

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 Fortunately, the funding freeze order was rescinded after a major public outcry and the threat of losing in court. Yet, even with the order rescinded, real people's lives were fundamentally changed.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,

would ask me questions about the \$2.5 million grant that was given to Vietnam to be able to fund the construction of electric vehicle battery recharging stations—which, by the way, \$2.5 million that was given by USAID to Vietnam to do that created one charging station which so far has saved a total of 260 gallons of gas equivalent—\$2.5 million. It might have been cheaper just to send them 250 gallons of gas than it is to send them \$2.5 million to be able to do that.

Now, if I were to talk to Oklahomans, they would tell me they want to be able to be more in charge of that money, not sending it to do that.

They would do the same thing when they find out that \$10 million in food aid that was supposed to be going to Syrian refugees was actually diverted to a terrorist group linked with al-Qaida, and they would want to ask USAID why that was done.

They would ask some basic questions: why almost \$1 million was sent to a group linked to Hamas just the week before the October 7 attack was actually done.

All those things are reasonable conversations to have that are really, honestly, not partisan conversations in this room. I don't find anyone that thinks that is a partisan issue. Everybody just says: How do we go after that waste, and what do we do to be able to stop it?

For the last 10 years, I have stood in this room and I have talked about my “Federal Fumbles” book. We just released the latest version of my “Federal Fumbles” book today. The “Federal Fumbles” book that we put out each year is not trying to be overly critical of government. We have released it under Republican and Democrat Presidencies and Congresses. We have said: Why don't we spend time—quite frankly, as I ask every year—why doesn't every single Member of this body assign their staff to go look for areas of waste and regulatory inefficiency and just ask some very basic questions: How could we do this better?

Every business asks that question all the time. They ask the question: How can we be more efficient? How can we do things better?

But we in government ask more “What can we do next?” and very seldom stop to evaluate what has already been done. That is all “Federal Fumbles” is saying: This is the money that was allocated. How was it actually spent?

Over the years, we have engaged in things to be able to identify some areas of waste and to be able to put a stop to them. We stopped the funding that was going toward drag shows in Ecuador that we used to fund in American tax dollars. That is not happening anymore. We stopped the funding that was being sent to France to help preserve the secret language of French Parisian butchers. We used to fund that. We don't anymore. We stopped the funding that was going to research the Russian

wine industry after we exposed that. We even stopped the funding that was going to the border to be able to fund Shakespeare all along our border. There might be other ways to be able to spend our money better at the border other than doing performances of Shakespeare with Federal tax dollars.

This year, we are spending some time actually focusing in on what can we do better; what has already been done that the money has gone out the door or how can we do things better. One of them, interestingly enough, has been one of the areas that are being talked a lot about more that we have already focused on, and that is FEMA and disaster relief. Now it has suddenly become a big topic of conversation over the last couple weeks. But we ask a very simple question: When a community experiences a hurricane, a tornado, a flood, and they want to engage with the Federal Government for disaster relief, this is what they confront: 30 different Agencies, 30 different processes for aid coming to their community, most of them having a different way to actually sign up for them, different deadlines, different information that is needed, and also different percentages. Some of them pay 90–10. Some of them pay 85–15. Some of them pay 50–50. They have to know this intricate set of rules in the middle of cleaning up from their disaster to be able to get relief.

This is a disaster, and it shouldn't be a partisan issue for us to be able to look at it and to say: We can do better. When a small, rural community faces a devastating flood, why are we asking the mayor of that community to figure this out to be able to get aid? They won't be able to. They are trying to help their neighbors dig out. We can do better on this.

So we exposed the 30 different Agencies and the spaghetti map of how to be able to get aid and to say: Let's work on this. We exposed some of the inefficiencies that are out in our Federal Government right now, even for things like permitting.

We all talk about energy production, and I know we have differences of opinion on where that energy should come from, but when we start talking about the permitting to go get energy—whether that is lithium or whether that is natural gas—we get into a conversation about how do you permit to actually go get that resource.

Well, right now in the United States of America, it is taking 29 years to go from the beginning process where a critical mineral is mined to actual production. We are on the same international ranking for efficiency of regulations on mining as Zambia.

If we go into our northern border, to Canada—now currently, apparently, referred to as the 51st State—if you go into Canada, it takes 3 years for them to be able to permit a mine. And they go through all their environmental reviews. They go through their legal challenges. They do all those things in

3 years, what is taking us 29 in current structure, if it ever gets done at all. We can do better on that.

If we want to increase our use of American-made minerals and our American-made production on that, we as the Federal Government, we as the U.S. Senate, have to be able to reform the way we are doing our permitting processes so that we can produce that American energy.

If we have some belief that China or Central Africa or the Middle East is producing energy cleaner than we are, we are kidding ourselves. We will produce it cleaner if we can get to it at all.

In this “Federal Fumbles” book, we walk through a lot of areas of waste we have identified and said: Hey, let's find some common areas of agreement that we should all be able to look at.

Let me raise one that is controversial: the SNAP program. I don't know a person in this room that would say they want to end the SNAP program. That is food stamps, for some people that still use the old term. But over \$10 billion was actually allocated in the SNAP program last year of what they called improper payments; that is, we don't know if they qualified or not for the program.

Now, a lot of folks in Oklahoma would say: I don't mind people getting some help when they need it, but for folks that don't qualify, why are they actually getting access to that?

We have the same issue in the Medicare and Medicaid Program. We don't want to do anything to be able to hurt that program. We have a lot of things we need to do better in that program to deliver. But over \$100 billion in Medicare and Medicaid last year was designated as improper payments; that is, we don't know if it is an appropriate payment that was done or not.

That is something we should spend some time investigating. Mr. President, \$100 billion seems like real money to me.

Last year, there was a billion dollars that was allocated in subsidies to a Chinese solar manufacturing facility—a billion in American taxpayer subsidies.

If I went to the folks in Oklahoma and said, “Where should we get solar power?” Not a one of them would say China. And if they did, they certainly wouldn't say: We should give a billion dollars to a Chinese company to be able to subsidize them to be able to send solar panels to us.

If I were to walk around Washington, DC, right now, current stats are there are 17 Agencies in Washington, DC, that are using 25 percent or less of their real estate. Seventeen of our Agencies are using 25 percent or less of their occupancy building space. That is billions of dollars in costs in electricity; that is billions of dollars in costs in furniture—for a simple question, because it is not a business. They are not having to pursue efficiency. We have 75 percent of the building unused.

That is an area that we should actually ask some very simple questions about and just say: What can we actually do better on this?

Listen, these aren't partisan things. If I sat down with my Democratic colleagues, they would nod their head and say: Let's take a look at that. Let's figure it out. The most simple thing that we do every year when we bring out this "Federal Fumbles" book is say: Here are things we can talk about.

Now, I understand the DOGE conversation has become controversial with Elon Musk and some of the tactics and the speed that they are moving. I completely understand that and respect the conversations about that. But government inefficiency shouldn't be partisan. It shouldn't be controversial.

And for those that have joined all of us that have worked on this for years to expose waste in government, welcome to the club. We are glad to have folks engaging on this. I am not critical. I am excited that you are here because we need more help, because when the Federal Government fumbles taxpayer dollars, people in Oklahoma, in my State, lose their hard-earned tax money on things that aren't education, aren't roads, aren't national defense. They are waste, and that is what people want to see stopped.

So I not only encourage people to be able to just take a glance—it is easy reading, lots of pictures. I not only encourage people to take a glance at our "Federal Fumbles" book, now that it is released, but I encourage every Member of this body to assign their staff to go look for waste. And then let's sit down together and see if we can figure out how to make it stop. We should waste less and save more. It shouldn't be that hard.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

NOMINATION OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise today in strong opposition to President Trump's nominee for Health and Human Services, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

The Department he has been picked to lead is charged with protecting the health of all Americans, from safeguarding Medicare and nursing home care for seniors to investing in medical research, to safeguarding the Nation's food supply and supporting public health programs such as lead poisoning prevention and suicide prevention.

One of the most important public health inventions of the last century is vaccines, making many deadly and debilitating diseases a thing of the past. The Secretary of Health and Human Services has an outsized role in making vaccines available to children and adults throughout the country, and that is something that gives me great pause about Mr. Kennedy's nomination.

For those of us who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, polio was an insidious

threat that sent fear literally through every home in this country until Dr. Salk invented a vaccine. And it literally saved the lives—many, many lives—of generations of Americans. It was approved, and then it went forward. But I can recall lining up—in fact, my parents pulling me along and urging me to stand in line to get the first shot, and then the following year, get the next shot, because to them it was not just a medical routine. It could eliminate the constant worry and concern that one day their child could be subject to polio. So this notion of vaccine that is prompted by Mr. Kennedy is, I think, contrary to the great experience, at least, of those who have been through that period of time.

Mr. Kennedy has spent the last decade or more spreading lies about vaccines and encouraging families not to vaccinate their children. He is not just an advocate with a loud bullhorn spreading that message. Indeed, Mr. Kennedy has made a living making millions of dollars, no less, questioning the safety of vaccines—safety that has been proven time and time again.

Mr. Kennedy chaired one of the most prominent anti-vaccine organizations, the Children's Health Defense, for almost a decade, stepping aside only to run for President in 2023.

Mr. Kennedy had a long and successful career as an environmental lawyer, and he has a compelling personal history overcoming addiction and should be commended for that. However, Mr. Kennedy's only work in the health space has been deeply detrimental to the public health of the United States and, indeed, across the globe. There is no starker example of this than his work in Samoa 5 years ago.

In 2018, in a tragic mistake, two infants in Samoa died after receiving their measles vaccine. The vaccines had been improperly prepared—improperly prepared—with a muscle relaxer instead of water. To be clear, nothing about the vaccine itself killed these children. Indeed, two nurses were imprisoned for 5 years for the mistake they made that day.

Children's Health Defense, again, chaired by Mr. Kennedy, seized on the opportunity and began questioning the safety of the measles vaccine online. Between the tragic accident and the spread of misinformation, the vaccine rate in Samoa fell to dangerously low levels.

Children's Health Defense pressed on, paying for Mr. Kennedy to travel to Samoa, with a prominent anti-vaccine activist, to meet with the Prime Minister and other government officials, as well as other anti-vaccine activists.

And the damage was done. A measles outbreak began a few months later and, with such low vaccination rates, spread rapidly. By January 2020, there were almost 6,000 cases of measles, which resulted in the death of 83 people, and nearly all of the deaths were in children under the age 5.

Two truly tragic deaths spiraled into over 80 deaths, mostly of young chil-

dren. And really think about that: children dying of a vaccine-preventable illness, with a vaccine widely available. And Mr. Kennedy was one of the leading voices opposing vaccination, encouraging places like Samoa to embrace a natural experience to see what happens when we stop routine vaccinations.

We have seen what happens. Children die.

And on top of that, Mr. Kennedy not only maintains no wrongdoing; he takes no responsibility. He denies the reality of what happened. In his confirmation hearing, he claimed that the cause of these children's death wasn't clear. Nothing could be further from the truth. We know exactly what happened, and Mr. Kennedy is still peddling misinformation to the U.S. Senate and to the people of America.

Now, I mentioned that Mr. Kennedy stepped down from Children's Health Defense in 2023 to run for President, which leads me to my next concern. It has been reported that Mr. Kennedy, in fact, approached both the Trump and Harris campaigns offering his support if he could take on a prominent role in the winning campaign's administration.

