that vaccines lead to autism. I want to be really clear that decades of extensive, peer-reviewed, scientific studies have found no connection—zero connection—between vaccines and autism. When he was pressed about this during his confirmation hearings, Mr. Kennedy continued to promote junk science studies rather than walk back his misinformation.

In response to Mr. Kennedy's words in his confirmation hearing, Christopher Banks, the president and CEO of the Autism Society of America, said:

The Autism community deserves leadership that prioritizes evidence-based policies and respects the lived experiences of Autistic individuals and their families. The continued promotion of debunked vaccine theories only serves as a distraction from the critical research needed to better understand Autism and provide support for the Autism community today.

I completely agree with Mr. Banks.

Financial disclosures from his confirmation process have also revealed that Mr. Kennedy has made millions of dollars in referral fees from law firms suing vaccine manufacturers based on baseless conspiracy theories. If confirmed, his own personal financial interests could still be tied to these anti-vaccine lawsuits.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic that led to more than a million deaths in the United States alone, Mr. Kennedy campaigned to end the nationwide vaccination effort that helped us save millions more lives. He continued his well-worn and, again, completely evidence-free message that no vaccine is safe and effective. And just like with all vaccines, the COVID vaccines went through independent review and extensive trials to ensure they were safe and effective. If Mr. Kennedy had had his way, we might still be losing thousands and thousands of our family members and neighbors to that virus.

Mr. Kennedy has, again, without any sound evidence also pushed conspiracy theories claiming that antidepressant medications cause mass shootings and chemicals in our water make children gay. If those claims sound nuts, it is because they are.

Mr. Kennedy has said that he is opposed to promoting prescription medications to treat chronic diseases, including anti-obesity medications like Ozempic that are currently used by millions of Americans.

Mr. Kennedy has said that he would eliminate the entire nutrition department at the Food and Drug Administration, jeopardizing the safety of our Nation's food supplies.

Mr. Kennedy has said that he supports gutting the National Institutes of Health, which supports the development of medicines to treat diseases and delivers untold resources to healthcare institutions in New Mexico and every other State in this country.

During his confirmation process, Mr. Kennedy also reportedly made commitments to my Republican colleagues to support restrictions on mifepristone, a medication abortion and miscarriage management drug. Mifepristone has been approved by the FDA for 25 years.

It is true that Mr. Kennedy has made a number of conflicting statements in the past about his personal views on women's reproductive healthcare, but during his confirmation process, Mr. Kennedy signaled to Republican Senators that he will go along with whatever President Trump wants to further roll back women's reproductive rights.

Mr. Kennedy is not who any of us should want to put in charge of our Nation's health and food safety. The Department of Health and Human Services oversees health coverage programs that serve half—half—of all Americans. HHS plays a critical role in overseeing Medicare, overseeing Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act. HHS also supports the medical research that helps us to develop the next vaccines, prevent the next pandemic, and find cures for cancer and chronic diseases like diabetes.

We have already seen President Trump, Elon Musk, and his DOGE minions target scientific and medical research at Agencies like the National Institutes of Health. Just last week, we saw them announce an estimated \$4 billion cut for health research at universities across the Nation, including



an estimated \$17 million impact at the University of New Mexico alone. And just like many of the unilateral and illegal actions of this emboldened Trump administration, this one received a temporary halt from a Federal judge 2 days ago.

But whether this particular attack holds up in court or not, the Trump administration's intention is clear: dramatic cuts to medical research into treatments and cures that countless Americans are depending upon to save their lives. Mr. Kennedy plans to lead this effort and even to expand on it.

Mr. Kennedy is not who my constituents in New Mexico want to see leading our Nation's health Agency. In fact, New Mexicans have raised their concerns in letters and emails and phone calls day in and day out, and I am going to take a few minutes to read to you from some of these New Mexicans who are terrified about the danger that Mr. Kennedy would pose as our Nation's healthcare Agency leader.

Melissa from Albuquerque is concerned that Mr. Kennedy's past of promoting misinformation about vaccines and his lack of experience will endanger Americans.

Melissa said:

This role demands a leader who relies on evidence-based decision-making, upholds public trust, and prioritizes the health and safety of all Americans. RFK Jr.'s history of promoting conspiracy theories makes him fundamentally unfit for this critical position. If RFK Jr. were confirmed to head HHS, millions of American lives would be put at risk. His policies would jeopardize public health and undermine efforts to protect our communities from preventable diseases and health crises.

William from Albuquerque, a retired University of New Mexico health communications professor and longtime NIH principal investigator, knows that Mr. Kennedy's harmful rhetoric and lies will hurt public health efforts and lead to unnecessary deaths.

William said:

My research team and I have had to continually battle anti-vax misinformation. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is often at the center of that misinformation. I urge you in the strongest possible terms to oppose his nomination as Secretary of HHS. The damage he would do will take decades to undo and will lead undoubtedly to US morbidity and mortality increasing due to infectious diseases.

Jane from Albuquerque is concerned that Mr. Kennedy's lack of experience will negatively impact the health of New Mexicans.

She said:

The administration has nominated manifestly unqualified individuals and those openly hostile to evidence to head the Department of Health and Human Services and the individual agencies that are charged with protecting the health of everyone in the U.S. This abdication of responsibility will undoubtedly impact vulnerable populations most profoundly, including those living in New Mexico.

Mark from Albuquerque, a survivor of polio, knows that the polio vaccine effectively eradicated this relentless and deadly disease. He is worried that

Mr. Kennedy's confirmation could stifle future vaccinations like the one that saved his life.

Mark said:

I am a polio survivor. I know that I was very fortunate in my recovery and I also know that the vaccines effectively eradicated this relentless and deadly disease. So, I ask that you do whatever you can to prevent RFK Jr. from overseeing the healthcare of all Americans!

Lori from Las Cruces is also worried that Mr. Kennedy's history of spreading misinformation could harm Americans.

Lori said:

If the Senate confirms RFK Jr. to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, Americans' health care will be put at risk and we'll be ill-prepared for another public health catastrophe. We need to push for a qualified, trustworthy nominee to lead America's health policy.

Meghan from Albuquerque, a primary care physician, is worried that Mr. Kennedy's lack of experience and disregard for evidence-based medicine pose a danger to Americans.

Meghan said:

As a primary care physician in New Mexico, I am also very worried about the possibility of RFK Jr. being confirmed as HHS Secretary. His past actions have shown that he has little regard for research, evidence based medicine or the expertise of scientists and physicians. He is dangerous to the American people.

I agree with these New Mexicans that Mr. Kennedy is unprepared, he is unqualified, and he is dangerously unfit to be confirmed as our next Health Secretary—unfit to protect our kids' health from debunked conspiracy theories, unfit to defend women's reproductive rights, unfit to safeguard the future of Medicare and Medicaid, and unfit to continue lifesaving medical research and medical care in my State and across the country.

For all of these reasons, I would urge all of my colleagues to join me in voting no on confirming Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

MR. KELLY. Mr. President, I really care about science. I spent my career as an engineer, as a Navy pilot and a test pilot, and as an astronaut—three jobs where facts matter, where you make decisions based on science, not superstition, because when you are launching off of an aircraft carrier or orbiting the Earth at 17,500 miles per hour, there is no room for conspiracy theories; you have to deal in reality.

In my career, relying on science literally meant the difference between life and death. The same is true for the person who is responsible for our Nation's health. The Secretary of Health and Human Services is responsible for making sure that the best science guides our healthcare, from developing lifesaving medicines to preventing deadly diseases.

This job requires a commitment to science, facts, and to public health, but the nominee before us today, Robert F.

Kennedy, Jr., has spent much of his career doing the exact opposite—rejecting science, spreading conspiracy theories, and putting public health at risk. That is not someone that I want in charge of keeping Arizonans healthy.

That would be his job, by the way—responding to disease outbreaks, approving new medicines and treatments, overseeing healthcare coverage for millions of Arizonans and millions of Americans. So this isn't just some bureaucratic decision that we are about to make; this is about whether the next HHS Secretary will protect public health or undermine it with dangerous misinformation.

Let's be clear about Mr. Kennedy's record. This is not someone who is simply asking questions about vaccines. Healthy skepticism is one thing, and I always told my space shuttle crew members to tell me when they thought I was wrong, to constantly question the way we were doing things. We should be doing the same thing here in the Senate.

But what Mr. Kennedy has engaged in goes far beyond that—far beyond that. Even when presented with definitive science, he has doubled down on conspiracy theories because, for him, that is what paid the bills. He was the chairman of the most well-funded anti-vaccine organization in the country. The group he led has spread false claims that vaccines cause autism, that vaccines cause cancer, and that they cause autoimmune disease. This organization has filed lawsuits to block children from getting vaccinated.

What happens when people believe that? We get outbreaks of disease that we thought was long gone in the rear-view mirror.

In America Samoa, he spread misinformation about vaccines during a measles outbreak that killed 83 people. Instead of helping families get lifesaving care, Mr. Kennedy sowed fear and doubt, and then he had the audacity to question whether measles was really the cause of those 83 deaths.

In Texas, right now—right now, today—there is a measles outbreak. It is in a county that has low vaccination rates. So far, all of the cases are in unvaccinated people. Now, we know exactly what causes these outbreaks. It is not science; it is misinformation. It is people like Mr. Kennedy telling parents they can't trust their doctors.

I am thinking about this nomination not as a Senator but as a father and a grandparent. I know how much Arizona families care about their kids' health. All they want us to do is do what is right for their family and for their kids. And I know what it means to trust doctors, to trust medicine, to trust science.

I want my granddaughter Sage to grow up in a world that is safer and healthier than the one before her, where we don't have to worry about diseases that we already know how to prevent. I think about my daughter, her mom, who, like any first-time parent, is doing everything she possibly

can to make the best decisions for her child, and that is already hard enough. The last thing parents need is one more loud voice—especially one in a position of authority—pushing conspiracy theories that make it harder to know what is true. It is bad for kids across Arizona and across the country.

When he spreads these conspiracy theories about vaccines and autism, it has cascading effects. Senator HASSAN made this point, I think, better than anybody else could. Just last week or the week before, after speaking about her son, who has cerebral palsy, Senator HASSAN said:

The problem with this witness' response on the autism cause and the relationship to vaccines is because he's relitigating and churning settled science. So we can't go forward and find out what the cause of autism is and treat these kids and help these families.

She continued. She went on and said:

Sometimes science is wrong . . . but we make progress, and we build on the work, and we become more successful. But when you continue to sow doubt about settled science, it makes it impossible for us to move forward . . . and it freezes us in place.

So, you see, the job of HHS Secretary isn't about chasing conspiracy theories; it is about making sure families get the best care possible based on the best science available so we can make progress and live healthy lives.

Folks, here is what makes this even worse—like, a lot worse: Mr. Kennedy—get this—Mr. Kennedy vaccinated his own kids while telling other parents not to. His own cousin, Ambassador Caroline Kennedy, called him a predator for what he has done. That is not leadership, folks; that is hypocrisy.

Here is what Ambassador Kennedy wrote:

Bobby prays on the desperation of parents of sick children—vaccinating his own children while building a following by hypocritically discouraging other parents from vaccinating theirs.

She went on:

Even before he fills this job, his constant denigration of our health care system and the conspiratorial half-truths he has told about vaccines, including in connection with Samoa's deadly 2019 measles outbreak, have cost lives.

She continued:

And now we know that Bobby's crusade against vaccination has benefited him in other ways, too.

His ethics report makes clear that he will keep his financial stake in a lawsuit against [the] HPV vaccine.

In other words—

This is Ambassador Kennedy's words.

In other words, he is willing to enrich himself by denying access to a vaccine that can prevent almost all forms of cervical cancer and which has been safely administered to millions of boys and girls.

That was a quote from his own cousin.

The Senate cannot ignore this massive conflict of interest. Mr. Kennedy has personally made millions of dollars from lawsuits attacking vaccines, including the HPV vaccine, which prevents cervical cancer.

And, if confirmed, he would oversee the FDA, the very Agency that regulates the vaccines that he is suing over. That is a direct financial incentive to undermine vaccines, even if it puts people's lives at risk. And he wouldn't commit to removing himself from this equation.

And it is not just vaccines. Mr. Kennedy has made a career of embracing conspiracy theories over facts. He claims—it would be funny in another context. But Mr. Kennedy—get this—claims Wi-Fi and 5G cause cancer. He thinks the COVID vaccine is part of a government plot. He suggested that vaccines are a holocaust.

But, of course, when he was confronted about that, he said he didn't recall saying it. He believes that the people who are running our vaccine programs should be in jail. And when asked about 9/11, one of the most defining moments in our Nation's history, he refused to say who was responsible. And his response? He said:

It's hard to tell what's a conspiracy theory and what isn't.

Well, Mr. President, we cannot put somebody in charge of our Nation's healthcare who doesn't know how to separate fact from fiction. No one in the Senate should be comfortable with that.