Then-Candidate Donald Trump took him up on his offer. In short order, Mr. Kennedy abandoned his campaign, endorsed President Trump, and, it appears, agreed to do whatever President Trump would demand of him in the new role as Secretary of HHS.

The American people, I do not believe, can trust Mr. Kennedy. Mr. Kennedy has proven, time and time again, that he will bow to President Trump and his reckless agenda.

For example, Mr. Kennedy has a long, lifetime record of being pro-choice. Yet he said at his confirmation hearing that he will do whatever President Trump wants on issues of reproductive health, perhaps taking away lifesaving care for women.

During his confirmation hearings, Mr. Kennedy downplayed the work that he had done discrediting vaccines, no doubt to secure the votes he needed to get confirmed in this role. When asked about his affiliation with Children's Health Defense, which, again, promotes anti-vaccine views widely and he chaired for almost a decade, he acted like he had barely heard of it.

When asked about his previous statement sowing doubts about vaccines, he claimed it was taken out of context or misrepresented. Yet these anti-vaccine statements are not things he has said once or twice; they are deeply held views that he has spent a lifetime pushing.

In 2015, for example, Mr. Kennedy falsely associated autism with vaccines, saying:

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

He did later apologize for equating autism with the Holocaust, but he has

only doubled down on his lies about vaccines and autism. As recently as 2023, in an interview he said:

I've read the science on autism and I can tell you, if you want to know. David, you've got to answer this question: if autism didn't come from the vaccines, then where is it coming from?

Well, ask scientists, not Robert Kennedy.

However, this wasn't the first time he had made references to such despicable examples as Nazi Germany when talking about childhood immunizations.

When speaking at a conference in 2013 about his claim that vaccines cause autism—a claim that has been debunked decades before and many times since, he stated:

To me this is like Nazi death camps, what happened to these kids.

When asked why the CDC would cover up the supposed link between vaccines and autism, Mr. Kennedy said:

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

This is not the language of a thoughtful, insightful person dealing with a subject so critical to our country as vaccines. This is inflammatory, outrageous, and I think consistent with his behavior, unfortunately.

Now, Mr. Kennedy has also said that vaccine scientists should be imprisoned for their work. At the same conference he said of vaccine researchers:

Is it hyperbole when I say these people should be in jail? They should be in jail and the key should be thrown away.

In 2021, speaking on a podcast about how he encourages people not to vaccinate their children, he said:

If you're walking down the street—and I do this now myself, which is, you know, I don't want to do—I'm not a busybody. I see somebody on a hiking trail carrying a little baby, and I say to him, "Better not get him vaccinated." And he heard that from me. If he hears it from 10 other people, maybe he won't do it, you know, maybe he will save that child.

In case it wasn't clear, he repeated his position later in the same podcast saying:

If you're one of 10 people that goes up to a guy, a man or a woman, who's carrying a baby and says, "Don't vaccinate that baby," when they hear that from 10 people, it'll make an impression on 'em, you know. And we all kept our mouth shut. Don't keep your mouth shut anymore. Confront everybody on it.

In the summer of 2023, speaking on a podcast, he was asked if there was any vaccine he thought was good, and he responded:

There's no vaccine that is safe or effective.

That says it all. He has a long, long record of opposing vaccines and discouraging families from getting vaccinated.

But now that Mr. Kennedy is facing a nomination vote in the Senate, he changes his tune. Mr. Kennedy said in his own confirmation hearing that he

did not oppose vaccines and had, in fact, gotten all of his kids vaccinated.

That is a hard pill to swallow for the families in Samoa whose children died after Mr. Kennedy and his organization convinced them not to vaccinate their children.

If confirmed to this role, I don't know which Robert Kennedy we will get: the pro-choice, environmental lawyer with a penchant for conspiracy theories and pushing anti-vaccine propaganda or a mouthpiece for President Trump, pushing an anti-choice agenda, putting women's lives at risk, advocating for an end to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, and allowing Elon Musk and DOGE to undermine HHS at every turn.

Either outcome is dangerous to the American people and their health, and I will oppose the nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I rise to share my deep concerns about entrusting our Nation's ability to respond to another pandemic, our world leading medical innovation infrastructure, the ability of women in my State to choose a medical abortion, and continued research for healthcare of millions of Americans, putting that in the hands of the HHS Secretary nominee, Robert F. Kennedy.

We all agree that our healthcare system could be reformed. It can be bloated; it can be maddening. Too many people have gotten the dreaded letter from an insurance company telling them: "Sorry, your procedure isn't covered." And if you don't have insurance, you avoid that doctor visit, and you pay out of pocket, or maybe you wait until you end up in the emergency room and have to deal with medical debt. And we all know the cost of prescription drugs are too high.

We agree that we are spending way too much and that we need better outcomes. So you only have to look at the health outcomes of virtually every other industrialized nation to know that they spend less and get better results. But rather than choose a new leader for the Health and Human Services Agency that would lead us down that better path, President Trump's nominee would get us stuck in conspiracy theories that would cost us lives.

The nominee has been a purveyor of disinformation. As my colleague from Rhode Island just mentioned, sowing doubt about lifesaving vaccines, he said, "[. . .] the COVID 19 was a bio-weapon that spared Jews and the Chinese [. . .]."

Achieving better health outcomes, both today and in the future, happens when we follow science—not conspiracy theories, but science. I happen to represent a very innovative science State, and right now, it is a choice about innovation versus the skepticism represented by this nominee.

Instead of speeding up innovation, under Mr. Kennedy, we would be taking

a risky step backwards. The COVID pandemic showed us, in my State, one of the first—actually, the first in the Nation known cases of a COVID-19 case.

And 5 years ago this month, some of the first deaths occurred in my State. Sadly, there were many more. And trust me, I came back here to Washington, DC, and people talked as if business was usual, all the while it was spreading across my State.

Ultimately, this pandemic killed more than 1.2 million people, and it devastated our economy, it had an impact on our children's education, and it has long term healthcare effects on millions of survivors.

Now, we are at the possibility of the beginning of another crisis, the avian flu. This crisis is yet another reminder of the importance of medical research and collaboration. But these two stories were on the front page of the Seattle Times just yesterday, the cost of eggs skyrocketing, caused by the avian flu, and the proposed cuts to NIH.

Now, what do people not understand? Does it make sense to cut science at the time we might have another pandemic? Does it make sense to continue to cut the collaborative efforts of research? This Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory at Washington State University is on the frontlines of the avian flu.

One of my institutions is on the frontline. They test animals from across the State so they can be identified and stop the flu from spreading. And we want to cut those dollars?

Americans already see the impact of the avian flu every time they go to the grocery store, and now, people in Seattle and Spokane are saying it costs \$7 for a dozen eggs. Some stores are limiting how many eggs you can buy.

So, as you can see, this issue is on the top of mind of constituents, and they want to know what kind of leadership we are going to provide here in Washington, DC, to lower costs, particularly at the grocery store, but to also lower costs in healthcare. Putting someone in charge who is a skeptic of medical science in response to the avian flu is just wrong. It is a catastrophic mistake for America's healthcare.

Now, I will admit my State is a global leader in medical innovation. From research, to biotech, to getting drugs to the market—in 2023, the National Institutes of Health awarded \$1.2 billion in highly competitive grants to 65 different organizations in the State of Washington.

This supported about 12,000 jobs and generated close to \$3 billion in economic activity. So, yes, we know a little something about global health and innovation. But we know something else, Mr. President, the kind of research we are talking about here is the kind that saves lives, and this, ultimately, is about making an investment in saving the lives of people.

Last Friday, when the Trump administration announced it was reducing

crucial funding for NIH grants, you are talking about our medical institutions that need this to build services and equipment and train the next generation of researchers.

For example, as I mentioned, Washington State University with avian flu, they actually help pay for backup generators. These generators keep the systems working in case of a power outage so the pathogens can't escape. So if you cut the institution and you cut the lab, who is going to pay for these overhead costs? Or will they have to cancel their research or stop training the PhD students?

So, this week, a court stepped in and blocked the NIH head count cuts for now, but believe me, people are afraid that their life's work will be gone.

At the University of Washington Medicine, they are testing treatments for kidney disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's, and pediatric cancer. So, if the so-called DOGE cap goes into place, these are programs that will see a shortfall.

They tell me they have to stop admitting new patients to clinical trials, that they will have to scale back. And we can't just start and stop medical research like a faucet. Once these people leave, the programs are stopped. It takes a long time to get them started. Once halted, the research data, the clinical trial, the patients, the laboratory, the equipment that led to those innovations will be lost.

Now, if you ask me, that is throwing taxpayer dollars away. When you have an opportunity to cure a disease that affects millions of people and can save taxpayers billions, but somebody is arbitrarily going to cut these NIH funds, thinking they are saving the American people? They are not saving them. They are causing harm.

Cutting NIH and scientific research funding have consequences for every State in this Union. North Carolina is home of the famous research triangle and receives about \$2.2 billion in NIH funding. Texas is home of Baylor College of Medicine and receives about \$1.85 billion in NIH funding.

As a country, we should be working together to do more research, create more jobs, and decide what are the life-saving science and medical innovations that we want to invest in and are represented in a budget process here in the U.S. Senate—not the arbitrary decisions of someone who hasn't even been elected to make these decisions.

But the risks don't stop at our medical labs. Republicans are proposing to cut \$2.3 trillion in Federal Medicaid funding so the administration can afford to lower taxes on some of the most extreme wealthy Americans.

More than 1.8 million Washingtonians are enrolled in Apple Health, Washington's Medicaid program. So that is one in six adults, two in five children, three in five nursing home residents, three in eight people with disabilities. I am not confident, Mr. President, that Mr. Kennedy under-

stands how critical this process is and the provisions of Medicaid are to people in my State.

We know that we had this debate before and only because a very small bipartisan group of Senators helped save Medicaid from a crazy block grant idea that would have taken a very big building block out of our healthcare delivery system. Thanks to all my colleagues on this side and those on that side who stood up for that and said block granting was the wrong idea.

Well, believe me, they are at it again. There are those who think to give the tax break to corporations, somehow you are going to get it out of the hide of these very individuals that are counting on Medicaid.

I do not believe Mr. Kennedy will stand up to President Trump and be an advocate for those who rely on Medicaid. I know my constituents know what is at stake with this vote, and they know that our healthcare delivery system is about science, it is about innovation, it is about making the investments to keep Americans healthy. I urge my colleagues to vote no on this nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the greatest threat to American prosperity is not food aid to kids in Sudan or a diverse workforce; the greatest threat to our country is the abuse of power by a small group of people—an unelected group of people—who happen to have a billion dollars.

Our Founding Fathers created a government with checks and balances, but they didn't anticipate a U.S. Congress—now currently under Republican control—that would voluntarily give away its constitutional authority. That is where we find ourselves, as hospitals and medical researchers in blue and red States are in chaos over the Trump administration's attempt to usurp Congress's power of the purse.

When Senate Republicans abandon another constitutional responsibility of advice and consent for Cabinet officials, we are presented with such things as the bizarre nomination of Robert Kennedy, Jr., to serve as Secretary of Health and Human Services.

It has been my honor to know members of the Kennedy family and particularly to serve with one of them, Teddy Kennedy. He used to sit right back there. He was an amazing man. He probably had more impact on the legislative agenda and the outcome of legislation than anybody I witnessed in the time I have been in the Senate. I counted him as a friend, and I still mourn his loss. But today we are considering a Kennedy that I don't believe is qualified to follow in his uncle's footsteps.

Health and Human Services is a life-and-death Department of government. Every day, Federal health officials decide whether to approve new medications after they have been proven—

clinically tested and proven to be safe and effective. We count on the HHS to initiate recalls of contaminated food. We count on that same Agency to investigate new therapies for cancer clinical trials. We count on HHS to alert doctors about an emergency disease outbreak. Think about the gravity of those situations and how much is vested in the Secretary of that critical Department.

In any of these tasks—critical, often historic tasks—Robert Kennedy, Jr., would find himself unqualified, unfit, and dangerous to lead the Department of Health and Human Services.

Mr. Kennedy masquerades as a crusader for healthy foods and someone who just wants to—"I just want to ask some questions. I just want to study the science."

America, the Senate, don't be fooled. Mr. Kennedy has spent the past 30 years ignoring science and lying to parents about vaccines, all the while enriching himself by the doubt he has created.

He declared:

I see somebody on a hiking trail carrying a little baby and I say to him, better not get that baby vaccinated.

Can you imagine that for a moment, that he would walk up to a person he didn't know and counsel them: Don't vaccinate your child.

Look at this quote. Does this sound like the kind of person you want to lead the premier health Agency of our Federal Government?

He states:

There's no vaccine that is safe and effective.

No vaccine safe and effective. And he wants to head the Health and Human Services Department?

The organization he founded sells newborn onesies that have printed on them "Unvaccinated, Unafraid." Another one says "No Vax, No Problem." To him, it is a novelty, a game that he can say these things about vaccines that literally have been proven over and over and over again to be safe and save lives.

During his confirmation hearing, Senator BILL CASSIDY of Louisiana, a Senator, of course, and a medical doctor who has the distinguished record of service to poor people in his State, practically begged Robert Kennedy, Jr., to state unequivocally that the hepatitis B and measles vaccines do not cause autism. Kennedy couldn't bring himself to do it.

When confronted during his hearings with false statements he has made linking vaccines to autism, he feigned ignorance to decades of research findings and suggested he just needed to be shown the data. Well, that data has been around for decades.

Mr. Kennedy approaches this job with bias—a deadly, dangerous bias—and he is unwilling to consider information that contradicts his preconceived conspiracies.

If Mr. Kennedy is confirmed, he won't be just speaking to one parent on a

hiking trail; he will be speaking to all American families from a podium with a U.S. Government seal on it. That is a terrifying prospect.

Since 1974, the measles vaccine has saved 94 million lives, and since its creation, the smallpox vaccine has saved 200 million lives—2 proven, successful vaccines, and we have to sell them to a man who wants to head the HHS and says that there is no vaccine that is safe and effective?

Measles is one of the most contagious pathogens on Earth. When I was a kid in the fifties going to school, it was common for kids to get measles. I had them. I stayed home from school a few days and usually got through it all after waiting at home for all those red spots to go away. Yet, with Mr. Kennedy's megaphone online, we are seeing the danger of conspiracy theories.

Last year, a record share of kindergartners across America had nonmedical exemption from vaccines. Right now, there is a measles outbreak tearing through Gaines County, TX. Seven kids are hospitalized—all unvaccinated. Gaines County has one of the highest rates in Texas of school-age children opting out of vaccines. Why are parents in that county in Texas and a few other counties foregoing lifesaving vaccines? Because of fraudsters like Mr. Kennedy.

What about polio? I know that issue personally. I see Senator KING on the floor. He remembers it as well. Since 1955, the polio vaccine has prevented 20 million people from becoming paralyzed and saved 1½ million lives. Most Americans are lucky never to have ever experienced the fear of polio. I remember, as a kid, it scared the hell out of us. A kid could go to school healthy and be paralyzed at dinnertime.

A constituent of mine, Mary Ellen from Union County, wrote to me. Mary Ellen said:

When I was in kindergarten, my best friend disappeared for weeks. When I asked about her, people shook their heads—saying polio. When she returned, she couldn't walk without heavy leg braces. . . . We could hear her cry and scream with pain.

I remember that era—iron lungs, leg braces, paralysis, and worse.

Had Mr. Kennedy been our Nation's Health Secretary at that time, would American families have access today to lifesaving measles and polio vaccines? I am afraid the answer is clearly no. This isn't speculation; look at the record.

Mr. Kennedy and his associates have filed petitions with the Food and Drug Administration to remove the COVID, hepatitis B, and polio vaccines from the market.

In 2019, Mr. Kennedy flew to Samoa during a measles outbreak to question whether the vaccines themselves were causing the illness. As a result of that, 83 people died in Samoa.

When asked by Senator WARREN, Mr. Kennedy said he would not do anything differently about that dangerous trip. Eighty-three people died as he spread those falsehoods about the vaccine.

Senator CASSIDY aptly wondered:

Does a 70-year-old man who spent decades criticizing vaccines and was financially vested in finding fault . . . can he change his [attitude]?

Mr. President, I am sorry, but we know the answer.

Listen, I understand we have a great health system in this country, but I also understand it is flawed in many ways. I spent years in my Senate and House career to lower drug prices, rein in Big Pharma's influence, and stop Big Tobacco from peddling poison to our kids. But just because he might talk about the right problems doesn't mean Mr. Kennedy has the right solutions. In fact, over 2 days of hearings, he did not offer a single concrete idea on how to improve the delivery of primary care or preventive healthcare services.

It was clear Mr. Kennedy didn't understand the difference between Medicaid and Medicare. Mr. President, I will tell you, that is an issue that you take up in Congress 101.

Nobody believes Kennedy will stand up to President Trump or Elon Musk on medical research.

I understand the urge to shake things up, to address failures in our healthcare system, but Mr. Kennedy brings an unacceptable prejudice that will only cause harm and be dangerous to American families.

Neil Steinberg writes for the Chicago Sun-Times. He wrote that when you are claiming you want to "study" the issue where the science is settled, that is code for dismissing facts that don't serve your personal bias.

I fear there is a sense that being an outsider is qualification enough, but how far could Senate Republicans be willing to go if they pursue that dangerous path? Make no mistake, if the political tables were turned and it were Democrats proposing this man for this job, he wouldn't get a single Republican vote in the Senate. He would be decried as a pro-choice, anti-vax, uninformed, conspiracy theorist who trades on his family name to peddle dangerous misinformation that benefits him financially. And guess what. This nominee is all of those things. But because he was nominated by President Trump and has the MAGA seal of approval, my Republican colleagues can't wait to march down and support his nomination.

Many of them secretly, privately, quietly know better. Some of them are doctors or parents themselves who trusted doctors to vaccinate their kids or people who spent their lives trying to really improve our health system. They know Mr. Kennedy is not the right choice for the job, and they know our children will suffer the most if he becomes HHS Secretary. I hope they will find the courage to join me and reject his nomination.

Let me add this point that is related to this issue, and I will make it brief. On Friday, the Trump administration issued an illegal order to impose an arbitrary cap of 15 percent on "indirect

costs" that the NIH pays to grantees for essential research expenses.

Without this funding for specialized equipment, data processing, safety materials, and the maintenance of labs, universities and hospitals nationwide will not be able to afford the technology that allows them to continue lifesaving research.

This is a critical moment in America's history. After the progress that we have made, after the leadership we have shown, are we going to, under this new President, turn our backs on medical research? God forbid. If you go through the misfortune of a terrible diagnosis for yourself or someone you love, you pray that you can then ask the doctor: Is there anything—a new medicine, a new cure, a new surgical procedure? And you are hoping that medical researchers lead that answer to yes that one moment in your life.

In 2017—the last time President Trump attempted to cut NIH funding—the now-House Appropriations Committee chair, TOM COLE of Oklahoma, called the proposal "arbitrary, unreasonable, and ultimately destructive of the research enterprise." Chairman COLE understood that cutting funding means clinical trials will be delayed, new breakthroughs in cures will be put off, and promising researchers will get discouraged and leave the field.

A constituent and doctor from Palos Heights, IL, wrote to me:

I care about this issue because I know new research on immunology kept my stage-4 cancer-patient wife alive for 10 years, enough to see our youngest son graduate from high school.

This sudden, indiscriminate cut to medical research violates Federal law, which blocks NIH from deviating from its current indirect cost policy.

Thankfully, my attorney general in Illinois, Kwame Raoul, and 21 other States filed a Federal lawsuit to temporarily halt this senseless cut.

Remember, tweets from Elon Musk forced a bipartisan pediatric cancer research bill to be cut from a government spending bill just a few weeks ago. Now Mr. Musk is at it again; only this time, he is targeting cancer, Alzheimer's, and diabetes. If Elon Musk were to get sick, I will bet the richest man in the world would find the doctor he wanted. I am sure he would. For the rest of us, for the parents facing a devastating diagnosis of someone we love, this is a cruel political decision.

A University of Chicago researcher put it this way:

This attack on the very structure of . . . academic research . . . is threatening a system that every other country in the world has tried to reproduce. . . . It seems spiteful and targeted at those of us who just want to contribute to a better society.

Mr. President, I don't know that this will continue to be a problem and challenge, but I promise you this: As long as I have the power to stand and speak out in favor of the National Institutes of Health, I am going to do it.

This country is a great country. It has greatness that includes medical research—maybe the best in the world.

Why in the world would we give up on that? And why would we choose someone so bizarre to head up the Health and Human Services Agency and trust with him life-or-death decisions? It is a bad choice.

I will be voting to oppose Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and doing everything in my power to restore the spending for medical research in America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. JUSTICE). The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. HICKENLOOPER. Mr. President, I appreciate what the good Senator from Illinois has gone through and enunciated in great clarity.

Our government plays a critical role in informing the public. The American people look to us for trust. They look to us for guidance during the roughest points of our history. They look to us for accurate, factual information so they can have the freedom to raise their families without fear and anxiety.

That trust is broken when partisan officials use their platforms to spread reckless and damaging information. They attempt to overwhelm Americans with views that push anti-science narratives or foreign propaganda often that threatens our national security.

You can't go onto social media anymore without running into a fake headline or some hyperbolic clamor with no source. I mean, for so many people, the more you see, the more you believe, and this leaves Americans dazed and confused, unsure of who to trust and where they can go to get accurate information.

Unfortunately, the new administration has shown a bias towards elevating people who peddle disinformation, spreading seemingly random falsehoods about our voting systems, marginalized groups, or our public health. This has real negative impacts on Americans.

Way back in 1980, I graduated with a master's in Earth sciences. I moved west to work as a geologist. Earth sciences is kind of low on the Pavlov pyramid of science, but I published peer-reviewed studies, and I have a reverence for the scientific process. I think I understand how it works, despite the fact that there are not that many of us left around here anymore. I will be the first to admit that science can sometimes surprise us. It is always evolving. It is why the entire field of science relies on constant evaluation and constant research to continue to make new discoveries or deepen our understanding of complex problems.

Leading with science helps us get the most accurate information we can. Yet the Trump administration's appetite for anti-scientific claims and disinformation is something that, in many ways, threatens all of us. It puts our country at risk.

This morning, the Senate confirmed Tulsi Gabbard as the Director of National Intelligence. I voted no on her confirmation. Ms. Gabbard has none of

the relevant qualifications or intelligence experience sufficient for this role. Officials from both sides of the aisle have raised concerns about her ability to provide the President with impartial analysis as the Nation's top intelligence officer.