But the dangerous misinformation doesn't stop with vaccines. Mr. Kennedy claimed that anti-depressants, not guns, are to blame for school shootings. Let's be clear, folks. There is zero—zero—evidence to support that—none. What we do know and what the data tells us is that in every other developed country, they also have anti-depressants. What they don't have is America's level of gun violence. The difference is not mental health treatment. It is easy access to guns for kids, for criminals, and for dangerous people who shouldn't have them.

Mr. President, my family and I have lived with the consequences of gun violence. My wife Gabby Giffords was nearly killed by a gunman when meeting with her constituents outside a grocery store in 2011. Six people died; 12 were injured. You won't find anyone at that grocery store who believes that an excess of mental health treatment was responsible for that tragedy—not one.

Gabby and I have sat in living rooms of parents who have lost their children in mass shootings, and we have fought for real, commonsense gun safety laws that can save lives.

Just like Senator HASSAN, I will not stand here and let conspiracy theories distract from real solutions. And this is the core of the problem. Mr. Kennedy treats healthcare like it is a conspiracy theory.

Mr. Kennedy is not the person who should be running the Department of Health and Human Services. It is very clear. If Mr. Kennedy was simply a private citizen saying these things, that would be one thing. It would still be a problem, by the way. But this is some-

one who wants to be in charge of all of our healthcare.

And if his dangerous views weren't enough, he doesn't even understand the weight of the job he is applying for. In his confirmation hearing, he didn't know the difference between Medicare and Medicaid. He didn't understand the different parts of Medicare and what they provide for seniors. He didn't know what a community health center was. He couldn't articulate a basic managing plan for HHS's \$2 trillion budget.

He wouldn't answer as to whether he will negotiate for lower drug prices for seniors. And that means, if you are a senior, with him in charge you might see higher drug prices.

Mr. Kennedy does not have a medical degree, and he has no experience—zero experience—in healthcare policy. So this isn't just about bad ideas; it is about dangerous ideas and the fact that he is completely unprepared to do this job.

We also learned at his confirmation hearing that Mr. Kennedy won't make decisions based on science, data, and facts or what is best for our public health. Instead, he will do whatever President Trump tells him to do. Over and over again, when asked about his policies, he didn't give answers based on what he believes is right. He said:

President Trump has not told me what his policy is.

On reproductive health:

Trump has told me to look into it, but I don't know what his policy is.

This is a nominee who traffics in conspiracies, who doesn't know much about the Agency he is nominated to lead, and who has said he will just do whatever he is told which, considering what we heard all along, that President Trump has a "concept" of a healthcare plan—it is not a real plan. But we still don't know what that is. Now, that, to me, feels like a big problem.

Mr. President, we need an HHS Secretary who will lead with facts, not fear; who will lower the price of prescription drugs or fight to do that; and fight to reduce healthcare costs and not to go along with efforts to take health insurance away from kids and people with disabilities; who will build trust in our healthcare system, not undermine it.

Mr. Kennedy has built a career out of rejecting science, spreading misinformation, and profited off of fear. He has compared vaccine scientists to Nazis. He has refused to say if 9/11 was a conspiracy theory. And when it comes to leading this Nation's healthcare system, he has no plan, no knowledge, and no independence; and he says he will do whatever President Trump tells him to do.

So my colleagues, we all have to ask ourselves: Are we really willing to put the health of American families in his hands; are we? I know my answer, and I urge everyone in this Chamber to think very hard about theirs.

Mr. President, I yield 30 minutes of postcloture debate time to the Democratic leader.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

The Senator from Illinois.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, if you go back exactly 20 years ago today, I could tell you exactly where I was. I was a patient at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

I was staring at the beige-colored walls. And amidst the pain in every inch of my body, I was trying to muster the strength to sit up or to take a step or even just to breathe. I spent months and months and months in that hospital room, hooked up to machines, getting wheeled in and out of surgeries, learning how to live again in my new post-shoot-down world.

But despite it all, looking back, I consider every one of those days in that hospital room lucky days because, when the worst happened to me—when that RPG exploded in my lap in Iraq and I needed serious, sustained medical attention to survive the hour, the day, the year, I had healthcare I could rely on.

The same cannot be said for countless of Americans—Americans whose health costs have already been too high and whose access to care is at even greater danger if this Chamber is foolish enough to confirm Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., as our next Secretary of HHS. Put simply, Mr. Kennedy cannot be trusted with the grave, grave responsibility that comes with this job. He cannot be trusted with our lives. He is focused on pushing his agenda, regardless of the cost to middle-class Americans. And if this man is confirmed, more Americans will die preventable deaths because of his policies.

Next month will mark the 5-year anniversary of when COVID shut down our Nation. In this moment, it is dangerous, reckless, and heartless to everyone who lost a loved one in the pandemic to even consider nominating a guy who has stated that “no vaccine is safe and effective.”

And if our Health and Human Services Secretary refuses to ensure children are protected against “preventable yet deadly” diseases like measles, RSV, whooping cough, or polio, it will be our kids, not Mr. Kennedy, who pay the price.

I have gotten letter after letter from my constituents, begging me to try to reason with my colleagues, to do whatever I can to prevent a man so ignorant of all things science and medicine from holding a position of such power over our children’s next breath.

One pediatrician in Illinois wrote to me:

I will always remember the 9-month-old infant with whooping cough who could not be saved despite every high-tech ventilator and medication we had available.

Another said:

I recall a father screaming and punching a hole in the wall when his 4-year-old son died of chicken pox.

The stories, the letters of avoidable tragedies go on and on. Imagine how much worse the heartbreak will become under a guy who acts like the term “vaccine” is a swear word.

The only reason that Kennedy is even up for confirmation is because he, like Elon Musk, decided to throw his dignity to the wind and bow down at Trump’s altar. And because of that, he gets to be yet another rich guy with too few qualifications and too much power, somehow now charged with leading our government.

Trump is running this country like the mob: Kiss his ring. Pledge your unyielding loyalty. Get made.

It is just that, this time, you get made into a Cabinet Secretary.

Well, Kennedy has given Trump his fealty. So why would any of us ever think he would have the courage to stand up to Trump if the President issues an order that actively harms everyday Americans? How could any of us actually believe that Kennedy would fight back against Trump’s worst instincts when Kennedy himself has proven, time and again, that he believes more sycophancy than science?

Now, Americans are going to be the ones to suffer because, now, with Kennedy’s confirmation, even programs as popular, effective, and vital as Medicaid will be in even greater danger.

The Republicans told us in Project 2025 that they would come for Medicaid, and this is the rare case when the GOP has actually kept its word—putting at risk roughly 80 million Americans who rely on Medicaid, Americans in red States and blue, in big cities and small towns, and folks who may have never heard of RFK, Jr., but who will certainly feel the effect when he rips away the healthcare their family so desperately needs.

Medicaid is a lifeline for kids, for pregnant women, for people in nursing homes, for Americans with disabilities. The Republicans don’t seem to care about any of that. It is obvious that Donald Trump has never stayed up late at night, hunched over the kitchen table with a calculator in one hand and a medical bill in the other, praying to figure out a way to afford his child’s insulin. No, of course not.

With every passing day, it becomes clearer and clearer that Republicans care more about tax breaks for the billionaires they pal around with on the golf course than prescriptions for the middle-class folks who actually work at Mar-a-Lago. While that teacher in Peoria lies awake at night trying to work out how she can afford her father’s home care now that he can no longer get those services through Medicaid, while that new mom in Chicago who has just learned she has stage 3 cancer and is trying to find a second job so she can afford both diapers for her newborn and her own chemotherapy, Donald Trump and Elon Musk will be too busy lining their already full pockets to care.

To my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, I am sure many of you have

faced health crises of your own. I am sure many of you have had a parent who has been sick or a nephew who has been in a car crash or a spouse who has been in need of an emergency C-section or a child who has relied on an autoimmune injector. Imagine if your loved ones hadn’t had care they could rely on in the moment, and then ask yourself how you can sleep soundly tonight if you vote to further the agenda of a couple of rich guys who so clearly don’t care about making America healthy. They only care about tipping it even more in favor of the wealthy. They are not bringing back the good old days of Reagan; they are just bringing back the days of dying from the measles. And they are certainly not making America great again; they are making America sick again. That is the Trump-Kennedy promise.

I care about my constituents’ ability to afford their prescription medications, their ability to get the vaccines that will keep them alive through the next pandemic, their ability to survive those worst-case scenario health moments without going broke in the process.

So for all of those reasons and a thousand more, I will be voting no on Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.’s nomination. If my Republican colleagues care about any one of those things, too, then they will have no choice but to do the same.

Mr. President, I have received a number of messages from my constituents describing what access to Medicaid means to them and their families. I would like to close by asking unanimous consent that they be printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Tom, age 60, Clinton County—Medicaid is keeping Tom alive. After working in construction his whole life, Tom, age 60, experienced a series of heart attacks. He cannot return to work with his current disabilities, and Medicaid is the only health insurance available to him. Medicaid covers his cardiologist visits and the eight medications he needs to stay alive. Tom has applied for Social Security disability benefits, but has not been approved. If Medicaid work requirements were implemented, Tom doesn’t know how he would prove that he is disabled and cannot work since his disability application is still pending. The uncertainty of whether his state would even approve an exemption adds to his stress. He knows he cannot afford the care and treatment he needs out-of-pocket.

Beth—Medicaid pays for my 25-year-old autistic son to attend Community Day Services. Without this financial help my son would not be able attend. It is CRUCIAL that he has a routine. Without this his behavior would be terrible and it would affect his and our family’s live horribly. He is not independent enough to work. Cutting off Medicaid would harm him. I hope President Trump comes to realize the damage that would be done if he cuts it off.

Brian and Janice—Alex genetic disability requires many doctors’ visits and tests and medication. She also requires physical therapy and occupational therapy. Medicaid is her health insurance for these things. Due to her disability she can only work a little bit

not enough to pay insurance costs or her bills. I am her mom plus caregiver. She relies on me for help with basic needs and she can't drive, so I have to get her to work and appointments. She will never be able to live alone. She will always require a caregiver. Medicaid provides caregivers. In the future Medicaid will provide day programs, when I am not physically able to care for her and her brother becomes her guardian. Medicaid provides for needs now, so she can have a good life and will provide for her needs in the future, as a parent of a child with a disability this relieves our stress. As a parent we won't live forever, and it gives us peace of mind to know she has these services to live a fulfilling life!

Diane and Erin—Medicaid helps me take care of my daughter with a disability. It costs over \$350,000 per person per year in an institution. Medicaid provides a much better quality of life for people in the community for 7% of that budget. My daughter can work in the community because she lives in the community. She is able to enjoy the hobbies she loves, attend college to pursue a degree in dance, and maybe, thanks to Medicaid's support, maybe even live independently.

Neomi—My son suffered a brain injury at birth. He is g-tube dependent and teach/vent dependent. Medicaid covers the copay costs and items necessary that aren't covered by private insurance. Medicaid covers his in-home nursing that allows him to attend school and access our community. The Medicaid waiver program has granted him the means to enter his home, family vehicle and a home generator to ensure his life sustaining equipment can always run and to help maintain his environment. With out Medicaid, my son would have to live in a hospital.

Cassandra—My medically complex son was born with Wolf Hirschhorn Syndrome. He has required a tremendous amount of medical care since birth that we were not planned for. We were initially denied Medicaid and the final burden for resources he needs were a lot for a family to handle with only one parent being able to work while the other has to provide care for him. As care became harder, we were approved for Medicaid. Medicaid picks up the expenses our primary insurance does not cover. It has also allowed us to have in home nursing which is necessary for him to be able to attend school and allow myself a little bit of a break. Cade has a very serious case of seizures that can become deadly quickly which is why he needs nonstop supervision. He also has stage 3 kidney disease, heart defects, cleft palate which causes feeding issues therefore he is g-tube dependent, severe apnea requiring CPAP and oxygen, immune deficiency requiring immune therapy on a weekly basis, many hospital stays for seizures and illness. He has around 15 specialty doctors at our children's hospital. He is 7 years old, non-verbal and can not walk alone. He works hard daily to continue his development through therapies.

Debra—I adopted two medically fragile children from foster care. Both have Medicaid as their primary and only insurance. They both receive services through the Division of Specialized Care for Children in Illinois. My daughter has a MFTD waiver. They require 19 daily prescription medications. My son requires a nightly injection that is \$4,000 a month. My daughter requires multiple pieces of expensive medical equipment. I would never have been able to afford to adopt them with all these needs without knowing they would be able to receive Medicaid. I am so proud of how much they have accomplished thanks to the therapies Medicaid has provided. Medicaid is a vital, life saving program for thousands of children

like mine. We need to fight to keep Medicaid accessible for all who need it.