Ms. Gabbard has frequently parroted Russian disinformation. She repeated Russia's erroneous justification for its brutal invasion of Ukraine. She criticized Kyiv's democratic government—a steadfast partner of the United States—and she spread, repeatedly, falsehoods about her own involvement in bioweapons research in Ukraine.

Let's be clear about what this means: An American adversary invades another democracy, and Ms. Gabbard actively pushes their narrative. Either she cannot distinguish fact from fiction or she intentionally chooses to promote false claims. Either scenario should be disqualifying for a Cabinet official, let alone one who is responsible for ensuring the President has accurate and timely intelligence.

As they say, "He who stands for nothing will fall for anything."

Regardless of her intentions or what she actually believes, her readiness to champion clear disinformation undermines our national security and puts American servicemembers at risk.

As the Director of National Intelligence, Ms. Gabbard will have full visibility into every threat that the military and civilian personnel who perform these vital missions in Colorado and across the country and around the world are working tirelessly to address. They need leaders—we need leaders—who base every assessment and decision on accurate intelligence, not propaganda, especially not propaganda from one of the most threatening rivals we have.

President Trump's nominee to the Department of Health and Human Services, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., is another clear example of someone who is willing to overlook facts and science when it is convenient. He has a wide following, and many people look to him for guidance and for leadership. In particular, his ideas of a healthier America appeal to many Coloradans. Indeed, they appeal to me as well.

But make no mistake: Our country can and should be healthier, and we all share a vested effort in that direction. There is a bipartisan appetite to get us there. We should provide better food options and keep unsafe chemicals out of the products that we eat, but we have to be able to do it in tandem with fact-based science and thoughtful policy to protect Americans and to keep them safe.

RFK, Jr., has shown a propensity for anti-scientific claims. One of his most anti-scientific claims is that autism is caused by childhood vaccines. This is a claim that has been spread through many communities for decades. It is all based on a single paper published back in 1998. That paper was retracted years ago, and there have been hundreds of

studies on the nonexistent link between autism and the measles vaccine ever since. They have all—I repeat—they have all had a zero connection between vaccines and the cause of autism. Let me be clear: Every single one found a zero connection. It is settled science.

Vaccines are not only extremely safe; they are extremely effective. Every year, they save millions of lives all around the globe. We have effectively eliminated horrible diseases like polio, and we are making considerable progress toward a vaccine for HIV and for AIDS. In the last hundred years, our country's average life expectancy has increased by 30 years, and 25 of those 30 years are largely attributed to vaccine adoption and clean drinking water. Vaccines not only save lives, but they also make lives healthier and happier, which is as they were intended.

Now, some of the damage from disinformation about vaccines is nearly impossible to undo. Why would anyone accept the results of one debunked paper rather than the conclusions of hundreds of studies that have been conducted since?

It is completely understandable for parents to have questions and concerns about vaccines that their children receive. I know I have as a parent. As a parent of two kids—one who just turned 2 years old—I understand the concern that families feel. We want to make sure that we are doing everything we can to keep our kids healthy and safe. We do the best we can with what we have to make them as healthy and happy as possible. People who peddle vaccine skepticism are preying upon parents' very rational fears to advance these conspiracy theories. Parents are trying their hardest to keep their kids safe and healthy, and it is irresponsible for people to plague them with pseudoscience and misinformation when the science has been settled on this for decades. The measles vaccine is safe and does not cause autism.

It is personal for me, too. My son Teddy—now in college—unfortunately, got pertussis, or whooping cough, when he was 4 months old—before he was able to finish his full vaccination schedule—after he interacted with an unvaccinated child. Because of how rare whooping cough is now, it took us a while to get the correct diagnosis.

Finally, when we got him into Children's Hospital, I remember staying up all night for 2 nights in a row to blast little puffs of oxygen into his coughing face—to snap him out of those coughs—about every 10 minutes and to prevent his oxygen blood levels from dropping too low. It is one of the most frightening experiences of my entire life.

Whooping cough—that disease—is rare because of the vaccine and because of the adoption of that vaccine. America was able to almost completely stamp it out of existence. If we backslide in the number of children getting vaccinated, stories like what happened

to my son Teddy are going to become more common and more severe.

When you consistently promote uncertainty in settled science, it begins to raise doubts about all science, and it slows our progress using science against the really big challenges, like a cure for cancer and vaccines for the next pandemic.

In President Trump's first full term—at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic—Operation Warp Speed helped bring vaccines to the public in record time. The National Institutes of Health estimate that Operation Warp Speed saved over 140,000 lives by speeding up the development of vaccines by more than 5 months. When the next pandemic comes along—it is not if; it is when—we are going to need a robust Federal response and preparedness plan. We need the ability to get to a vaccine down to 100 days. We need that plan to be guided by actual science. Otherwise, we obviously endanger the lives and health of all Americans.

The Department of Health and Human Services also oversees Federal medical research as Senator DURBIN pointed out. The research has unlocked groundbreaking achievements in public health and will continue to help us cure diseases and work toward solutions for a variety of illnesses. However, the White House announced late last week that they are slashing funding for the National Institutes of Health.

This will have devastating impacts on research projects in Colorado and across the United States, including places in Colorado like CU-Anschutz, Fort Lewis College, and National Jewish Health. Our Colorado institutions are at the forefront of medical research from everything from clinical trials for veterans who are struggling with PTSD to individuals with Down syndrome. These cuts for research institutions, rural hospitals, and our veterans will impact our most vulnerable communities—all this to give tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans.

Again, I am all for making government more efficient and smaller. If you want to seriously look at how we spend money and where we can cut actual fraud and waste and abuse, I am in. I am game. But I struggle to understand how stripping funding for cancer research or Head Start or hiring programs for law enforcement officers is wasteful. These cuts throughout our government are exaggerated by the extreme nominees who are really ill-equipped and ill-experienced to handle large governmental organizations.

The administration also continues to illegally dismantle Agencies without having congressional approval. They have attempted to freeze Federal funding—something the courts have halted but that the White House continues to pursue. Colorado and the American people are caught in their crosshairs.

I have committed to opposing nominees who pose a genuine threat to Colorado. We have also helped support law-

suits and oppose some of these Executive actions. I would be the first to admit our government isn't perfect. Government never will be. I would be the first to recognize that it takes all of our elected officials to do their duty for the American people and to be truthful and for our constituents to hold us accountable.

The American experiment in democratic government is just too important to confirm people who actively spread disinformation and refuse to follow science. It threatens Coloradans. It puts all of us at risk.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Mr. KING. Mr. President, I would like to begin my remarks this afternoon by talking a little bit about the Constitution.

I spent some time last week talking about the Constitution and our failure to observe that the constitutional, fundamental structure of the division of power between the Congress and the Executive is being violated and that Congress is allowing it to happen.

Another provision of the Constitution is the provision in article I about advice and consent. It is a fundamental check and balance built into the Constitution, by the Framers, for a reason. It wasn't a throwaway line or a few sentences that were put in because they wanted to fill the paragraph out. Again, it is part of the structure that was designed to protect us from tyranny. The structure involved the division of power, the separation of power, because the Framers knew, if all power was concentrated in a single individual or a single institution, that that institution or that individual would inevitably abuse our people. That is human nature. That is 1,000 years of human nature. All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. So the advice and consent provision was in the Constitution for a reason. It was in there for a reason in order to provide a check on the Executive and the people who were going to be put in charge of running the administration.

By the way, I want to stop for a minute and focus on the word "administration" and the word "Executive" because it really goes to the discussion we are having in this country right now about how our government is supposed to work.

The "Executive" comes from the word "execute," and the word "execute" means "to put into action." It doesn't mean to initiate the action. It means to put it into action. It is the same for the word "administration." There is a reason we call it the administration. They are to administer the laws. In fact, the obligation on the President in article II is to see that the laws are faithfully executed. It does not give the President the power to ignore laws or to decide which laws he or she thinks are OK; to ignore the responsibility and constitutional authority of the Congress to define spending.

It does not give the President that power; although the fellow we approved for the Office of Management and Budget last week thinks he has that power or this President or any President has that power. That is absolutely antithetical to the whole concept of the Constitution as established by the Framers.

So "administration" means administer the laws. "Executive" means execute the laws, not make them. We make the laws here, and the administration is to faithfully execute those laws.

Now, let's talk about "advice and consent." "Advice and consent" means we have a responsibility—a constitutional responsibility—to consider each of the President's nominees for these important jobs. This isn't something that we may do or occasionally do; this is a fundamental part of our job.

We take an oath when we come here to defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

I think it is interesting. They knew in 1787 that there was a potential for domestic enemies of the Constitution.

So we have an obligation to take "advice and consent" seriously.

Now, I am a former Governor, as is the Presiding Officer. And as a former executive, I believe the executive should have the ability to choose the team that they want, to choose their advisers, to choose the people who they will work with, with some limitations. In other words, I start with the premise that the person elected should—perhaps, "get the benefit of the doubt" is a little too strong. But I start with the premise that they were elected, and they should be able to choose the team that they are going to be working with.

However, I think there are two qualifications. And, by the way, this has been my stated position on this subject since I entered the Senate. We should give the benefit of the doubt to the Executive. However, the nominee must be manifestly qualified and not hostile to the mission of the Agency to which they have been appointed—two criteria, two criteria that, for me, give life to the idea of "advice and consent."

OK. Let's talk about Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. He, unfortunately, checks both of the boxes as to being disqualified. No. 1, he is not remotely qualified to run an organization of the magnitude of HHS. He has no background in management, no experience in running anything remotely like the scope and scale of the Department of Health and Human Services, no executive experience in that sense.

That is No. 1: Is he qualified? No, he is grossly unqualified.

But the second box is my criteria: Is he hostile to the mission of the Agency? And if the mission of the Agency, HHS, is to protect the health of the American people, I would argue he is manifestly hostile to that mission.

There has been a lot of discussion here today, and I think it is interesting. I don't know how this debate is

going. I haven't heard too many people come up on the floor and support this nominee and tell us why he should be approved, because do you know what? If this were a secret ballot, this man wouldn't get 20 votes. Everybody in this body knows he is not qualified. Everybody in this body knows he has no business anywhere near this position. But here we are; we are going to take a vote. Unfortunately, it will probably be on a party-line basis.

But let me focus on just one little piece. On January 29, barely a week ago, before the Senate Finance Committee, here is what Mr. Kennedy said:

News reports have claimed that I am anti-vaccine or anti-industry. I am neither. I am pro-safety. All of my kids are vaccinated.

I bet that came as news to a lot of the people he has been leading astray over the last 25 or 30 years.

All of my kids are vaccinated, and I believe vaccines have a critical role in healthcare.

I am reminded of Saul on the road to Damascus—a miraculous conversion. A bright light was shown, and, suddenly, the scales fell from his eyes in his confirmation hearing.

Let's go back, a little over a year, to July 6, 2023. This is a quote—a direct quote:

There is no vaccine that is safe and effective.

He later said on the podcast:

Vaccines are inherently unsafe.

This man shouldn't be confirmed because he told the committee and the Senate something diametrically opposed to the position he has taken the last 30 years, all of his adult life.

Maya Angelou said if somebody tells you who they are, you should believe them. And he has told us repeatedly.