Gayle and Kelly—Medicaid provides my supplemental health/medical insurance. In addition, Medicaid funding provides services and supports that help me reach my employment and independence goals. With Medicaid, I have the opportunity to live with dignity and purpose.

Tessa—Medicaid helps my son receive services that are imperative to his daily living without interruption. It allows our family to operate on a stable foundation to make sure our sons care is fully supported while being a mother to my other children as well.

Dyan—My daughter Caity was born with Down Syndrome. She has a trache and vent to help her breathe and a g-button to help her eat. We use Medicaid to cover the costs our insurance doesn't cover for her medical needs. As well my daughter needs nursing to go to school and help her live day to day. Without Medicaid, Caity would not be living and would not be able to go to school.

Tommi—Medicaid allows me to keep Amanda home. It also provides a piece of mind knowing that we always have extra help covering her astronomical medical costs. Amanda has Spina Bifida and other anomalies and relies on life sustaining equipment such as 24/7 oxygen, tube feeds and ventilator to sleep; without Medicaid, the copay for these items would be so costly our family would not be able to afford to survive. Medicaid has not only allowed us to keep Amanda home so we can care for her; I am sure, because of this, Amanda is still alive. I am confident the care she receives at home far surpasses the care she would receive at a care facility, (if we could find one that could provide for her high level of needs), or she would have to be hospitalized, putting her at risk for major complications due to infections and other ailments that are picked up in a hospital base setting. I am paid as Amanda's caregiver thanks to Medicaid; this allows me to provide the best care possible for Amanda to give her the best quality of life possible.

Sarah—My son has a rare genetic syndrome, Ayme-Grippe, with many medical complications. He has a tracheostomy tube, a gastronomy tube, cochlear implants, contact lenses, and seizures, to name a few. Medicaid supplements our private insurance and allows us to keep nursing hours staffed, our prescriptions filled, and all necessary tests and interventions performed, which in turn, keeps Beau out of the hospital or an institution, and home where he belongs. Along with the host of medical features, Beau also has the warmest smile, the best twinkle in his eyes, and the softest touch when he holds your hand. He deserves everything this world has to offer, and Medicaid helps us give it to him.

Rebekah—Care for my disabled child at home. If we did not have Medicaid our daughter would be living in a hospital. We use in home nursing services to help care for her. Medicaid has also provided us with medical supplies and equipment to ensure we give her adequate care and to keep her safe. Miracle has a Trach, feeding tube, central line and is TPN dependent. She is also type 1 diabetic and depends on her medications and blood sugar monitoring devices and supplies.

Jane—Medicaid helps me send my son to an adult day program that helps be an active member in our community It supplies a safe place for him.

Jill—It allows me to work while my adult son attends a day program where he gets social interaction and life skills.

Ally—Keep my son with complex medical needs at home (with home nursing) and out of the hospital/long term care.

Lindsay—Keeping my son at home. Medicaid provides nursing care to give us a mental break and prevent caregiver burnout. They also help us get him to his many appointments and therapies. If we lose Medicaid, we would have to put my son (14 years old) in a hospital or turn him over to the state to be put in a nursing home. We can't afford monthly feeding enteral supplies. That alone is \$8,500 a month. We would have to file bankruptcy. Most private insurance companies won't pay for feeding supplies. There is already a nursing shortage, and he needs someone by his side 24/7, which can't happen in a hospital or nursing home.

Mary—My child has Septo Optic Dysplasia and cognitive delay. He has a tracheotomy tube to breathe and a feeding tube to eat. He is Nonmobile and requires 24/7 care. Medicaid provides in home nursing for his care; otherwise, he would need to live in a long-term facility. Medicaid is vital to our family staying together as a family.

Maximilian—Participate in day programs and activities that give me meaningful life and community experiences.

Erika—Care for my medically complex child at home. Medicaid helps me acquire critical supplies my son requires to stay healthy such as tracheostomy, g-tube, and daily care supplies. It also helps us receive medications such as antiepileptic medications. This is just a fraction on ways Medicaid supports the quality of life for my child.

Tara—Medicaid has been a lifeline for our family for the past two years. My daughter has a rare condition called Aicardi Syndrome. She suffers from a whole slew of medical issues. Two years ago, her health took a nosedive, and we were faced with an incredibly hard decision. Due to her being in the hospital frequently and needing 24/7 medical care, we were forced to have me quit my job as a nurse to become her nurse at home. We barely made it by with two incomes, let alone one. I found the MFTD waiver through DSCC, and we found a way to care for our daughter like she deserves. Medicaid pays for nursing that our primary insurance does not cover. The state allows me to be paid as her nurse so we are able to financial pay for our daily needs, home, and wheelchair van to transport our daughter. It helps to pay for all the supplies and monthly fees associated with her equipment she needs to help her eat and breathe. With Medicaid funding we were able to get a generator for our home, so when the electricity is out (we are rural and it can take many hours to restore), we do not have to take her to the hospital immediately to get the equipment she needs to live. We were able to fund a wheelchair accessible van to transport her safely. Without Medicaid, we would not have access to medications, equipment, supplies, and nursing. These are the things that keep my daughter alive.

Christina and Emma—I have a trach and a g-tube. I am nonmobile and nonverbal. I use an eye-gaze device to communicate. Home Nursing makes it possible for me to go to school!

Jenni—Give support to my child so we can work and earn a living to care for our family. Medicaid's also allows her to attend a day program when she exits school in 2 years so we can work and earn a living. Selena has severe epilepsy and intellectual abilities that prohibit her from being able to work, speak or care for herself.

Alaina and Ayla—Get all of the supplies I need to help me eat and breathe at home. It also helps me get the equipment I need to make me stronger and work on my standing. Medicaid pays for my therapists that I love that teach me new ways to move around in my own way and interact with my siblings and friends.

Yvonne—Medicaid helps me keep my loved one at home, as healthy and connected to his family and community as he can be. Medicaid helps me provide him with the doctors, therapists, and medical equipment that he needs to grow and develop. Without Medicaid, my son would not be here.

Tiffany—My daughter was born with several congenital abnormalities and has no unifying diagnosis. She is a rare medical case; we still have no understanding for. Without Medicaid programs and grants, she would not be able to receive her at home nursing or care from her many physicians. Graylinn would not be alive today or live in her home with her family if it wasn't for her Medicaid programs providing her with in-home nursing services. She would be living in the hospital. She would not be able to have life experiences such as attending her older sisters sporting events and family holidays.

Sarah—Take care of my child. My child is on seizure medications to help control seizures. A ventilator to help with breathing and keeping lungs inflated. A feeding tube and formulas and has many health issues. Medicaid helps with all of those things and in-home nursing so that my child does not have to be in an institution. Many of the things needed are very costly. If it wasn't for the help, our family would not be able to provide these things, and our child would no longer exist. Please consider all that are affected by these decisions.

Yanet—I'm the mother of a girl with special needs. With the Medicaid, We Get to go to doctors' visits. We get Medicine that my family needs. Without the help of Medicaid, I would not be able to go to my doctor or get the medicine or services that I need. Like psychological help for my depression that has helped the whole family. I won't be able to Get the audiologist services or physical therapy my 9-year-old son needs.

Andrea—Take care of my daughter, who is 11 years old and medically fragile. Medicaid paid for her specialists, hospital visits, and medical services so she doesn't live in a hospital—which would be catastrophically more expensive. Because of this, she thrives, and I'm able to work and serve my community.

Denise—Our son Andrew, who goes by Drew, is 29 years old and has Down syndrome. Medicaid is his health insurance provider. He has a permanent pacemaker, and it work 80% of the time, causing his battery to drain quickly. Without his pacemaker, he would at best have a very poor, even more disabled, quality of life; at worst, he would die. He has a congenital heart defect that requires ongoing monitoring, as well as thyroid disease also requires monitoring. He is employed part time but would not qualify for health benefits, nor would he be able to afford them. Our son was pulled from the PUNS list at age 25, and that pays us as his parents and legal guardians to provide his care at home, rather than placing him in a group home. Taking away that would take away ½ of our income.

Lindsey—Provides nursing allows which allows me to live at home and my parents to work. It also covers all my medical appointments and therapies, and my gastronomy tube, formula and other medical supplies.

Mary Anne—Pay for community day program services for my 23-year-old son, who has autism and intellectual disability. Aidan loves his day program, and going there is fulfilling and gives him purpose each day. At the day program, Aidan is given the opportunity to learn, socialize, gain new skills and be a meaningful part of his community. We are grateful the Medicaid waiver funding exists to keep these programs functioning for our most vulnerable loved ones like my son. Losing Medicaid funding would be devastating to Aidan and many others like him.

Robin—Provide care for my son. So I can work and provide for our family. So Colin has health care and the medication he needs for his epilepsy. Provide personal support workers that work with him daily. Behavioral therapy.

Suzanne—Without Medicaid funding, my day program would not be able to operate, my tuition would be unobtainable, and my family and I would be stuck at home with no options for my current daily life or my future.

Drew—Medicaid is the reason that my husband and I are able to care for our son at home. It provides his food. He is nourished through a G-tube, it provides tracheotomy supplies. It provides oxygen to help him breathe, a nebulizer, chest therapy and other pieces of equipment that without these he would have to be hospitalized. The cost of hospitalization is very expensive. Medicaid helped to provide the vertical lift to get my son in and out our house for his appointments. It helps to cover nursing expenses to care and help my husband and I care for him in our home. It covers the numerous medications that are necessary to keep our son alive and out of the hospital.

Jaclyn—Medicaid helps me to care for my daughter at home, where she belongs. It provides the critical support Ava needs—ventilator care, nursing, and medical supplies—so she can grow, learn, and thrive with her family. Without Medicaid and the MFTD waiver, keeping Ava home wouldn't be possible. It allows us to give her every opportunity to reach her full potential while keeping our family together. Medicaid isn't just a program—it's a lifeline for families like ours.

Maria—I never imagined that I would become disabled, especially at a young age. I had been working since my early teens, believing that if I worked hard, I would always be able to provide for myself and my family. But by 25, my body was in complete flare-up, and I found myself unable to work while raising two small children as a single parent. Then came the life-changing diagnosis—a brain tumor. Without Medicaid, I would not be here today. Medicaid has provided me with the lifesaving medical care I need to survive and be there for my children. It has allowed me to continue my advocacy work, where I fight for disability rights and support the most vulnerable in our communities. My life has meaning, just like the lives of millions who rely on Medicaid. Cutting Medicaid would be devastating—not just for me, but for countless others whose survival depends on it. Please, don't take away our lifeline. Our lives depend on it.

Todd—I am a Medically Fragile Technology Dependent person. Medicaid is the only reason I can live with my parents and not have to live in a hospital or institution. Medicaid pays for me to have my ventilator, oxygen, suction machine and all the supplies necessary for me to be able to live in my home with my family. I have ROHHAD Syndrome, an extremely rare medical condition that only about 100 or so children have ever been diagnosed with. Medicaid also pays for my private duty nursing so that I can go to school and work in the community. Without Medicaid's support, I would have a tragically horrible life in a cold and uncaring institution somewhere, away from my family. I need Medicaid so that I can live a life that I love, with the people I love.

Illinois Provider—I want to share the story of two young clients, aged 3 and 5, who were diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA). SMA is a genetic condition that causes progressive muscle weakness and atrophy due to the loss of motor neurons in the spinal cord. These children were born without any initial concerns, but as they grew older, they began to lose their motor skills.

Despite having typical cognitive abilities, they became extremely fragile. They could no longer attend school or leave their hospital beds on the main floor of their home, as they were dependent on machines to help them breathe and unable to move independently.

Illinois Provider—Their mom was a single parent and could not leave them even to go to the grocery store. They were unable to find consistent nursing care due to nursing shortages, so their mom became the expert. Due to their needs, she was unable to work. I came into the home as the speech-language pathologist with Early Intervention, which allowed me to see the younger child until her third birthday. However, her older sister no longer had care as there were no providers who accepted Medicaid insurance in the area. I was able to help the younger child learn how to use a speech-generating device funded by Early Intervention. This allowed her to communicate with her mom and sisters using her eyes to activate words on her communication device. Not only was she able to ask for suction to clear her airway when her breathing was compromised, but she was also able to ask for her mom to come and play with her when she was lonely or bored—both of which are desperately important communication needs.

Julie, Chicago—Medicaid has been fabulous—helped me through breast cancer, and still helping me. We cannot afford not to be able to take advantage of this benefit. I worked and paid taxes for my entire life.

Susan, Chicago—Pre-ACA, I couldn't get healthcare at any price for 5 years due to a pre-existing condition. In the meantime, my body started failing me to the point where I couldn't work and wound up on disability. After 6 months, I became eligible for Medicare, which was life-changing. A few years ago, I was able to get Medicaid, as well, after the Medicaid Expansion. It enables me to have a caregiver twice a week. I'm a Senior. I've often wondered if I had had access to healthcare earlier, if it would've meant I could keep working. I think that would have made a huge difference in my life. I'm doing much better now, and I volunteer when I can. It's my way of giving back.

Gail B., South Holland—Gail B., RN is a home health and hospice staff educator and mother of three. She knew all about Medicaid throughout her career, but never thought she'd need it or qualify for it herself. When doctors removed a lump in her breast, they discovered she had treatable breast cancer. Privately insured through her employer, Gail, who had previously survived cervical cancer, underwent a painful radiation regimen, which left her with oozing underarm burns. She could barely keep her eyes open when she got home after her 50-mile roundtrip commute, let alone try to prepare a meal for herself. Still, she felt fortunate to have insurance. But near the end of her treatment, she was laid off—losing her job and her insurance. Unemployed, uninsured, and ill, Gail didn't know what to do or where to turn, until a friend recommended she apply for the Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program, which provides treatment through Medicaid. Sheepishly, Gail visited Mercy Hospital in Chicago, where a staff 'navigator' helped her enroll for Medicaid. Her doctors quickly accepted her new insurance coverage, enabling Gail to schedule follow-up appointments for that same week. Gail finished her treatment as a Medicaid beneficiary and returned to the workforce cancer-free just a few months later. While she is no longer on Medicaid, she credits it with saving her life and supporting her through her time of crisis. These days, Gail also volunteers as an ambassador for breast cancer survivors in her spare time.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, I yield 30 minutes of postcloture debate time to the Democratic leader.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

The Senator from Nevada.

Ms. ROSEN. Mr. President, today, we are here to discuss President Trump's nominee to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

If confirmed, Mr. Kennedy would be in charge of a Department with the power to, well, regulate the food we eat, the medicines we take, and the vaccinations we depend upon. He would oversee Agencies that provide healthcare to almost 170 million Americans, including hundreds of thousands of Nevadans who are on Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program.

I am here today to oppose Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., as our next Secretary of Health and Human Services. Confirming him would have disastrous consequences for our public health, for our seniors who rely on Medicare, and for our families who get their healthcare through Medicaid.

Let's start out with his lack of qualifications. Mr. Kennedy has never worked in healthcare or the Federal Government. He is probably best known for his skepticism of vaccines and spreading dangerous conspiracies and outright lies. Mr. Kennedy's history of promoting anti-vaccine misinformation is well-documented and deeply troubling.

Vaccines have saved millions of lives throughout history, and they remain one of the most effective tools we have to protect public health. Yet Mr. Kennedy has spent years promoting debunked claims linking vaccines to autism, cancer, allergies, and autoimmune diseases. He has spread lies about vaccine safety, making people fearful and increasing rates of unvaccinated people, which put all of us—all of us—at risk.

He has previously stated that "no vaccine is safe and effective." He said that the polio vaccine "killed many, many, many, many, many, many, many more people than polio ever did." Mr. Kennedy has called the COVID vaccine the "deadliest vaccine ever made." This rhetoric isn't just reckless; it is dangerous.

If Mr. Kennedy had been around during the first Trump administration, he would have undermined President Trump's Operation Warp Speed and efforts that helped us end the pandemic.

He doubled down during his confirmation hearing. Even though he was asked multiple times, Mr. Kennedy refused to acknowledge that vaccines don't cause autism.

He has also engaged in Holocaust distortion to push his dangerous views. While attending an autism conference, he was asked why the CDC wasn't acknowledging autism as an epidemic.

He said:

To me, this is like Nazi death camps, what happened to these kids. . . . I can't tell you

why somebody would do something like that. I can't tell you why ordinary Germans participated in the Holocaust.

Frankly, these aren't the words of someone you want to be in charge of America's public health. These are not the words of someone you want anywhere near the White House or anywhere near our healthcare, our safety.

He has even gone so far as to falsely suggest that certain antidepressants are behind the rise in school shootings and that certain chemicals in the water might be part of why more young people are identifying as transgender, neither of which is backed by any science. We can't allow someone who spreads this kind of vitriol and dangerous misinformation to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, but his problematic views are just the start.

During his confirmation hearing, Mr. Kennedy was also asked about his understanding of Medicare and Medicaid. He was just asked if he knew about it. Well, he struggled—struggled, mind you—to remember which program covered older and disabled Americans. He struggled to remember which program provided for low-income people. This is Medicare and Medicaid—not something that is so brand new. Even Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., should know what it is because Medicare and Medicaid are not mere government programs; they are a lifeline for millions of Americans, including our seniors, our parents, our grandparents, people with disabilities, families in need, including half of all children and around 40 percent of all babies born in this country. Why would we trust someone with the future of Medicare and Medicaid when he doesn't even understand the basics of the system he would oversee? This makes no sense.

We can't overlook the broader impact of Mr. Kennedy's and President Trump's proposals on medical research, safety, and innovation. We are already seeing devastating attempts to go after the National Institutes of Health, or the NIH—the very institution that has pioneered lifesaving research in areas like cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. This is not just any research; this is lifesaving research. We are talking about research and clinical trials in my home State, at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and at the University of Nevada, Reno, to better understand Alzheimer's disease and improve care for patients. We are talking about advancing breast cancer therapy at the University of Nevada, Reno, and clinical trials on treating and preventing cancers at the Southern Nevada Cancer Research Center.

You know, I lost my mother to cancer, and I lost my brother to leukemia. I think it is shameful that this administration, enabled by RFK, Jr., would target research into these deadly diseases which have cost lives in my family. I don't want anyone to go through what I went through. I want other people's families—their parents, their sib-

lings, their friends—to be able to live, and we know lives are saved every day because of investments in research and those clinical trials and what the NIH does. I want people to live because of the research. It matters.

Mr. Kennedy has also proposed radical changes to the Food and Drug Administration—the Agency in charge of the food we all eat and keeping it safe. Just like many of the other reforms proposed by Mr. Kennedy, his suggested changes to the FDA, while they are based largely on the conspiracy theories he peddles, include clearing out entire Departments, like the Food and Nutrition Center, which is responsible for preventing foodborne illnesses and ensuring that chemicals in food—the food we all eat, every single one of us all around this country, every day, from young to old and everywhere in between—that our food is safe. How does dismantling this keep any of us safe? How does it keep any of us healthy?

Mr. Kennedy has an overarching plan to gut the funding for the FDA, which will severely limit regulation and safe implementation of new drug trials and medications. This could lead to dangerous drugs flooding the market, putting countless lives at risk.

The role of the Health and Human Services Secretary is one of profound responsibility, and Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., has undermined the very foundations of our public health system. Mr. Kennedy's vision for the future of our healthcare system—well, it was to undermine Medicare and Medicaid. He wants to slash cancer research funding. He wants to push dangerous public health conspiracies. These are visions and these are things that I cannot support and that no one should support.

We all want a healthier future for America, one that both prevents diseases and where we can think about curing diseases, where we can do preventive medicine, curative medicine, where we can have that hope for folks whose mother gets lung cancer in the future, that she might live, or leukemia in the future, that their brother might live. Mine didn't, but I hope that they didn't die in vain because the research that goes on will help others, and I want us to be able to cure diseases for the ones we love.

So that is why I cannot in good conscience support Mr. Kennedy's nomination, and I urge my colleagues to do the same. The stakes couldn't be higher. Our very lives and the lives of our loved ones may just depend on it.

Mr. President, I yield 30 minutes of postcloture debate time to the senior Senator from Oregon.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I stand here in strong opposition to the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., to serve as the Secretary of Health and Human Services for the United States of America.



The American people know that our healthcare system is broken. Families have to work through too much health insurance redtape, only to be denied care or forced to pay out of pocket.

Medical debt is the leading cause of bankruptcy in the United States. Families are saddled with medical debt from prices that are too high and burdened by quality of care that is too low. When they need to get an appointment, they have to wait months, drive hours, or simply go without the care which they need.

Pharmacies, hospitals, and community health centers struggle to keep their doors open, and communities are watching health providers and workers burn out under the strain of a healthcare system that is increasingly being sold out to greedy investors and the billionaire class.

The American people deserve a real healthcare system, not the current sick care system. And they deserve leadership who will recognize all of these problems and commit to solving them.

Instead, Donald Trump and Elon Musk are only making things worse.

To Elon Musk, “move fast and break things” is not in the U.S. Constitution. That is why these Federal district court judges are stopping your actions.

In Trump’s first 3 weeks in office, he has taken illegal and unconstitutional action that disrupted lifesaving health research, sent Musk and his DOGE acolytes to make cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, cut off Federal funding for community health centers, and used discriminatory fearmongering to threaten Federal funding for hospitals and health providers just trying to provide care for their patients.

Every chaotic decision, every cut, every illegal action are all to make it easier for this administration to work alongside congressional Republicans to slash and burn our core healthcare programs. They are not doing this to make things better for everyday Americans. It is Robin Hood in reverse. They are working to take from those who need it the most just to give billions more in handouts for defense contractors and their billionaire donors.

They want hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks for billionaires. They want to increase defense spending by \$150 billion—more nuclear weapons, more. But then, in turn, they say: Where are we going to get the money? They say: Ah, we are going to Medicaid. We are going to the Affordable Care Act. We are going to community health centers. We are going to go to the programs that actually do protect people.

More nuclear weapons aren’t going to protect people; it is having access to the healthcare system that can help protect their families.

Trump and Musk and Republicans, they are going to call it “efficiency” or they will call it “transparency” or they will say it is just adding basic requirements to Medicaid. This is all code—the code for “cuts.”

Efficiency, transparency are—just be honest about it, Elon; just be honest about it, President Trump—cuts to programs.

They keep saying there are all kinds of waste in the system. Well, point it out to us; we will cut it out for you. Give us the list of the programs you want to have cut because there is waste, and we will do it. But do you want to know what they don’t want to say? They don’t want to say that they want to cut Medicaid. They don’t want to say they want to cut clean air, clean water—the programs that protect ordinary people. They want to call it waste. We are going to call it out for what it is.

Where are they going? They are going to the programs that help provide the healthcare for ordinary Americans—cuts to healthcare that ordinary Americans rely upon. And when Americans have to wait longer for care, when they have to pay more, or watch the only hospital in their community shut down, the blame for what will happen will lay at the feet of the politicians who put self-interest above the interest of the American people.

Rather than consider a nominee who would seriously protect and preserve the health of the American people, Donald Trump nominated yet another enabler to his Cabinet, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., who, instead of standing up to the Trump-Musk chaos, will only add fuel to Donald Trump’s “Make America Sick Again” campaign because that is what it is, “Make America Sick Again.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson from Massachusetts, he said: Health is the first wealth. Well, that first wealth is going to get looted so billionaires get even richer.

Serving as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services is an immense responsibility. The Agency oversees the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; the Food and Drug Administration; the National Institutes of Health, which is made up of 27 institutes and centers. Each decision that a HHS Secretary makes would have a huge impact on our healthcare system.

Run well, HHS ensures medications are safe and effective; keeps workers and students and seniors safe; protects the public from global pandemics or disease outbreaks; guarantees hospitals, doctors, and community health centers provide safe quality care; and funds research that will build the foundation to accurately diagnose patients, better treat cancer, cure Alzheimer’s, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. That is what it is supposed to be all about, not freezing that funding, not cutting that funding, but ensuring that the researchers have the funding they need because researchers’ medicines fields of dreams from which we harvest the findings gives hope to families that we will find a cure for those diseases that have run through their family’s medical history.

We know that HHS as Health and Human Services, but it also stands for “human health security.” The stakes of leadership are life and death. But instead of nominating a serious and qualified candidate, Trump selected a candidate who questioned the well-proven conclusion that HIV causes AIDS, made millions by spreading lies about vaccines, compared vaccine mandates to Nazi Germany, said Wi-Fi in cell phones caused “leaky brains,” threatened to remove fluoride from drinking water, and made baseless claims about medication for depression, that it would lead to mass shootings.

Mr. Kennedy’s track record shows that he is a danger to the health of America. He would make America sick again.

In June of 2019, he went to Samoa on a trip arranged by anti-vaccine activists. He used that trip to spread lies about the measles vaccine to the Samoan Prime Minister and Director General of Health. He and the organization he led amplified activists who spread false information about the measles vaccine. And after a measles outbreak broke out in Samoa and 16 people died, rather than intervene and help, Mr. Kennedy sent a letter to the Prime Minister to blame these deaths on the vaccine rather than the absence of vaccines.

The death toll in Samoa grew to 83. Volunteers in New Zealand sent tiny coffins to help bury the dozens of children who died. A New Zealand vaccinologist later said the impact of Mr. Kennedy’s role in the outbreak was “devastating.” In a moment, when Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., could have used his influence for good, he fueled disinformation that cost lives.

When Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., was asked about Medicare and Medicaid, he could not answer questions in his confirmation hearing, the most basic questions, demonstrating that he would be at HHS only to make whatever cuts that Trump and Musk and DOGE dictate at the expense of the healthcare of the American people. Now he is in line to be the No. 1 healthcare official in the United States. That would be a disaster.

Mr. Kennedy has reportedly given reassurances on his position on vaccines or on his position on food and chronic disease.

To my colleagues, I would say this: We cannot address chronic disease if we are slashing Medicare and Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act or recklessly cutting off funding from hospitals and community health centers.

If we are battling vaccine misinformation, it will make it much more difficult to take on chronic disease, like heart disease or diabetes. The long-term impact of food on children’s health doesn’t matter if children are dying from preventable infectious diseases because their families believed misinformation spread by the nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Even with the promises he has made on the vaccine misinformation, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., has not demonstrated that he will fulfill his promises. He has used his position to lead people down the dangerous path of vaccine misinformation. And when asked about his role in the Samoa measles outbreak, he lied. The stakes are too high to take a risk on this nominee.

I hear from people in Massachusetts who rely on our healthcare system: single mothers of disabled children relying on Medicaid—also called MassHealth in Massachusetts—to make sure their child gets care. I hear from people living with cystic fibrosis or parents of children on the autism spectrum or with Down syndrome who could only afford their medication or coverage with MassHealth Medicaid coverage. For them, Medicaid is the lifeline. And when that lifeline is cut, their lives get harder. That is what this administration is aiming to do with Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., in the lead.

The American people deserve more than what they have now. They should be able to get healthcare when they need it, and they should not have to worry that it is available. They should be able to go to their doctor or to their pharmacy without running up their debt or being forced to choose between paying their rent or a medical bill.

They should have health providers who aren't too overworked and burned out to provide them quality care. They should have primary care, mental health care, addiction care, dental care, and cancer treatment more available to them without waiting months or traveling for hours or being left to hope for an available clinical trial.

Americans should have unquestioned healthcare access and quality, and I want to deliver on that for every single American. But Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., will only make this harder by embracing Donald Trump, Elon Musk, and the spread of vaccine disinformation.

I am not alone in my concern. I have received over a thousand calls and emails to my office opposing his nomination. I have also received letters from over 20,000 physicians, including thousands of pediatricians, internal medicine and emergency medicine doctors, representing all fifty States and Puerto Rico, over 800 public health officials; 75 Nobel Laureates oppose his confirmation. Chairs of pediatric departments across the country; statements from the Massachusetts Teachers Association, representing over 11,000 educators; and the national nurses union, representing 225,000 nurses, all oppose Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Every single one of them expressed concern and dismay about having a Secretary of Health and Human Services who doesn't believe in vaccines that save lives.

We need to listen to the people on the frontlines: the health providers who have dedicated their lives to serving their patients; the researchers, who

have committed to finding lifesaving treatments and cures; and the educators who care for our Nation's children each and every day. They are all saying no to Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. He is unqualified, and his confirmation would be dangerous to the health of our Nation.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I come to the floor with sadness and anger because we are here to consider the nomination of a person who, very practically and unfortunately, is unworthy and unqualified and unprepared for this position.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., will, in fact, betray the trust and credibility of the office he has been nominated to fill. He has already shown that he lacks the trust in science and the adherence to the truth that is so important because this office is, fundamentally, about advocating for public health, informing the public, and speaking truth to the American people when there is so much misinformation and disinformation about what will keep Americans healthy and make them healthier.

And he threatens, literally, to make America sick. Whether it is "Make America Sick Again" or just "Make America Sicker," the fact is he has supported conspiracy theories and distorted views of what is important in public health that threaten the American people.

The Nobel laureates, the healthcare professionals, the members of his own family—and, in a certain way, I would say, if you have any question about Mr. Kennedy's qualifications, you should listen to Caroline Kennedy and her very powerful comments on his nomination. The fact is that her comments are an indictment. They are literally a warning against his nomination, stating that he is "addicted to attention and power" and that he has already denigrated our healthcare system by championing beliefs that cost lives.

Ultimately, the confirmation process so far has confirmed what we already know: that as a source of information, advocacy, and truth, he is less than Americans deserve.

Americans deserve someone who believes in the Affordable Care Act and its premium tax credits that reduce healthcare costs for millions of Americans who otherwise would be left uninsured and unable to afford healthcare. Americans deserve a Secretary who will advance research into lifesaving medicines, treatments, and vaccination.

He is not that person.

Americans deserve a Secretary who will protect Medicaid, which provides healthcare to nearly 1 million Connecticut residents, including 350,000 children—at the very least, someone who knows the difference between Medicaid and Medicare.

He is not that person.

And Americans deserve a Secretary who will protect the sensitive health

data of millions of people across the country. When the Department of Government Efficiency, which is an unregulated and potentially unsanctioned organization, gained access to millions of seniors' records at Medicare, Mr. Kennedy purposefully said nothing.

And, at the very least, we need someone who will stand up to President Trump when he spreads misinformation from the White House, someone who will stand up to him when he asks that his Secretary of Health and Human Services do something illegal or immoral. And, clearly, Mr. Kennedy is not that person.

There is a reason that he lacks support from all of these professional organizations and is actively opposed by them—by healthcare professionals, Nobel laureates, and his own family—and that is that he fails the basic test of what Americans deserve: a Secretary that believes in science and advances in modern medicine; a Secretary who won't profit off of the lies he tells about vaccines and science; a Secretary who will not instigate fears of life-saving vaccinations, while, at the same time, ensuring that his own children are vaccinated and protected; a Secretary who will protect women and reproductive rights; and someone who knows the difference between Medicare and Medicaid.

The kind of leadership that is required from the Secretary of Health and Human Services has never been more important, and that truth-telling advocacy, informing of the public, is more vital than ever.

Now, HHS is a massive Department. The management challenges alone are fierce. He has no qualifications or experience that would justify his appointment.

He would oversee health insurance for millions of people through Medicare, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, and the Affordable Care Act. He is responsible for promoting the economic and social well-being of children and families, combating the opioid epidemic, supporting people with disabilities, and strengthening the Nation's public health system and emergency response.

The HHS Secretary is responsible for advancing innovative medical research through the National Institutes of Health; the Food and Drug Administration, responsible for ensuring our food and drugs and medical devices are safe and effective; and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which strengthens our public health system and responds to disease outbreaks.

This Agency is a sprawling, massive, challenging management task, and his nomination has spotlighted not only his lack of experience in management but also his long history of dangerous, delusional, and misguided beliefs that would be detrimental to the public and, in fact, a betrayal of public health.

The focus has been on Mr. Kennedy's views on vaccinations and his public denial of well-recognized science. His—

really—frightening views, which he has used to make money and have endangered the lives of countless children and families, ought to be disqualifying on their own. He admits to vaccinating his own children. Vaccines are safe and effective enough for his family but not others, it seems.

The fact is, vaccines are safe and effective. To be clear, over the last 50 years, vaccines have prevented 154 million deaths, including 146 million among children younger than 5 years old. They undergo exhaustive tests and trials and independent review to determine whether they are safe and effective, and they continue to undergo rigorous review even after approval.

This system works, but Mr. Kennedy has a long history of weakening and weaponizing parental instincts to protect their children and to spread disingenuous and life-threatening misinformation. These lies are attributable to his bad judgment as well as self-enrichment—exactly the opposite of what a Secretary of HHS should exemplify.

He has supported the dangerous, unproven lie that African Americans can use weaker vaccine schedules because Black people have stronger immune systems. This disgusting, appalling claim has been disavowed by the medical community and renounced by the authors of the studies that Mr. Kennedy has incorrectly cited in espousing these lies. But these lies exacerbate racism, and it is a weakness in our public health system that this racism may continue to exist. To exacerbate it threatens people's lives.

The anti-vaccine group he founded has maintained that the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine is linked to higher rates of autism in Black children—again, a flat-out lie, racialized comments that are intended to stoke fear in the public health system and exploit the very caution that many communities of color approach the healthcare system with. His lies will, again, exacerbate the clear disparities that exist in healthcare for different racial groups, and the inequity of those disparities is a glaring weakness in our current healthcare system.

But he will be spouting those kinds of disinformation—spouting on podcasts, espousing in the media as the highest ranking health official in our country. The notion that the public health of the Nation—credibility, trust, truth-telling—would be put in the hands of this man is truly frightening.

Now, he has attempted to backtrack since his nomination. He is claiming he is not anti-vaccine. But when he was asked point-blank, under oath, during confirmation hearings, in effect, he ducked and dodged.

Some of my colleagues have claimed that Mr. Kennedy privately told them he will work with existing vaccine approvals and safety networks and that he won't undermine vaccines in his role overseeing them. In private, that is what he said. Why wouldn't he make

these commitments during public confirmation hearings? Why couldn't he make them when he was under oath?

The threat is that he will do exactly the contrary.

The American people deserve more than back-door, private, confidential conversations and quiet promises about what the HHS Secretary will do. And the fact is, he has pushed these kinds of debunked theories linking childhood vaccinations to autism, claiming that COVID-19 vaccines were weaponized against specific ethnic and socioeconomic groups, and profiting off lawsuits against lifesaving vaccines that prevent deadly diseases like cervical cancer, measles, tetanus, and chickenpox.

There is no argument from me that there needs to be testing and review and clinical trials for vaccines to be proven safe and effective. But once those tests and trials and independent review take place and are judged to be sufficient to show a vaccine is safe and effective, undermining them is simply contrary to public health.

Now, Mr. Kennedy would also threaten reproductive care and reproductive freedom. During his 2024 Presidential campaign, he consistently downplayed the importance of reproductive health, claiming that abortion was “just a little issue.”

Abortion was hardly “a little issue” for women across the country, especially women who have literally died or come close to death as a result of denial of this essential healthcare and freedom.

The Americans deserve a Secretary of Health and Human Services who respects women and who works against politicians telling women what they can do with their bodies and trusts women to make decisions about what is right for them.

The HHS Secretary, as a matter of fact, oversees the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act, a Federal law that mandates that women who need emergency care are entitled to it, whether that emergency care be an abortion or some other treatment.

When he was asked if a woman bleeding out in an emergency room is entitled to emergency care under this law, Mr. Kennedy responded, “I don't know.” He should know. Whether sheer incompetence, utter confusion, or just an unwillingness to agree to uphold Federal laws protecting women, that comment and response alone should be disqualifying. It is dangerous, and confirming him in this position could be deadly to women who depend on that program.

He has refused to say that he will protect access to medication abortion. Instead, he has said he would reevaluate the drug. Now, this drug has been safely and effectively used by millions of women for decades. His response is code for making it harder to access or ban it altogether.

He won't commit to protecting women who need emergency medical

care. He will not commit to keeping safe and effective abortion medication available. He will limit access to abortion services. His confirmation poses the danger of catastrophic consequences for women.

How can women trust him to protect their interests and safeguard their health? The women of America deserve better.

Mr. Kennedy has a long history of making baseless and damaging claims about the LGBTQ+ community, including the absurd lie that environmental chemical exposure somehow causes children to become gay or transgender. Boggles the mind. Incredibly dangerous to the health and safety of LGBTQ+ youth, but it is his stated belief or has been at various times in the past, and adding to those harmful ideas is his belief that HIV does not cause AIDS.

He has supported bans on gender-affirming healthcare for transgender individuals and spread misinformation about what gender-affirming care actually looks like in the real world. If he continues to spread this unscientific rhetoric as Secretary of HHS, he will cost people their lives.

Members of the LGBTQ community already experience significant health disparities, and Mr. Kennedy's false views on health, sexual orientation, and gender identity would make these disparities—like racial disparity—even worse.

To serve in this position, Mr. Kennedy need not be the world's greatest scientist or the most erudite professor or the most astute researcher, but he needs to have a respect for science and medical professionals. He lacks it.

He made it abundantly clear during his confirmation hearing that he has none of those qualities and, in fact, demonstrated an inadequate understanding of the very programs he is supposed to be administering if he is confirmed, like Medicare and Medicaid.

You know, we have reviewed a lot of nominees as Senators, and we know that they are prepared—they are extensively “murder-boarded,” as they say—asked questions in preparation.

You would expect that the nominee to be HHS Secretary would understand the difference between two of the most important and largest health insurance programs in the country that serve millions of Americans every day. He didn't.

The American people deserve better. His decisions, if he is confirmed, will have long-lasting impacts, and he lacks the expertise to lead this Agency and lead America as an advocate, as an informer, as a truth-teller.

Lest you think he will rely on good people who will help him in administering this Agency, he has pledged to fire hundreds of National Institutes of Health employees. He told the Food and Drug Administration workers to “pack their bags.” He would like to clear entire Departments of the Federal Government, including the nutrition department at the FDA. He is in

no way going to rely on career professionals who truly understand the policies behind the programs that he knows so little about.