And he has acted on his vaccine skepticism. This isn't something that was rumbling around in his head. He has traveled the world. He has written articles. He has gone on podcasts. He has gone on TV. And he has discouraged people from being vaccinated. And now he has this miraculous conversion 10 days ago:

All my kids are vaccinated, and I believe vaccines have a critical role in healthcare.

The same thing during COVID—he said:

It is criminal medical malpractice to give a child one of these vaccines.

Wow, criminal malpractice.

And, of course, as has been discussed, he said:

I do believe that autism does come from vaccines.

In July of 2023, there was one study in England—I think it was in 1998—that purported to show a tenuous connection between vaccines and autism. I am reasonably confident that one of the authors of that study recanted it. It was withdrawn, and it has been debunked over and over and over again. But this man has been peddling this lie for 20 years. Who knows how many parents have fallen for that, and who knows how children have paid the price.

Just to talk about vaccines, at one point during the pandemic, there was a survey in July of 2021. Remember, that was the height of it. They surveyed 50 hospitals in 17 States. Ninety-four percent of the patients hospitalized in July of 2021 were unvaccinated. What does that tell you? Vaccinations worked, and people who were unvaccinated were at an enormously higher risk—94 percent of the people were unvaccinated.

In addition to the vaccination issue, this man doesn't respect the FDA, the Agency that was put in place to protect our health, to regulate us, to be sure that we are getting safe medications, to deal with some of the awful problems of the potential of harmful medications literally getting into America's bloodstream.

In December of 2024, barely 2 months ago, he said he would fire officials at the FDA. And in October 2024, he said on X:

FDA's war on public health is about to end. If you work for the FDA and are part of this corrupt system, I have two messages for you . . . Preserve your records, and . . . pack your bags.

He didn't say a certain office in the FDA or a certain part of the FDA or maybe there was one provision or part that he didn't think was helpful. He said: "If you work for the FDA"—that is everybody—"preserve your records, and . . . Pack your bags."

This man is not only unqualified; he is anti-qualified. He is a danger.

We have physicians in the Senate. I believe that the Hippocratic Oath, "Do no harm," should apply to Senate votes. You should not be voting for somebody who you know is going to do harm to the public health.

So this is really a kind of surreal debate because everybody in this Chamber knows this man should not be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Now, I want to end with a personal story. One of the few advantages of being older is that you have a long memory. In 1952, I was entering the third grade at MacArthur School in Alexandria, VA, and in my class in the third grade was a kid named Butch. He was horribly twisted into a wheelchair. I don't think I had ever seen a wheelchair when I was going into the third grade, but he was there.

And here it is—I am not even going to say how many years later, but I can close my eyes and see Butch in that chair. Polio was what he had. He was in pain daily. He could barely make himself understood. His arms were crossed. His legs were bent grotesquely in the wheelchair. And 3 years later, the Salk vaccine began what turned out to be the elimination of polio.

Where would we be as a country if this man had been the head of—at that time, it was HEW—and somehow put a stop to this vaccine, which I believe he has said even the polio vaccine should be rescinded, which has saved millions of lives around the world. Where would we be?

I can't escape the memory of that boy in that wheelchair. I can't escape the memory of my parents not letting me go to the public swimming pool because of the fear of polio, not being able to go out and play in the summer in Virginia because of the fear of polio that stalked the land.

The former Republican leader was a victim of polio. The former President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was a victim of polio. And it was the vaccine that ended it.

I hope this place comes to its senses and rejects this surreal nomination. It would be hard to find someone less qualified to serve in this position. I believe it will lead to damage to our country, to our health, to our children.

I urge my colleagues to vote no. If you vote yes, you will regret it.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. SMITH. Mr. President, I want to just, first, comment on how much I appreciated the comments of my colleague from Maine, Senator KING—both in your elucidation of the deep challenges of the Robert Kennedy, Jr., nomination but also your close look at what the difference is between the legislative branch and the executive branch, and the role that we have in this body to provide advice and consent.

And I appreciated what you were saying about kind of what your North Star is when you look at these nominations.

I would say I agree with you that I do believe that incoming Presidents should be able to surround themselves with people whom they trust, and that, of course, we may strongly disagree with the President; however, he has the right to have people around him who agree with him.

But I think that there is something that you said, Senator KING, that was extremely important. I also look at these nominations in terms of whether I believe they have the base-level qualifications to do the job. And then the second thing I ask myself is, Can I trust these individuals? Can I trust Robert Kennedy to follow the law?

I mean, that is fundamentally what their responsibility is—to, certainly, be loyal to the person who put them in that role, but also, at a base level, that they are going to follow the law.

So, Mr. President, I rise today to highlight what I consider to be the threat of Robert F. Kennedy, the threat that he poses to Americans' health and safety and well-being.

In fact, I have concluded—I have talked with him. I have listened to him. I have asked him questions, both in a private setting and also in committee. And I have read his words and his history. I can only conclude that he cannot be trusted with this important job; that I cannot trust him to follow the laws of this land.

I believe that Mr. Kennedy is wholly unqualified for the position of Secretary of Health and Human Services,

and that he is unprepared to lead. And I think that he cannot be trusted with the health and the well-being of Americans, particularly in this moment.

Now, if you are listening to this, and you don't really know that much about the Department of Health and Human Services, you have got a busy life, you are trying to figure out how to afford your life and how to kind of hold it together in what is a very busy and complicated world, I want to just be clear about what I think Mr. Kennedy's confirmation would mean for Minnesota families. If he is allowed to become Secretary, I have concluded that your family will be less safe, that your loved ones will be more likely to get sick, and that you and the people you care about will be less likely to get the care you need.

As I have thought about this, what I find most disqualifying about Mr. Kennedy is how he has basically made his career—he has built a career around saying what he needs to say in order to get attention, and by getting attention, he is making money. I think it is just important to understand this. This is whether he is talking about vaccines or infectious diseases, whether he is talking about anything.

So you walk away from talking with this individual not entirely sure what it is that he believes because he does seem willing to say nearly anything to nearly everybody without actually considering what impact his words have on the lives of real people, whether he is talking about reproductive freedom, whether he is talking about mental health care, whether he is talking about infectious diseases, whether he is talking about vaccines.

So let's focus a bit on the question of vaccines because I think this is the thing that has gotten the most attention—and rightly so.

In decades of public appearances, as well as in our one-on-one meeting—the one-on-one meetings that I had with him—as well as when he talked about this in front of the Finance Committee, Mr. Kennedy has continued to promote harmful and dangerous information—information that if people followed and they paid attention to him and they did what he suggested, it could do real harm to their families; it could hurt them.

If you think about vaccines, this is his long and very public record of denying the safety and the efficacy of vaccines. In fact, he has spent almost the last two decades of his life promoting these harmful and false theories that vaccines will cause autism and that they are otherwise unsafe.

As an example, in 2021, he proudly described stopping strangers out on hikes and telling them not to vaccinate their babies. Can you imagine that? You are out walking around, and Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., comes up to you—a man of stature and power—and says: Don't vaccinate your children.

Those words have impact.

During a podcast interview in July of 2023, Mr. Kennedy said—and I believe Senator KING quoted this as well:

There's no vaccine that is safe and effective.

So, OK, just think about that. He is saying: Don't pay any attention to the science. Don't pay any attention to the experts. I am going to tell you that there is no vaccine that is safe and effective.

Those words have consequences.

The online store is another example. Mr. Kennedy's organization, the Children's Health Defense—there is an online store. You can all go on and check it out. You will find there that they are still selling little baby onesies and T-shirts for little children that have messages on them like “Unvaccinated, Unafraid.”

Now, of course, here we are on the verge of a vote to decide whether the U.S. Senate is going to confirm Mr. Kennedy, and, of course, now he is denying all of that. He is distancing himself from all of these past statements. But you can't run away from your words, certainly in this day and age—and, I would argue, in any day and age. Those words are out there. You said them. They are on the record. They are on video. And it matters what the Secretary of Health and Human Services says, what he says about these things, and, of course, it matters what he doesn't say as well. Words have real consequences.

Just the mere fact of his presence being as the head of this Agency, just the fact that he sits there is going to be a factor that will cause some people not to know whether they can trust vaccines. He is in a position of power and authority. He has a high and loud bully pulpit—an individual who has told Americans, both when he was out on hikes, stopping them as they are walking by, and on every media megaphone that he could find, that vaccines are neither safe nor effective. Yet here he is about to assume, unless my colleagues come to their senses, this most highest, you could argue, public health job that affects the health of all of our families. This is an unbelievable and an unacceptable risk to the health and safety of Americans.

I also wanted to highlight for my colleagues an exchange that I had with Mr. Kennedy when he came before the Finance Committee, where I serve. I wanted to ask him about a statement that he had made about Americans and antidepressants. When I probed him on this, I confronted him with some things he had said in the past about antidepressants. Basically, he attributed a connection between people who are using antidepressants and school shootings. I asked him about that, and I asked him whether he thought that folks who take antidepressants are dangerous or not. He refused to even say that Americans who take antidepressants are not dangerous. He could not even get those words out of his mouth. In fact, he doubled down on

his claims that antidepressants do cause school shootings, and he claimed that this is an area that needs to be studied and that he knows people who have had “a much worse time getting off of SSRIs than they have getting off heroin.”

Now, this is a typical strategy that I saw Mr. Kennedy take with many of our colleagues both on the HELP Committee and on the Finance Committee. When confronted with the facts and asked whether he believed the science and the facts, he would always say some version of “Show me the data; show me the information” even when the research is settled, the data is settled.

Here, let me come to this question about whether or not antidepressants are dangerous and are somehow a contributor to school shootings, which is an outrageous thing to say.

There is a study in 2019 that was published in the *Journal of Behavioral Science and Law*, and it says it appears that “most school shooters weren't treated with psychotropic medication before their attacks. Even when they were, no direct or causal association was found.”

I was stunned when Mr. Kennedy again sort of said “Well, I don't believe that research” or “I need to see other data; we need to look at this.” Of course, he is not willing to accept the facts and the science. He is not willing to do that.

I am simply not willing to trust Mr. Kennedy when it comes to ensuring that your children, your loved ones, the folks that you care about in your lives, are going to actually have access to the mental health treatments they need to live their lives as productively as they possibly can.

It also, I think, is worth noting that these comments that Mr. Kennedy is making linking antidepressants to school shootings—what it does, of course, is it perpetuates the stigma that so many Americans who struggle with mental illness, mental health—so many of those Americans struggle with the stigma, and they already feel that, and yet here is potentially the next head of Health and Human Services who is perpetuating this stigma in a very real way.

I have seen this in my own life. I have seen people who have been bowed down by this feeling that they can't talk about their challenges with their mental health because people are going to think less of them. It is a stigma that I have spent my time in the Senate working in a bipartisan way to try to break down. So to see it perpetuated in this way by Mr. Kennedy is just such a clear reason why he cannot be trusted.

The rigorous, peer-reviewed research on SSRIs—a common form of antidepressant—is the science Mr. Kennedy has willingly chosen to ignore, but it is not the only science he has willfully chosen to ignore. Mr. Kennedy said during his confirmation hearings

that if President Trump directed him to go after mifepristone—one of the key drugs that is used in medication abortion—he would do whatever the President ordered, even though this is a medication that has been proven safe and effective for more than two decades. Yet Mr. Kennedy said that he would follow the guidance of the President and not the law when it comes to the safety of mifepristone.