Mr. Kennedy claims to support improving nutrition and combatting chronic diseases, and many of us support those programs to eliminate additives, for example, or provide better nutritional information, front-of-package labels showing nutritional content, and enabling Americans to be healthier by eating better and by being better informed. But instead of surrounding himself with experts, his potential top advisers include people who want to change or abolish the nutrition guidelines, like the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which will bolster industry profits, not health.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans provides science-based advice on what to drink and eat to meet nutrient needs. They promote health. They reduce the risk of chronic disease. This dietary guidance is critically important because three in five adults live with chronic disease. Let me repeat. Three in five adults live with chronic disease that could be improved with better nutrition.

It informs all Federal nutrition programs, meaning that these dietary guidelines impact one in four Americans through programs like the National School Lunch Program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. These programs follow those dietary guidelines because they are based on science. But Mr. Kennedy lacks respect for science. The fact that he espouses better nutrition isn't translated into real-world support for actions that benefit Americans. His opposition to those guidelines benefits the food industry.

Having a science denier surrounded by potentially lobbyists at the helm of this Agency is not going to make Americans healthy again; it is going to make them sicker. It is going to potentially sell them out for profit.

I am disappointed that we are here, as I said at the outset, to be considering someone who is so deeply unqualified and unprepared for a position that is an enormous potential opportunity to improve the health of America. His advocacy could spread the truth, could hold the food industry or pharmaceutical drug industry to higher standards to provide more medicine and treatments and cures at lower prices. He could support research through the NIH instead of advocating that it be cut. He could enable women to have reproductive care instead of dodging or diminishing its importance. He could help eliminate racism and bias against LBGTQ+ people in our healthcare system. There is so much opportunity squandered in this nomination.

I will vote no on Robert Kennedy, Jr. I urge my colleagues to heed the warnings from Americans much better qualified than I am to make this judg-

ment—those Nobel laureates; the professional organizations; the healthcare experts; and, of course, his family, who knows him best—Caroline Kennedy, who spoke with such eloquence and insight. Her incisive and heartbreaking video should be watched by everyone who is about to vote on this nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, in Hawaii, thousands of our keiki—children—attend Head Start, setting them up for lifetimes of success. After the devastating wildfires on Maui in 2023, the U.S. Public Health Service was on the ground within days, providing care to survivors and first responders. On Oahu, the University of Hawaii's Cancer Center is leading on critical NIH-funded research on breast, liver, and lung cancer, studying diseases that disproportionately impact the Native Hawaiian and Asian-American communities. All of these programs are vital for people in Hawaii, and they are all made possible by the Department of Health and Human Services, or HHS.

HHS does critical work across our country keeping communities healthy and researching deadly diseases, from cancer to COVID and so much more.

Americans trust HHS because their mission has historically been guided not by politics but by science and data. But already Donald Trump is taking a sledgehammer to HHS and the essential work it does.

For weeks, HHS employees have been prohibited from making any external communications and have been directed to withhold grant disbursements—illegal, by the way—halting critical updates on emerging public health threats and delaying or denying funding for community health centers without explanation.

These edicts are already forcing clinics to consider reducing services and staff or, worse, closing these services, endangering healthcare access for our most vulnerable populations. And just last Friday, the National Institutes of Health, or NIH, announced it would slash indirect cost rates nationwide—funds that keep the lights on and the bills paid at America's medical schools, hospitals, and research institutions, enabling our country to lead globally on biomedical research.

This is lifesaving research. These across-the-board cuts aren't hypothetical. They will harm real people in need of help.

Just yesterday, I spoke with the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine, who explained the catastrophic consequences this cap would have. This illegal action, as I mentioned, would compromise plans for the U.H. Cancer Center to begin offering phase 1 clinical trials in Hawaii for the first time.

What does this mean for the people of Hawaii? For the first time, people in Hawaii will not have to go to the main-

land to participate in these trials. But with the help of this NIH funding—now being slashed—for the first time, people of Hawaii would be able to stay in Hawaii to participate in these very important clinical trials.

If allowed to stand, these actions will be catastrophic for our country and for global efforts to combat the spread of diseases, and all of these actions have been taken without a confirmed Secretary in place at HHS.

One would hope the President's nominee to lead such an important Department would be a level-headed individual guided by science and data. Instead, Donald Trump has nominated the total opposite: Robert Kennedy, Jr.

Mr. Kennedy is an anti-vaccine activist who peddles and profits from conspiracy theories and has a troubling history of misconduct. In his confirmation hearings, Mr. Kennedy appeared not to know the difference between Medicare and Medicaid, essential programs that 66 million and 72 million people, respectively, rely on for access to healthcare.

Mr. Kennedy purports to be a proponent of bodily autonomy when it comes to vaccines, as if we know better than scientists about the efficacy and safety of medical treatments.

But Mr. Kennedy's commitment to bodily autonomy suddenly flies out the window when it comes to women's rights to control our own bodies. He has shown he will do Donald Trump's bidding in his war on women and our freedom—where is our bodily autonomy?—as they work to reverse the FDA's approval of mifepristone, which has been used safely for medication abortion for more than 20 years—so much for bodily autonomy.

And it is clear Mr. Kennedy will be guided not by science but by the conspiracy theories he has pursued for decades on vaccines, raw milk, stem cell treatment, and much more.

Vaccines are a modern miracle that have saved an estimated 154 million lives and enabled us to all but eradicate diseases like polio and small pox. But due to the activism of conspiracy theorists like Mr. Kennedy, public trust in vaccines have eroded, endangering countless lives and threatening the herd immunity that protects us all.

I grew up in rural Japan, where we didn't have widespread access to most vaccines. As a child, I remember getting measles, mumps, whooping cough. When one kid in our village got sick, it just spread like wildfire in our village, and all the kids got sick. I know what it means to be vaccinated. To willingly submit our children to such a fate like what happened to us—to me in Japan—would be cruel, counterproductive, and deadly, but Mr. Kennedy seems not to care about those impacts.

We all agree there are things we can do to make our country healthier, and I stand ready to work with my colleagues to do that important work. But eliminating access to healthcare, promoting conspiracy theories, firing researchers, and undermining evidence-

based policymaking will do nothing to make us healthier. It will, instead, unleash chaos on patients, providers, and countless other Americans who rely on the services, funding, and research emanating from HHS.

Mr. Kennedy will not “Make America Healthy Again”—yet another empty slogan. He will, in fact, instead make us less healthy, less safe, and less prosperous. We know this because it is exactly what happened in Samoa after misinformation about vaccines, pushed in part by Mr. Kennedy, led to a deadly measles outbreak there.

Hawaii’s Governor, Josh Green, is also a physician, and he traveled to Samoa at the invitation of the country’s Health Minister to help stem the consequences of this deadly misinformation. He recently wrote about his experiences in an op-ed in the *New York Times*, and I would like to read portions of that op-ed now.

Our Governor wrote:

[W]hen vaccination rates fall, preventable diseases can regain a foothold and pose a new danger. And that’s precisely what happened in Samoa, after misinformation spread by anti-vaccine activists eroded trust in vaccines and led to the 2019 outbreak. Thousands of preventable cases of measles sprang up, leading to the deaths of 83 people, mostly children. One of the most prominent voices behind the anti-vaccine campaign was Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Governor Green goes on to say that:

[W]e also witnessed the deadly consequences of the anti-vaccine campaign. We arrived at one home just minutes after a toddler girl had died from measles, her mother bursting into tears as we approached. The child was lying on a makeshift bed in the middle of the family’s one-room house, her face still red from fever. I put my hands on her face and could feel the warmth in her skin, but her eyes were fixed and glazed over. My stethoscope confirmed she was no longer breathing.

Governor Green went on to write:

Mr. Kennedy and others fanned the flames of this fear with misinformation. The people of Samoa shared with me that they got very little news from outside their community but that in the months before the 2019 epidemic they were bombarded with social media posts claiming that vaccinations were unsafe and would harm or even kill their children. Activists from other countries, including Mr. Kennedy, claimed vaccines were dangerous. Many Samoans were afraid to vaccinate their children, and by late 2019, the epidemic was raging, overwhelming Samoa’s national health care system.

Governor Green concluded by saying:

As we look to the future, the possibility of his being confirmed—

He is talking about Robert Kennedy—

as the secretary of health and human services is cause for grave concern. I worry he would jeopardize half a century of progress and success gained by the United States as a result of vaccination programs. Too much depends on our commitment to truth and the lifesaving power of vaccines to entrust Mr. Kennedy with the direction of these programs. Our children’s lives depend on it.

I thank the Governor for his service to the people of Samoa and for so elo-

quently describing what is at stake with Mr. Kennedy’s nomination.

Our Governor was so concerned that he recently traveled all the way from Hawaii to Washington, DC, to speak to as many Senators that he could directly about what is at stake. Governor Green was that concerned about what this nominee could do to HHS.

During his confirmation hearing, Mr. Kennedy had the opportunity to take responsibility for his role in Samoa’s measles outbreak. Instead, he stuck to his old tricks, blaming vaccines and spreading misinformation.

Governor Green is correct. Our children’s lives depend on our commitment to vaccinations, and all of our lives depend on the science and research done by HHS. Mr. Kennedy poses a dire threat to that science and, indeed, to the American people.

For those reasons, I urge my colleagues to vote no on his forthcoming nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHMITT). The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. I yield 30 minutes of postclosure debate time to the junior Senator from Oregon.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, I rise today to join my colleagues, to join the many Granite Staters who have written my office and expressed their grave alarm in opposing the nomination of Mr. Kennedy as the next Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., is without experience or qualification for this post. He is uninformed and apparently uninterested in the most basic elements of healthcare policy. He entertains and spreads conspiracy theories that virtually everyone in this body knows to be dishonest and dangerous.

In a different time, in a different political moment, with a different President, Members of this Chamber would have joined together to resoundingly reject Mr. Kennedy’s nomination. In fact, in a different time, where qualifications and character mattered, Mr. Kennedy’s nomination would never have made it to the floor. But here we are.

Today, it appears that Mr. Kennedy will be confirmed and that Members of the U.S. Senate—the so-called world’s greatest deliberative body—will sacrifice the health of our fellow Americans by failing to stand up for science and for the truth.

For even the most skilled and experienced person, running the Department of Health and Human Services is a really daunting task. We expect and trust the HHS Secretary to direct the administration of critical programs like Medicare or Medicaid; to direct research so that we can find cures for cancer, Alzheimer’s, and other diseases; to help bring new lifesaving medications to market; to find ways to

make medicine and care more affordable; to help ensure that our children grow up healthy and that our parents age with dignity.

When a crisis hits, we look to the Secretary of Health and Human Services for leadership, to help lead the fight against fentanyl or to protect our communities from a pandemic.

There is, perhaps, no aspect of public policy as complicated as healthcare, and there are few aspects of life as fundamental as being healthy.

And to be sure, there are grave healthcare challenges facing our country. The cost of healthcare is too high; the cost of prescriptions, too steep. While we have made extraordinary progress in recent generations, we know that too many diseases still cry out to be cured, and too many people struggle to get the care that they need where and when they need it.

The challenges are real, but progress is possible.

When I was Governor of New Hampshire, I worked with Republicans and Democrats in the legislature to help our State adopt Medicaid expansion. And during the first Trump administration, we came together to end surprise medical billing with a new bipartisan law. Of course, there is much more work to do. The point is that when we work together, embrace commonsense solutions, and have the right leadership, we can forge progress. But it takes hard work. It takes seriousness to tackle a challenge as daunting as healthcare. It takes experience, talent, and ability. We are talking about the health of our country and of our children.

This is a job that requires us to search far and wide across our country to find the right person; someone who is informed, capable, and forthright; someone who has a proven track record of leadership; and someone willing to tell the truth in service to the goal of helping every American to be healthy.

Instead, the President of the United States offered us Mr. Kennedy. It is entirely unclear to me what qualifications Mr. Kennedy brings to this office. He has never run an organization or a business even one-hundredth of the size of the Department of Health and Human Services. He has no background in medicine, science, health policy, or government. Most concerning, though, is his complete and utter lack of even the most basic knowledge of the Department he is supposed to lead or the health policy debates and challenges that our country has been grappling with over the last several decades.

It is not simply that we have been asked to hope that Mr. Kennedy learns on the job. It is not simply that we are being asked to grade Mr. Kennedy on a curve. It is worse than that because even for his confirmation hearings, Mr. Kennedy couldn’t be bothered to even do his homework.

During his confirmation hearing, I asked Mr. Kennedy some fairly basic

questions about Medicare and Medicaid, the most well-known health programs overseen by the Department he seeks to lead, programs which tens of millions of Americans count on for their care. He couldn't accurately identify a single part of Medicare. He got every question I asked wrong.

When it comes to Medicaid, which, among other things, provides coverage for about half of the births in the United States, he wrongly said it was fully, federally funded, which it isn't.