In fact, as my colleague Senator HASSAN made so abundantly clear in the committee, over 40 safety studies have demonstrated what Mr. Kennedy was not willing to see, which is that there is clear evidence that this medication is safe.

On reproductive freedom, Mr. Kennedy has proven himself wholly untrustworthy, repeatedly flip-flopping on his position depending on whom he is talking to. Now, this is something that many of us have seen in our lives—a person who will say one thing to one person and another thing to another person, all with the goal, it seems, of winning friends and influencing people, but this is not the kind of character you want to see in this most important job at the Federal Government, leading the Department of Health and Human Services.

Here is just a bit of an example of how this has played out with Mr. Kennedy on the issue of reproductive freedom and abortion rights. On the morning of August 13, 2023, Mr. Kennedy said:

I believe a decision to abort a child should be up to the woman during the first three months of life.

Now, people may agree or disagree with this view, but it is clear what he is saying here.

The very same day, his campaign followed up by saying that his position on abortion is that it is always the woman's right to choose and that he does not support legislation banning abortion.

So on the same day, two different positions.

Then, on May 19, 2024, a few months later, in a podcast interview, he said:

I wouldn't leave it up to the States—

This is a quote.

I wouldn't leave it up to the States. I believe that we should leave it up to the woman—

We shouldn't have government involved.

—even if it's full-term.

OK. So there is a completely different view.

Then the very next day, he tweeted:

Abortion should be legal up to a certain number of weeks, and restricted thereafter.

Mr. Kennedy seems to change his mind so often that we don't know what he actually thinks, what he actually stands for. But when you are the Secretary of Health and Human Services, you have to stand up for something. You have to stand up for the laws of the land.

What is clear through all of this back-and-forth—it is clear to me—is

that the Trump administration and Mr. Kennedy are more than willing to restrict or even ban access to medication abortion despite the fact that they have been determined to be safe and effective and that Mr. Kennedy and President Trump are, in fact, dangerous to a woman's access to medication abortion.

I want people just to think about this for a minute. If you live in a State like mine, in Minnesota, where the State has determined that abortion should be accessible, that this is a decision that is up for people to be able to make on their own without government interference—and roughly 60 percent, maybe a bit more now, of abortions are done through medication abortion. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and Donald Trump are going to affect your rights in Minnesota if they take away the right to mifepristone just as much as they affect the rights of somebody who is living in Texas or any of our States.

Mr. President, I want to change the topic to discuss a bit the question of infectious diseases and how Mr. Kennedy has taken similarly unfounded positions—positions that are not based on the science at all.

On infectious diseases, he has taken a position that I think could put Minnesota families at risk. Here is an example of that. At a Children's Health Defense conference in November of 2023—this is the anti-vax organization that Mr. Kennedy led for the last 7 years—Mr. Kennedy said that he is “gonna say to the NIH scientists, God bless you all. Thank you for public service. We're going to give infectious disease a break for about eight years.”

Now, Mr. Kennedy and President Trump may want to give infectious diseases a break for the next 8 years, but I am pretty sure that infectious diseases are not going to give the United States of America a break for the next 8 years.

Here is a classic example of that. Across the country, we are facing a very real public health threat from avian flu. In Minnesota, farmers and producers know this better than anywhere, although it is certainly not affecting only Minnesota; it is affecting many of our States. This is an infectious disease that is infecting flocks of wild birds and also domesticated poultry. Nearly 150 million chickens across the United States have had to be culled, had to be euthanized, to prevent the spread of the virus. In the last year, bird flu has jumped from poultry to livestock, often to dairy cows, and then from livestock to humans—often, the individuals that are working in livestock operations. So this is something we have to take seriously.

This is important for us to pay attention to. We need surveillance. We need to be working on treatments. We need to be evaluating whether we need to be finding a pathway potentially to some sort of a vaccine.

Avian flu is not going to take an 8-year break. It is already infecting

chickens and livestock, and it is already infecting Americans.

And I know that in Minnesota, people want somebody leading the Department of Health and Human Services who is paying attention to this and wants to be on top of this.

You know, one of the things that is sort of incredible, when you dive into the things that Mr. Kennedy has written, is that it is not even really clear if Mr. Kennedy believes that germs cause disease.

I mean, if you read his words on this, you come away with a very concerning perspective. For six pages in one of his recent books, just as an example, he extols the virtue of something called the miasma theory while simultaneously casting doubt on the basic and well-accepted scientific evidence that germs cause disease.

You know, Mr. Kennedy doesn't even really describe this miasma theory correctly, but he most certainly doesn't accurately represent germ theory, which is the basic understandable concept that medical students are introduced to at the very beginning of their medical education that germs, viruses, bacteria are the cause of many, many human illnesses.

You know, and this is the kind of stuff that if it were coming from the Secretary of Health and Human Services, people are going to listen to this. And I just, like, think about the chilling effects that this could have on the healthcare that people are able to seek and receive, particularly if Mr. Kennedy is going to be dialing back or stopping the research on infectious diseases that is the lifeblood of the United States public health work that we do.

At the Finance Committee and then the next day at the HELP Committee, my colleagues and I gave Mr. Kennedy opportunity after opportunity to dispel the false and misleading claim he has spread for decades and to distance himself from these past positions. And we gave him the chance to tell Americans that he would keep them and their children safe and that he wouldn't threaten their access to treatments or to cures or to care and that he believed the research that is out there and accessible to anybody and everybody who wants to see it—the research that is taught at medical schools, the research that is followed by National Institutes of Health, and he couldn't do it. He couldn't just say that vaccines don't cause autism. He couldn't just tell us that antidepressants don't cause school shootings.

He couldn't just tell us that he will make sure that America's health insurance is protected. I mean, he could barely—in his conversations and the questions that he was asked, he could barely articulate that he understood the difference between Medicare and Medicaid. Instead, what happened is that Mr. Kennedy repeatedly talked about following the good science, the science that is good. But the science that he relies on is not good.

And in so many circumstances, he quotes science or studies that have been disproven. The studies that he has referenced have been withdrawn, or they don't say what he claims or purports to say that they do.

Most of all, what happens is that this has the potential to hold our researchers and our scientific community back from making the real progress that we need to make when it comes to medicine and disease and treating ailments.

Think about the progress that we could one day make to help cure cancer, to prevent Alzheimer's. If we have to revisit the history, the record of science, because Mr. Kennedy says that he doesn't think it shows what everybody else thinks it shows, think about how that is going to set us back, how that is going to keep us from moving forward to address the real health challenges of today and tomorrow.

Think about what it might have meant if Mr. Kennedy had led the Department of Health and Human Services when we were in the midst of Operation Warp Speed and we were doing everything that we possibly could to get a vaccine out to Americans and the world to stop the millions of deaths that were happening because of the COVID-19 virus.

What would have happened if Mr. Kennedy, sitting in that position of authority, had said: I don't believe the science; I think we need to do more. I don't think any vaccine is safe and effective; and, therefore, I want to call this vaccine back.

And, in fact, that is what Mr. Kennedy did. He submitted a call to the Department of Health and Human Services in the early days of the vaccine saying that he thought that it should be pulled back from the market.

Think about what impact that could have had on all of our families if he had been in a position of authority and had been able to accomplish that. Over and over again, when he is faced with the actual science—for example, on the science that proves that SSRIs are not associated with school shootings, that vaccines do not cause autism, that germs do cause illnesses—he has refused to accept it, and he has doubled down on his dangerous beliefs.

So this is concerning when it is an individual who is speaking on a podcast, but it could be a matter of life or death when it is the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. As I think about what I said at the beginning of my remarks about my strong belief that my job as Senator is to assess whether I can trust somebody in this role, can I trust them to follow the law? Can I trust this individual to protect the health and well-being of the people in my State and the people around the country? The answer is clearly, no, this is an individual who cannot be trusted.

At the heart of this nomination, of course—the heart of the work of the Department of Health and Human Services—is America's health and

healthcare. And it is clear to me that Mr. Kennedy has made it clear that he will enable the Trump and Musk agenda of chaos, that he will enable what they are doing not to execute the laws of this country, which is their constitutional responsibility, but to attempt to make the laws of this country.

And, you know, we can see this during his confirmation hearings. Repeatedly during his confirmation hearings, Mr. Kennedy said that he would follow Mr. Trump's directives.

Now, I am going to be clear about this, I understand that it is the job of any Cabinet official to follow the policies of the individual who has put them there, but not if those policies break the laws of the United States of America.

Department heads, Cabinet heads, the head of the Department of Health and Human Services is required to execute the law, not to execute the will of the President—because the President is a President; he is not a king.

What I am convinced of at this stage is as we see what, I believe, is a massive power grab by Donald Trump and Elon Musk to not just execute the laws but to make the laws, that Mr. Kennedy would be a part of that process, that he would be an enabler of that power grab that we see happening all over the country. And that is another reason why I cannot trust him.

I want to take a look for a minute at the directives that President Trump has put out already. Let's take a look at these—these directives of stopping lawfully executed payments to healthcare organizations that have been made following the will of Congress, the people who are supposed to be making the laws in this country.

I heard a lot about this from Minnesota, huge amounts of concern reflected back to me in my office about what is actually happening with the President's directives, basically directing to withhold funding that Congress has authorized.

I heard from Minnesota's community health centers that they were going to begin doing layoffs because of this Federal funding freeze—basically, a massive cut that they are experiencing. You know, community health centers are all over the country, and in my home State of Minnesota, they are the place that individuals can go to get basic, preventative healthcare. It is a very important part of our healthcare network, and yet many of these have come to me and said that they are basically going to be laying off providers and other folks who are providing direct care to patients.

One community health center's CEO in greater Minnesota, outside of the metro area, said that it was the worst day in his 38-year career when he got word of this freeze.

Now, I understand that this freeze has been unfrozen for now, at least in some cases—though, in other cases it seems like it is back on again. In fact,

I hear repeatedly that it is off and on and off and on in this sort of chaotic and confusing dance that they have started.

But these clinics are still facing real challenges about getting access to their Federal funding, and this is threatening their operations. Imagine if you were running a—like a small bootstrap and, you know, small little health center and every day you are just trying to make payroll. You don't have millions of dollars sitting in your bank account waiting for a rainy day. Every day is a rainy day, and every day you are just trying to make it work. And very suddenly, one of your most important ways of paying to provide healthcare to an individual has just evaporated overnight.

So then what happens—because people still get sick, people still need healthcare, even if they are unable to get it at a community health center. So what do they do?

Think about this, right now, in Minnesota—it is probably the same in West Virginia and other parts of the country—Minnesota emergency rooms are packed full of people who have the flu or RSV or norovirus. They go to the emergency rooms. You want to go to the emergency room when you really, really need emergency care. You go to a community health center when you need to be able to get access to urgent care but the care that you need right now. And what is happening is that because there are a lot of illnesses, people are getting sick in the wintertime, it is like 20 below in Minnesota right now, if they can't get their primary care in a doctor's office, in a clinic, they are going to end up in the ER.

And then what happens to all the rest of us who really might need emergency care? The ER is jammed to overflowing. There is no space. You have to wait 5 hours to get the care that you need. That is what is happening with this funding that is being put in jeopardy. That means that community health centers might not be able to help the patients that they typically help. And I am not talking about a small number of people here. That is 170,000 people in Minnesota who rely on community health centers.