Let me be clear: The administration is asking the American people to place these critical health programs in the hands of a man who has no idea what they even are. That is a big ask. And it is an ask we wouldn't make of our own constituents. No one in this body would hire even an entry-level healthcare staffer who did not understand the basics of Medicaid and Medicare. Why should we exercise a different, weaker standard for the person who is supposed to be in charge of both? Why, with this administration, does the bar go even lower when the office becomes even higher?

If Mr. Kennedy cannot be bothered to learn the basics about Medicare and Medicaid, he will certainly not bother to stand up for them. This administration has made clear that it is willing to gut Medicaid in order to pay for tax breaks for billionaires.

The President's new Director of the Office of Management and Budget has, in fact, proposed that the administration cut Medicaid—a program that provides health insurance coverage for approximately 80 million Americans—by more than one-third. Does anyone think that Mr. Kennedy will be a voice of reason; that he will speak out on behalf of American families and make the case for saving Medicare or Medicaid? He can't even describe what they are.

Mr. Kennedy is an intelligent and educated man. But education and intelligence aren't a substitute for taking the job seriously. If Mr. Kennedy were in the running for a different post, his failure to understand the basics of our healthcare system might not be relevant. But it so happens to be the American people's great misfortune that he is, in fact, being called to serve as the highest public health official in our land.

Mr. Kennedy's lack of qualifications and knowledge about healthcare have real consequences. If confirmed, his lack of preparation, experience, and interest in America's healthcare will leave our country worse off. Our people will be less healthy.

And nobody will feel Mr. Kennedy's careless disregard for the magnitude of his position more than America's women. When I was initially considering Mr. Kennedy's nomination, one mark in his favor was his long record of advocacy on behalf of a woman's fundamental freedom to make her own health decisions. When Mr. Kennedy was in New Hampshire campaigning for President, he told Granite Staters:

I am pro-choice. I don't think the government has any business telling people what to do with their bodies.

But since he came out in support of President Trump, Mr. Kennedy has made a remarkable discovery. He decided at the age of 71 that his long-held belief in reproductive freedom for women was wrong. All of his principles about women making their own choices were suddenly no longer true.

Instead, as the Nation's leading public health official, he has said that he will faithfully and enthusiastically carry out the anti-choice policies of an administration that continues to dedicate itself to undermining and taking away a woman's fundamental freedom.

This isn't a hypothetical issue. In his confirmation hearing, Mr. Kennedy said that he and the Trump administration would be examining the safety of the drug mifepristone, which is used for abortions and in miscarriage care. During the hearing, I showed Mr. Kennedy study after study—stacks—hundreds of pages of research done over the course of decades, all of which demonstrate the safety of this medication. Let me be clear, the safety has been proven. If Mr. Kennedy and the Trump administration continue to persist in studying a drug that is proven to be safe, it is clear that their objection is not with a lack of research; their objection is to the result of that research. So they want to sow doubt about it. They want to sow confusion. And once they do, they will hide behind the very doubt that they have created as a reason for denying women the most basic of human freedoms: body autonomy.

Mr. Kennedy, having sold out his pro-choice principles, will surely help in that effort. He certainly will not stand in the way of it. The debate about reproductive freedom is fundamentally a debate about whether one believes in the basic promise of our Declaration of Independence that all of us are free and equal. The question for Mr. Kennedy and all those who would deny women this basic freedom is whether they believe that women have the capacity and judgment to make their own healthcare and reproductive decisions just as men do.

Make no mistake, Mr. Kennedy did not have a miraculous conversion something like the Apostle Paul's on the road to Damascus on this issue. He just made a cold-blooded, expedient choice to cut a path to power. He decided that the freedom of women was a small price to pay in order to be able to call himself a Cabinet Secretary. I have had good-faith disagreements with friends and colleagues on the issue of abortion, but Mr. Kennedy is different.

Mr. Kennedy has spent his lifetime arguing for a woman's reproductive freedom. But he now abandons what he used to refer to as a core value for a title and for what he, apparently, thinks is more important than freedom—being in Donald Trump's orbit.

Americans have a particular disdain for those who sell out the freedom of

their fellow citizens in pursuit of power. We call such people many things. We seldom call them "Mr. Secretary." Even if Mr. Kennedy was not inexperienced, even if Mr. Kennedy had basic knowledge regarding our health system, even if Mr. Kennedy was not willing to imperil freedom for women, members of both political parties should reject his nomination because Mr. Kennedy, who has forged a career of peddling cynicism and conspiracy regarding vaccines, is, perhaps, the most uniquely dangerous man ever nominated to head America's Department of Health and Human Services.

Vaccines are among the greatest achievements in human history, and America has been at the center of that success. Our doctors and scientists were instrumental in helping vanquish smallpox and banish polio. Because of vaccines, more than 20 million people walk today who otherwise would have been stricken with polio. Hundreds of millions of people are alive today because of vaccines. I am reminded of the words of a previous HHS Secretary:

Vaccines are some of the most thoroughly tested medical products we have. Vaccines are safe, effective, and lifesaving.

HHS Secretary Alex Azar, who was appointed by President Trump, said those words during his first term. He was right when he said this 6 years ago. But today, Mr. Kennedy asserts that this statement is wrong.

Mr. Kennedy has a long history of dealing in both outright lies and clever half-truths to sow cynicism, mistrust, and confusion regarding vaccines. He has, at various times, discouraged people from getting vaccines for measles and polio.

Mr. Kennedy has led litigation to discredit the HPV vaccine, a vaccine which has led to a dramatic decrease in cervical cancers among young women.

When the pandemic hit, President Trump helped marshal America's scientific resources in Operation Warp Speed to produce a COVID vaccine in record time. This was, in my mind, one of the greatest public health achievements in decades and a real credit to President Trump. But Mr. Kennedy helped lead efforts that attempted to revoke President Trump's COVID vaccine's authorization.

And for more than 25 years, Mr. Kennedy has helped perpetuate the dangerous lie that vaccines cause autism. During his confirmation hearings, my colleagues virtually begged Mr. Kennedy to recant these views. But Mr. Kennedy would not, insisting that if he somehow saw more evidence—only then, perhaps—he might reverse course and tell people he was wrong.

This is a dangerous game that Mr. Kennedy plays. He hides his anti-vaccine conspiracies under a cloak of deniability. Sometimes he outright lies. But most of the time, he insists that he is merely raising questions and that he is simply a man looking for answers. But to borrow from Benjamin Franklin:



Half the truth is often a great lie.

When Mr. Kennedy is presented with facts, he ignores them. He ignored the conclusive data that my colleagues showed him proving that vaccines do not cause autism. He, instead, continued to rely on one tiny, outdated, faulty, disproven study from way back in 1998; a study that the Journal that originally published it has since withdrawn to support his claim, instead of relying on the exhaustive studies that have been conducted since then that prove there is no link between vaccines and autism.

It is fine to ask questions. It is often urgently important. But it is not doctors and scientists who are ignoring Mr. Kennedy's questions; it is Mr. Kennedy who is ignoring their answers. Mr. Kennedy's vaccine conspiracies are not a quirky personality or harmless eccentricity, but especially with the authority and megaphone he will have if he is confirmed, it will be a grave danger to the health of our people.

Mr. Kennedy has already spent much of his career taking legal action against safe and effective vaccines. With the full power of the Department of Health and Human Services, it stands to reason that he will use his post to limit access to certain vaccines, pull FDA approval of others, or change guidelines and recommendations concerning what vaccines children should receive.

But more than that, with the platform of HHS Secretary, Mr. Kennedy will undermine public trust in vaccines and will discourage a growing number of parents from getting their children vaccinated. As for Mr. Kennedy's insistence that is simply raising doubts about the safety of vaccines doesn't mean that he is urging people not to get their children vaccinated—well, Mr. Kennedy may be unqualified, but he is not naïve. He knows full well that millions of people listen to his words. Millions more will listen should he be confirmed to this office.

And so what happens? How much, Mr. President, does a lie about vaccines truly cost? Let us say that a greater number of Americans become wary of vaccines due to Mr. Kennedy's musings from the seat of the most powerful public health perch in the world. A greater number of families decide that their kids don't need vaccines. Sometimes that will mean just skipping one vaccine. Sometimes it will mean skipping all of them. These parents aren't necessarily conspiracy theorists themselves, but they have read some scary, if untrue, stories online, and as they try to figure out what to do, the most important public health authority in the land chooses to give credence to the lies rather than reassure parents with the truth.

Maybe, as is true with every parent, these parents are worried about their child developing a disability, and now they hear Mr. Kennedy suggest that vaccines maybe cause autism, so they hesitate. They don't return to the pedi-

atrician's office for the next dose of a vaccine that will prevent their child from getting a deadly disease.

As more and more children become unprotected and as Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., fails to advocate for safe, effective, lifesaving vaccines, children get sick, they spread the disease, and all of a sudden, we are back to the kind of deadly disease outbreaks that doctors used to witness in the early decades of the 20th century—a time long enough ago wherein many Americans don't realize what it was like to lose a loved one to an illness like measles. There will be more measles outbreaks like the one going on right now in West Texas, or maybe, instead of measles, it will be polio. People will get sick, and people will die. Take a look in a museum at a rusting iron lung. Go to the graves of the unvaccinated measles victims in American Samoa. That is the cost. That is the price of this particular lie.

I also take issue with the notion that Mr. Kennedy's anti-vax cynicism is somehow advancing scientific progress or healthy debate. The truth is that Mr. Kennedy's conspiracies are not particularly new. They are old theories that have been disproven but that Mr. Kennedy keeps alive by continuing to recycle them long after the debate has been concluded. So, no, I don't object to engaging in new debates on unproven science; I object to rehashing old debates on proven science.

Remarkably, during the hearings, Mr. Kennedy and some of my colleagues sought to place Mr. Kennedy in the tradition of great scientific minds like Galileo and Newton, who dared challenge the scientific status quo with their own provocative questions. There is, of course, a key difference. The difference is that Galileo and Newton were right, and Mr. Kennedy is wrong. The evidence vindicated Galileo. The evidence refutes Mr. Kennedy. That difference is what separated Galileo from the village crank. That difference is what separates a witch doctor from a real one.

This never-ending cycle of cynicism—of relitigating old debates about whether vaccines cause autism—doesn't further scientific progress. It doesn't unlock new truths or cures. It keeps us stuck in the past, stuck having the same debates over and over and over again. All that changes is that the mound of evidence disproving Mr. Kennedy grows higher and higher.

In his hearing, Mr. Kennedy said that he wouldn't apologize for asking what he called uncomfortable questions because “we have massive health problems in this country that we must face honestly.”

The problem is not that Mr. Kennedy is asking uncomfortable questions; the problem is that Mr. Kennedy himself is not willing to accept the answers to them. The problem is that Mr. Kennedy is wasting our time and our money with dishonest and already settled debates, debates that distract us from the

task at hand—the task of tackling the real and significant health problems that are facing our country—because in his lifetime of fearmongering, what good has Mr. Kennedy actually contributed to the mission of public health?

Mr. Kennedy says he wishes to make America healthy again, but when Mr. Kennedy suggested that the polio vaccine gave people cancer, what child did he make healthier? Mr. Kennedy says he is trying to promote vigorous scientific debate. When Mr. Kennedy suggested that the United States of America develop Lyme disease as a bio-weapon, what medical breakthrough did that yield? What disease did he help cure then? Mr. Kennedy's vaccine fears garner him headlines, but have they made healthcare more affordable for a single American family?

Think about the hours and resources that Mr. Kennedy has urged his followers to invest in relitigating proven science and what progress could instead have been made if that money were invested in finding treatments and cures to diseases. That is the price of Mr. Kennedy's insistence that we remain frozen in time in our understanding of science.

Mr. Kennedy has not made America healthier in his career thus far, nor will he if he is confirmed. He will make America less healthy, more doubtful, more divided, more cynical, and further away from finding cures and making scientific progress.

We have real healthcare challenges in this country. The American people need healthcare costs to come down. They want to stop having to make impossible choices between making ends meet and getting their children the medications they need. They want it to be easier to get a prompt appointment with a good doctor in their neighborhood who talks with them and doesn't rush them out the door. They want better mental health care in our schools. They want cures. They want their loved ones to stop being held back by chronic diseases. They want to say fewer early goodbyes because of cancer, Alzheimer's, and other diseases. They want to be able to age at home with dignity and high-quality home care.

Making our country more healthy is no small task, but we can do it. We live in a great country. The American people are talented and imaginative. When we work together, we have the capacity to do extraordinary things. We can make our country better. We can save more lives. But we cannot move forward if we confirm a Cabinet Secretary who engages in the same, tired debates over and over again, if we confirm a Cabinet Secretary who goads us into fighting each other rather than fighting for cures or for lower healthcare costs.

If this body confirms Mr. Kennedy, it will, in effect, be declaring that experience doesn't matter and qualifications do not count. It will be ignoring plain truths and suspending our capacity for

reasoning—all because a President demanded that the majority of this body do so.