And what is going to happen, those folks are going to end up in emergency rooms, and that is going to increase wait times, and it is going to stress the capacity of hospitals to provide care that people need.

President Trump did this. Robert F. Kennedy, if he were head of Health and Human Services, I have no reason to trust that he would stop this. In fact, I believe the opposite, I believe he would enable it. And this is why I think his nomination will end up making all of us less healthy and less safe and less secure.

President Trump, in another example, unlawfully cut National Institutes of Health grant funding earlier this week. This amounts to millions of dollars that support lifesaving research

into Alzheimer's and cancer and Parkinson's disease, and I am just talking about in Minnesota there.

This was retroactive; it happened overnight. Hospitals are left struggling. Big research hospitals like the University of Minnesota and the Mayo Clinic are suddenly looking at massive cuts to their research.

They have trials for important, you know, treatments and cures for serious diseases that are suddenly thrown into chaos, and you have individuals who are part of those trials who are hopeful that they are going to be getting—they are hopeful that, in some way, that this is going to help them to find a cure for what disease is ailing them.

And with this cut to NIH funding, overnight massive cuts, what does that mean for people's health and safety and security? It means people are less well-off. National Institutes of Health is under the umbrella of the Department of Health and Human Services, the organization that Mr. Kennedy is asking Congress to provide advice and consent on.

Again, I have no confidence. In fact, I am sure that Mr. Kennedy would be an enabler to President Trump's power grab here and his undermining, along with Elon Musk, his undermining of this extremely important research that helps us be healthy, helps us find the treatments and the cures for the diseases that are a threat to all of us.

So I see my colleague from Massachusetts is here. I know she has an important perspective on this, with Massachusetts being another—as is Minnesota—another center of research and education and medical education, and I suspect that we agree with one another when it comes to the threat that Robert F. Kennedy poses to all of our health and well-being.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I want to say thanks to the Senator from Minnesota for her leadership on this point. I know that great research institutions in Minnesota that count on her support are out there fighting, thanks to Donald Trump, as they are in Massachusetts—and people all around this country who rely on those research institutions, who are looking for those cures, for those better treatments, for those opportunities in their lives that, right now, Donald Trump and his co-President Elon Musk seem to want to cut off.

So we will stay in this fight. We will indeed.

I am here today because Americans didn't vote to bring back measles. Americans didn't vote to bring back polio. Americans didn't vote to bring back dangerous diseases that we thought we had wiped out decades ago. Americans didn't vote to get rid of critical vaccines that we know—based on science—we know save lives.

But that is what Robert Kennedy, Jr.'s vision would mean for Americans.

That is the vision that Donald Trump will empower him to carry out.

Kennedy not only worked to undercut vaccines at home and abroad; he has made a lot of money doing it. In fact, Kennedy has made millions off of peddling harmful conspiracy theories that hurt real people. He opposed the lifesaving COVID vaccine just 6 months into the pandemic, and he set himself up so that he and his family could make millions more from putting Americans' health at risk.

One thing is very clear: We cannot trust Robert Kennedy to make healthcare decisions that will affect every person in this country.

Right now, millions of Americans are sitting down for dinner with their kids, and I hope we just think for a minute about what RFK, Jr.'s plans would mean for them.

Will their teeth decay because Kennedy took fluoride out of the water based on some conspiracy theory? Will they have to worry about getting measles at school because Kennedy is spreading anti-vax conspiracies on government letterhead? Will parents have to risk their kids getting polio and maybe dying by sending them to daycare because Kennedy used his HHS rules to open the door to a flood of bogus lawsuits that force manufacturers to pull the vaccines?

Look, here is the thing: Robert Kennedy has spent years on an anti-vaccine crusade, spreading baseless conspiracy theories under the guise of protecting children. So we don't need to guess the level of harm he will cause. His past already tells us everything we need to know.

In July 2018, two children died immediately after receiving a measles vaccine that nurses had incorrectly mixed with a muscle relaxant. Within weeks, the Samoan Health Ministry publicly confirmed the nursing error and charged the nurses with manslaughter.

Nevertheless, leading anti-vaccine groups—including Kennedy's own organization, Children's Health Defense—exploited public fears to question the reports and spread baseless claims.

On August 5, 2018, Kennedy's organization, Children's Health Defense, posted on Facebook—and I will quote the post:

Were these once-healthy children the only two to receive MMR that day? If not, why were they the only ones to die? Research needs to determine susceptibility so that no child is ever injured.

Del Bigtree, Kennedy's partner and former campaign manager, also released a video linking the tragedy to false claims about measles and telling his followers to "share it with everyone you know. This is how we are changing the world."

Now, amidst public distrust and a paused vaccine program in Samoa, the vaccination rates plummeted. About 10 months later, once the Samoan Government had finally stood up against the disinformation and resumed the vaccine program, Kennedy visited the

island to meet with the Prime Minister.

Later, recognizing the blowback that comes with how much went wrong when a conspiracy theory cost people their lives, Kennedy has since denied that his visit had anything to do with vaccines and said that anything suggesting otherwise was "an industry propaganda trope"—in other words, totally false—"an industry propaganda trope." Kennedy lied.

A blog post that Kennedy himself wrote in 2021 admits that he went to Samoa to meet with the Prime Minister, who wanted to discuss the possibility of "measur[ing] health outcomes following the 'natural experiment' created by the nation's respite from vaccines."

Think about what that means. Another way to say it is that Kennedy was interested in taking advantage of how the vaccination rate had plummeted—caused by misinformation—so that they could conduct uncontrolled trials on whether unvaccinated kids were healthier than vaccinated kids, a conspiracy theory that he had widely spread.

You see, at the time, one of his traveling partners was working on a similar study with two anti-vaccine activists, which was ultimately retracted, following an investigation that "raised several methodological issues and confirmed that the conclusions were not supported by strong scientific data."

Now there is no surprise here. The Prime Minister of Samoa declined Kennedy's outrageous proposal. He didn't want his country to be Kennedy's guinea pig. He didn't want unvaccinated children to be studied to see what happened to them when measles or other diseases broke out.

But that didn't stop Kennedy from spreading his message. On this trip to Samoa, he met with various anti-vaccine influencers, one of whom said the meeting was "profoundly monumental for the movement."

A few months after Kennedy left, in October 2019, the vaccination rate in Samoa hit a historic low of 31 percent, down from 74 percent the prior year. And, no surprise, a massive measles outbreak erupted.

So here is Kennedy telling us now: No, no, he had nothing—nothing—to do with this. His trip to Samoa had nothing to do with the measles vaccine, and calling any claim "industry propaganda trope," and yet he himself posted a blog about meeting with the Prime Minister and talking about a study to measure health outcomes following a natural experiment of studying children, some with no vaccination and some that were vaccinated.

And the anti-vax groups he met with talked about how profoundly important it is. Then Mr. Kennedy leaves. Vaccination rates drop down to 31 percent.

The measles outbreak was truly tragic. In total, more than 70 children died,

right up until a door-to-door vaccination campaign brought the disaster to an end.

As HHS Secretary, Kennedy would be responsible for whether we keep our children vaccinated or subject them to, in his word, the same “natural experiment” that he was interested in testing in Samoa. Is that really what we want for our kids? Is that what we want for our elderly parents? That is a living nightmare, and it could truly be our reality with Kennedy heading up the Department of Health and Human Services.

And all the while that this is going on, while Kennedy is promoting this anti-vax theory, he and his family are profiting off the plan.

Now, I have been sounding the alarm about Kennedy since the minute Donald Trump announced that he would nominate him for HHS Secretary. It is not just that he is unqualified; his long history of promoting anti-science conspiracy theories make him disqualified.

This is a man who claimed “there is no vaccine that is safe and effective”—“no vaccine.”

He said that the polio vaccine “killed many, many more people than polio ever did.”

Now, Kennedy came to our committee and said: Don’t worry. He swears he is not anti-vaccine. But he has spent years on an anti-vaccine crusade, spreading baseless conspiracy theories under the guise of protecting children, and making millions of dollars in the process.

And when, in Senate hearings, he was confronted with his own words, he simply denied saying them. He denied saying them, despite the videotapes, the transcripts, the blog posts, and the people who heard them.

Kennedy thinks he knows what he needs to say to try to get the job that will put him in charge of our vaccine program. So he says he didn’t say exactly what he said. Kennedy’s actions speak louder than his latest words. And time and time again, Kennedy has shown us who he is: an anti-science conspiracy peddler who is willing to gamble with American lives. We know who he is. We need to pay attention.

Let’s do a quick count of some of the ways that, as HHS Secretary, Kennedy could make the anti-vaccine lawsuits and his own payouts even bigger. What could Kennedy do? Well, as Secretary of HHS, he could publish his anti-vaccine conspiracies, but this time on U.S. Government letterhead, something that might impress a jury in a subsequent trial. He could appoint people to the CDC vaccine panel who share his anti-vax views and let them do his dirty work. He could tell the CDC vaccine panel to remove a particular vaccine from the vaccination schedule. He could remove vaccines from a special compensation program, which “would open up manufacturers to mass torts” lawsuits. He could make more injuries eligible for compensation, even if there is no causal evidence. He could change

vaccine court processes to make it easier to bring junk lawsuits that could get vaccines pulled from the market. He could turn over FDA to his friends at the law firm, and they could use it however benefits their lawsuits.

In short, as HHS Secretary, Kennedy would have the power to make healthcare decisions that would affect millions of Americans—working Americans, kids, seniors—on everything from vaccines to abortion to lifesaving drugs.

Kennedy would have the capacity as head of HHS to make it easier to sue vaccine manufacturers. And in an area where the profit margins on vaccines are quite modest, if those lawsuits mount up, vaccines could simply disappear from the market all together. Manufacturers could decide: You know, it is just not worth the lawsuits. We will go produce other drugs.

Those kinds of decisions are critically important, and the consequences are grave. For many Americans, they may be the difference between life and death, and they could change lives forever.

So while you and your family are forced to deal with the grave consequences of Kennedy’s conspiracy-driven healthcare decisions, Kennedy could set himself up to make millions of dollars off his anti-vaccine crusade, just like he has been doing for decades.

Remember, the very first ethics agreement that Kennedy submitted to us on the Senate Finance Committee, he said that even while he served as Secretary of HHS, he planned to keep a financial stake in ongoing litigation, including vaccine-related litigation. That means that from the jump, Kennedy’s plan was to keep making money off the backs of lawsuits against vaccine manufacturers, some of which directly related to the very products he would have the power to regulate as Secretary of HHS.

So there he is. He has the power to regulate these drugs. He has the power to make life a little better or a little worse for the vaccine manufacturers. He has the power to make it more likely that lawsuits against vaccine manufacturers would succeed. And his initial plan was—even while he sat there as Secretary of HHS, he was going to keep on making money from that.

This was a damning conflict of interest, so we called it out. Kennedy told us, OK, OK, he would submit an updated ethics agreement. Sounds good. What was his update? Well, he said that instead of personally keeping the millions that he would make off these ongoing lawsuits, he would hand that money directly to his son.

Later, he confirmed that the son he is handing his interests off to is the one who works at Wisner Baum, the same law firm that Kennedy has maintained this very lucrative arrangement with over the years, so far netting him a reported \$2.5 million just in the last few years.