If this body confirms Mr. Kennedy, it will be betraying who we are as Americans. It will be sacrificing a better future for the sake of needlessly relitigating the past. It will be confusing a charlatan with a prophet and cynicism with wisdom.

In the end, if this body confirms Mr. Kennedy, more parents will reject vaccinations for their children, more people will get sick, and a growing number of children will likely die.

The exact impact of Mr. Kennedy's confirmation in terms of lives lost or progress thwarted will, of course, be hard to quantify. Regardless, what we do know for certain is that Senators on both sides of the aisle are willing to denounce the lies that Mr. Kennedy has spread, and we saw that in our hearings. But, colleagues, the issue in this moment isn't whether you will stand up against lies; the issue is whether you will stand up to the man who tells them. And in this moment, in this Chamber, it appears that not enough of my Republican colleagues are willing to do that. I hope I am wrong.

I urge my colleagues to reject Mr. Kennedy's nomination.

I yield the floor.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** The Senator from California.

**Mr. PADILLA.** Mr. President, I, too, rise to oppose the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., to serve as Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I can only hope that I am half as eloquent and moving as Senator HASSAN has been not just here on the floor today but in committee during the confirmation hearing.

I oppose this nomination for his wildly misinformed beliefs and his utter lack of experience. I believe he is fundamentally unfit and unprepared, and Americans will be less healthy if he is confirmed.

Let's begin with, for years, he has made conspiracy theories and anti-vaccine misinformation his calling card, from false accusations that vaccines cause autism to lies that the COVID-19 virus targets specific racial groups. He has founded his own anti-vax organization, authored several books pushing public health conspiracies, and has made millions off anti-vax lawsuits. It all points to a dangerous principle at the core of Mr. Kennedy's beliefs: "There's no vaccine that is safe and effective."

As the Presiding Officer knows, my background is in engineering. I am not a scientist, but I am an engineer. As an engineer, I trust the experts who have spent their lives researching, conducting clinical trials, and collecting data.

Through the decades of life-changing discoveries and scientific breakthroughs, one thing has become increasingly, undeniably clear: The single best way to protect the Nation from viral disease is to get vaccinated.

It is the reason why, today, hundreds of millions of Americans can live freely without having serious concerns of contracting polio, of contracting smallpox, or of contracting hepatitis.

That used to be a source of pride for the Nation, but in the face of all of the proven science—proven again and again science—Mr. Kennedy has chosen to profit off of fear, and countless parents are being misled into making dangerous decisions for their children.

Look, I get the fear. I am proud to represent California in the Senate, and I am proud to have an engineering background, but I, too, am a parent of three boys. I remember what it was like to hold a baby in your arms and to worry every time there was a snuffle and a cough. I would do anything to protect my children, just as you would do anything to protect yours. But where families have reasonable questions on everything from doctors to diets, Mr. Kennedy simply sees dollar signs.

Now, today, we find ourselves in yet another viral outbreak. A bird flu has shown some early signs of transmission to humans.

I can't think of a worse idea than to install an anti-vaxxer as Secretary of Health and Human Services. His beliefs alone make him unfit to lead HHS, but in addition to that, he is simply unprepared to lead.

Nearly 16 months ago, I was proud to cofound the bipartisan Senate Mental Health Caucus.

Thank you, Senator TILLIS; thank you, Senator ERNST; and thank you, Senator SMITH, for being cofounders of this caucus.

In the time since then, we have made some significant strides. But before Americans can ever reach out for help in a time of crisis, they have to know that they can access help. So that is on us to make sure that the support, the services, the programs are there for Americans when they need them. We know that Medicaid is the single largest payer of behavioral health services in the Nation.

So at a time when Republicans are looking to cut funding for lifesaving services, I would rather see a fierce defender of Medicaid at HHS. Yet, during his confirmation hearing, Mr. Kennedy failed to show even a basic understanding of Medicaid—not the sources of funding, not the benefits. At one point, he even seemed to confuse Medicaid and Medicare.

Colleagues, I shouldn't have to say this: This is not a "learn on the job" nomination.

Well, President Trump knows just how unprepared Mr. Kennedy is for this job. Reporting from Semafor just a few days ago tells us that during Mr. Kennedy's confirmation hearing, President Trump was watching. He saw just how poorly the confirmation hearing was going for Mr. Kennedy. So what did President Trump do? He does what he does best. He leapt into action to distract and divide. He held a press con-

ference simply to throw out the latest controversy to reporters, and it took the attention off and the pressure off of this dangerous nominee.

That is what we are up against, colleagues. Over the next several months, our Nation will face a critical test for some of the most important public health systems in our country.

In the House, Republicans are already floating cuts to Medicaid to pay for even more tax breaks for the rich.

In the White House, President Trump and his shadow president Musk have proven they will shutter any Agency that stands in their way.

Today, we are left wondering who will speak up to protect the health of millions of Americans? Unfortunately, Mr. Kennedy has already shown he is not up to the task.

So, colleagues, I urge you to join me in fighting to protect the health of our constituents and oppose the confirmation of Mr. Kennedy.

I yield the floor.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** The Senator from Virginia.

**Mr. WARNER.** Mr. President, I join my last two colleagues, the Senator from New Hampshire and the Senator from California, in echoing some of their concerns, because I also rise today to oppose President Trump's nomination of Robert Francis Kennedy, Jr., to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

It has been less than a month since Donald Trump was inaugurated. It feels a bit longer for some of us. Yet already, we have seen this administration attack nonpartisan civil servants, illegally freeze Federal funding, and gut the independent oversight bodies that crack down and protect Americans from corruption.

That would mean, now more than ever, the Senate needs to confirm nominees who want to make the government more efficient, yes, but who are also willing to work in good faith to advance their missions, regardless of political ideology.

Unfortunately, I don't believe that Mr. Kennedy is that nominee, and I fear that he will serve as a rubberstamp to the chaos and disruption that the Trump-Musk administration brings.

The past couple of weeks have made it clear that Elon Musk and his DOGE bros have a disturbing scheme to undermine the government's ability to operate, all in the name of efficiency.

We have seen Musk take a hatchet to USAID, ceding soft power and, frankly, 70 years of bipartisan leadership in that domain, to China.

We have seen that same attack to limit our ability to fight terrorists and, unfortunately, turn our back—which we have never done, even with Presidents of Democrat or Republican affiliation—turn our back entirely on the international community.

We have seen Mr. Musk take a hatchet to the CFPB and leave consumers to fend for themselves, giving a pass to

scammers and institutions that defraud Americans.

We are starting to see Musk take aim at the Department of Education.

We cannot allow this pattern to continue at the Agency tasked with keeping people healthy and safe.

As folks in my State may remember, earlier this month, the President issued an illegal order to freeze all Federal spending. Fortunately, the funding freeze order was rescinded after a major public outcry and the threat of losing in court. Yet, even with the order rescinded, real people's lives were fundamentally changed.

Across Virginia, for example, three community health centers had to close during the funding freeze, and now they won't be reopening because of uncertainty. They are not sure the money is even coming back.

These health centers, which provide primary and preventive care for the underserved populations, feel they can no longer rely on the government contract or the government to keep its word or meet its obligations.

In rural Buckingham County, a health center is having to put off replacing the only machine in the county that provides breast cancer screening.

Who suffers? Well, it is not Mr. Musk. He is the richest man in the world. I imagine he and the young men who work with him get pretty good and timely care.

But if we would just end it there, that wouldn't be all that we would potentially be putting Mr. Kennedy into. We have already seen some of the foreshadowing of what is to come if Mr. Kennedy is confirmed as the HHS nominee.

Take the NIH for example—National Institutes of Health—something broadly supported in a bipartisan way. NIH is one of the many important Agencies that is tasked with advancing medical and public health research in the United States. And, literally, in the years that I have been here, it has been Republican Members who have often taken the lead in championing existing and increasing funding. Unfortunately, many of the medical achievements which started off as NIH grants, from cancer immunotherapies to heart valve replacements to medications for many health conditions, all started at NIH. Yet earlier this week, the Trump administration put forward a plan to cut \$4 billion in Federal funding for research at hospital and universities, like those in Virginia which conduct some of our Nation's top research. This basically cuts the legs out of a lot of NIH funding.

This illegal and shortsighted maneuver could decrease the kind of work that leads to medical cures and scientific breakthroughs. It could devastate a major research ecosystem in Virginia, eliminate 21st century jobs, and hurt countless American families who have been touched by cancer and other devastating diseases.

I have no earthly idea why the President would choose to cede American

R&D leadership in bio at this moment to China. But what I do know is that Mr. Kennedy will do nothing to stop it.

What we need at HHS is a nominee who is willing to go in with a scalpel, not a hatchet, to make our healthcare system better. We need someone with the preparedness and experience necessary to safeguard a woman's right to reproductive care; to support healthcare systems in their fight against cyber attacks; that would protect both Medicare and Medicaid, and ensure that American families can count on good health insurance.

Rather than focusing on any of these things, Mr. Kennedy, as you have heard from my colleagues, has expressed that he would like to gut our Nation's top health Agency. Specifically, he said he would like to oust 2,200 nonpartisan health experts at HHS.

At his hearing before the Senate Finance Committee, I asked him a very simple question: Which ones? Which of these nonpartisan health officials have you got slated for the chopping block? I wondered, was it the folks who keep our food safe from salmonella? The individuals who examine medications we give our kids? He couldn't even answer the question who he wanted to cut.

Now, I do appreciate Mr. Kennedy's concern with chronic illnesses and the obesity epidemic. I also agree that not enough Americans have access to healthy food. However, having met with Mr. Kennedy in private and having questioned him in the hearing, I don't believe he is the right person to tackle these complicated issues.

I don't have the confidence that he will be willing to consider the science or consult nonpartisan health experts when necessary. I certainly don't have the confidence that he would ever be willing to stand up to Donald Trump or Elon Musk.

Frankly, at least in Virginia, I am not the only one who feels that way. Let me take a moment to share some concerns I have heard from Virginians.

Katherine, an ICU nurse in Charlottesville wrote:

I cared for critically-ill and dying patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, while public health conspiracies were spread by figures like RFK, Jr., with no scientific or medical training. I have seen the potentially deadly consequences of spreading misleading health and safety information.

Take Talia, an Alexandria resident who suffers chronic illnesses. She wrote:

My ability to access effective treatments relies on accurate research and development of medicine.

She fears, if nominated, Mr. Kennedy will cut progress in science and medical research.

Another constituent from Nokesville wrote:

My mother contracted polio at age 2. . . . She is now 92 and has spent her life dealing with the pain of post-polio symptoms. RFK, Jr.'s stance on vaccines is dangerous to people of all ages.

A doctor from my hometown of Alexandria wrote:

As a pediatrician for almost 50 years, I have seen many diseases nearly eradicated, thanks to vaccines. Mr. Kennedy would reverse that trend. In my care, I have seen children become profoundly impaired—unable to talk or care for themselves as adults—due to preventable infections. I have seen three children die from "harmless" childhood diseases like measles and chickenpox. I never wish to see that again.

A cancer survivor from Virginia Beach wrote:

Cancer survivors like myself count on public health initiatives and scientific research to ensure the effective long-term treatment and prevention of serious diseases. I do not believe Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.—a man who lacks any credentials and credibility in this field—will have those interests in mind.

The writing is on the wall. This nominee does not have the right experience, credibility, or motivations to be running a government Agency of this size and importance. That is why I will be voting no on Mr. Kennedy's nomination to be Secretary and urge my colleagues to do the same.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CURTIS). The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I would ask unanimous consent to be able to use a prop during my speech.

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

#### FEDERAL FUMBLES

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, in Oklahoma, if you were to go to any house anywhere in the State right now and ask them how their money should be spent, they would probably smile at you and say: I would like to decide that, not somebody else.

That would be a pretty common conversation, I would bet, in most every State.

For a lot of folks in my State that make \$55,000, \$60,000—make enough to be able to get by, work hard, take care of their kids and their family—it is a challenge for them from day to day, so every single dollar counts to them. They think about how every single dollar is spent or saved.

That is why it is surprising, in all the dialogue right now about government waste—there is a big dialogue about how do we handle waste and how do we cut back and how fast should we cut back and what should that look like.

But Oklahomans that I talk to are not offended that we are actually cutting back on waste. Now, they may have questions about how it is done and the speed and where it comes out. Those are all reasonable questions we should have a national dialogue on. But when Oklahomans hear that USAID last year did a grant of \$32,000 to create a comic book about transgenders in Peru, they would say to me: Hey, I would like to be able to spend that \$32,000 myself rather than the transgender comic book in Peru. If the folks in Peru want that comic book, maybe they should pay for it, not American taxpayers.

The folks in Oklahoma, if I were able to talk to them about the same issue,