Kennedy has made clear that he can use his tools as HHS Secretary to open

up the door for more anti-vax litigation and, once he is through as Secretary of HHS, go right back to Wisner Baum and cash in on the new flood of cases that Kennedy himself has unleashed. So that is Kennedy’s idea of fixing an ethics issue.

Beyond that, Kennedy has flip-flopped countless times in his answers to the Finance Committee. He is untrustworthy. He has made so many contradictory statements that it has come to the point that it is hard to believe anything he says is true.

For example, Kennedy originally said he was not an attorney of record in any of these vaccine-related lawsuits, but we did a little homework, and we found at least five cases related to the vaccine litigation that hadn’t been disclosed where Kennedy appears to be the attorney of record. That is important because what it means is that Kennedy is a lot closer to these cases than he is revealing—cases that he and his family will be able to make bank off even as he serves as Secretary at the HHS.

The importance of this litigation cannot be overstated. Just 20 years ago, we watched vaccine makers pull their product off the market because they didn’t have protection from these kinds of lawsuits. The consequence of Kennedy’s ability to make those lawsuits easier is also the ability to shut down access and manufacturing for vaccines for every one of us, and I think that is a terrible mistake.

Kennedy claims that he is taking on Big Pharma, but that is the lie he is peddling to hide his conflicts. I pressed him on real ways to take on the industry, including using march-in on Big Pharma’s patents when they use taxpayer funds to bring drugs to market and then turn around and jack up prices on hard-working Americans and by having the government negotiate prices directly with Big Pharma on behalf of Medicare beneficiaries.

But Kennedy, after talking a big game about taking on Big Pharma, said no, he doesn’t support march-in rights and, no, he didn’t want to commit to defending Medicare price negotiations—two proven methods to take on the drug industry and put money back into Americans’ pockets.

So whose side is he on? Well, one thing is for sure: RFK, Jr., is on the side of his own bottom line.

He has also refused to share a list of cases that he stands to benefit from. I told you he said, nope, he was not attorney of record on any cases. We dug around, and we found five. How many more are there? Well, here is what Kennedy said when we said: Just give us a list of the cases that you are participating in so we can take a look at the possible conflicts. His answer: The list is so long and the conflicts so clear that evidently it would be more damning than what we already know.

Kennedy’s list of ethics issues and financial issues are a mile long, and there is still too much that he refuses to reveal.

Think about this. He has already told us enough about his conflicts, about how he plans to keep making money even while he is Secretary of HHS. He revealed all that right up front. He said: Yes, I am going to make money while I am Secretary of HHS. Yet, on basic questions like "Can you just give us a list of the cases you participated in?" he says "No, I can't do that," which really makes you ask, what on Earth is he hiding?

He is dodging questions from the Senate, he is contradicting himself, and he keeps changing his answers in order to muddy the waters and really make it hard to understand what is going on.

Look, no one is fooled here. Kennedy has said he will "slam shut the revolving door" between government Agencies and the companies they regulate, but what he won't agree to is to cut off his own family's steady stream of money flowing in from lawsuits that he personally can directly affect while he is Secretary of HHS.

Kennedy knows that these conflicts are serious, and that is why he scrambled to update his ethics agreement and hand off his interests to his son in a desperate attempt to "fix" things. But that simply isn't good enough when millions of Americans' lives are hanging in the balance.

Don't take it just from me; take it from the Wall Street Journal editorial board. They wrote:

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. pledged during his confirmation hearing . . . to root out corruption between industry and government. Yet the man who wants to be the nation's Secretary of Health and Human Services refused to rule out personally making money from lawsuits against drug makers. This ought to be disqualifying.

The Wall Street Journal: "This ought to be disqualifying."

It is simple: If Kennedy wants to prove he was serious about "slamming shut the revolving door" between industry and people making money from their positions in government, I laid out a list of commitments he should make immediately.

Senator WYDEN, the ranking member on the Finance Committee, and I wrote:

1. If confirmed as Secretary, you will recuse yourself from all vaccine-related communications and decisions. Given the breadth of your involvement in vaccine litigation, such a recusal would help ensure that you and your family do not benefit financially from official government actions that you will oversee and control. Such recusal will also ensure vaccine-related policymaking and communications are not inappropriately skewed by your personal views at the expense of scientific evidence.

That was part 1 that we want.

2. If confirmed as Secretary, you will recuse yourself from all matters related to HHS-regulated entities that are involved in cases or litigation that you or your family have an interest in. This will help ensure, for example, that you could not leverage your position as Secretary by conditioning a company's request regarding an unrelated matter (e.g., an FDA approval) on such company

agreeing to settle an anti-vaccination case in which you or your family have a financial interest.

3. If confirmed as Secretary, you will not litigate cases involving vaccines, represent parties in VICP-related cases, or have a financial interest in such litigation or cases for at least 4 years after leaving office. As Secretary, you would be in a position to influence future anti-vaccine cases and litigation in ways that would benefit you personally after leaving HHS. For example, you could direct the CDC to remove a vaccine from the vaccine schedule, change vaccine labeling requirements, or make procedures in special vaccine court more advantageous for plaintiffs. Then, if you leave HHS and immediately return to litigating against vaccine makers, you would stand to profit from rules you helped reshape. This commitment would further mitigate the appearance of a conflict of interest while you are in office.

These commitments will help ensure that you do not have a direct or indirect financial incentive to interfere with HHS's vaccine proceedings or other matters involving the manufacturer of Gardasil or any other HHS-regulated entity.

In other words, Senator WYDEN and I laid out a path where he truly could avoid the conflicts of interest. If he wants to serve his country and not his own pocketbook, we have shown him a way that he can do this.

Senator Kaine and I followed up on this and wrote to Kennedy:

At your Senate confirmation hearing, you pledged to "remove the financial conflicts of interests in [HHS] agencies."

Continuing with our letter:

You should start by mitigating your own conflicts of interests, including by (1) relinquishing your direct and indirect financial interests in matters over which you will have power at HHS; (2) recusing yourself from matters involving your former clients, former employers, or entities in which you have a financial interest; and (3) for at least four years after you leave office, committing to not lobbying HHS, litigating cases against pharmaceutical companies and manufacturers, or joining the industries or entities that you interact with at HHS.

In other words, we showed you another way that you can get this done.

Look, this is just common sense. I would hope that my Republican colleagues would agree that our HHS nominee should not have ongoing, lucrative agreements that enable his immediate family to line their pockets while he influences healthcare decisions that impact millions of Americans.

It is not just attacks on vaccines that we have to worry about from the Trump administration. In the middle of the night last Friday, Donald Trump announced deep cuts to the National Institutes of Health funding, which powers the lifesaving research and medical breakthroughs at universities and medical institutions across the country, especially in my home State of Massachusetts. These Trump cuts will stop research that is working to help cure diseases, it will force people who are working now to lose good jobs, and it will literally threaten people's lives.

As head of HHS, Kennedy would oversee the National Institutes of Health,

and he would green-light Trump's plan to gut the Agency. He has made no commitments to protect the critical, lifesaving research that NIH funds, and maybe that should be no surprise given his years of attacking basic scientific facts.

Listen to what experts have had to say about what these cuts will mean for families across America:

People are not able to do their work if there isn't an infrastructure. This will have a huge impact on health research in this country.

We're all reeling. This would decimate medical research.

This is a surefire way to cripple lifesaving research and innovation. America's competitors will relish this self-inflicted wound.

As one expert said:

If you're a cancer patient in a clinical trial, it is not a theoretical undertaking, it is treatment.

For so many rare diseases and illnesses where research is already underfunded, like childhood cancer, researchers have said:

If it's not federal funding, there's nowhere else to go—that's a real impact on the short [term] and [the] long term.

I don't know how you make that up. These funding cuts are putting scientists in a position where they have to default on the promises they made—promises they made to people to join their studies, promises they made to other researchers to join them, promises they made to build up the labs and to build up the work that would make a difference in our world.

When the NIH and the NSF put out their solicitations, they are asking for critical scientific research to be done on behalf of the American people. That research cures diseases and saves lives. The institutions that apply for these solicitations are saying enthusiastically: Yes, we can do that. Yes, we share that dream. Yes, we believe that we can make a better product, that we can make a better medicine, that we can make a better treatment for people who are suffering, and we want to be part of that.

And now here we are in chaos and confusion, and the U.S. Government is trying to break that contract. Americans will suffer because of it.

This is Trump's plan for Americans' health, and Kennedy will be a rubberstamp for whatever Donald Trump wants to do.

Let's talk just a little bit more about that COVID vaccine.

Do you remember how, in the dead of the pandemic, hundreds of millions of Americans were counting on that vaccine as the light at the end of the tunnel; how, when we were shut away from our friends and family and trying to keep ourselves and our communities safe, that vaccine allowed us to come together again; how that vaccine saved countless more lives that otherwise would have been lost to COVID?

Well, just make sure you know: Kennedy tried to stop you and your family from having access to the COVID vaccine.

I will just read a little portion of one of the articles from last month on this:

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., President-elect Donald J. Trump's choice to lead the nation's health agencies, formally asked the Food and Drug Administration to revoke the authorization of all—

All—

COVID vaccines during a deadly phase of the pandemic when thousands of Americans were still dying every week.

Mr. Kennedy filed a petition with the FDA in May 2021, demanding that officials rescind authorization for the shots and refrain from approving any COVID vaccine in the interim. Just 6 months earlier, Mr. Trump had declared the COVID vaccines a miracle. At the time Mr. Kennedy filed the petition, half of American adults were receiving their shots. Schools were starting to reopen, and churches were filling. Estimates have begun to show that the rapid roll-out of COVID vaccines have already saved 140,000 lives in the United States.

The petition was filed on behalf of the nonprofit that Mr. Kennedy founded and led, Children's Health Defense, which we talked about earlier. It claimed the risks of vaccines outweighed the benefits and that the vaccines weren't necessary because good treatments were available, including ivermectin and—I just can't believe this—hydroxychloroquine, which had already been deemed ineffective against the virus.

The petition received little notice when it was filed. Mr. Kennedy was then on the fringes of the public health establishment, and the Agency denied it within months. Public health experts told about the filing said it was truly shocking.

You know, I want to underscore this one because Mr. Kennedy is saying now—not only is he saying he is not an anti-vaxxer; he is saying he wants you to still be able to vaccinate your children if you want to do that. Yet look at Mr. Kennedy's own actions. Mr. Kennedy tried to stop all of us—everyone in America—from getting access to the COVID vaccine. He cites junk science. It was already known to be junk science at the time that he cites it. He cites junk science in order to say, not just that he doesn't want to take the vaccine or not just that he doesn't want to give it to his kids, but he didn't want anybody in America to be able to get that.

So that is the man that the Republicans will be voting on to decide whether or not he makes healthcare policy in the United States—someone who is continuing to line his own pocket with lawsuits against vaccine manufacturers and someone who has tried to stop at least one vaccine from being distributed to anyone anywhere in America.

Look, when Kennedy says he doesn't believe in vaccines, which he has said many times, believe him. When his attempt at fixing his ethics issue is passing his stake to his son, believe him.

When he says he will do whatever Donald Trump wants on abortion, believe him. Don't say: No one will let him go that far, because they will let him go that far.

Republicans voting for Kennedy know exactly who they are voting for—someone who spreads baseless conspiracy theories, someone who profits off making our kids sicker, someone who will do whatever Donald Trump tells him to do, whether it is cutting off cancer research funding or banning abortion medication.

Let us be very clear: When it comes to your health and your well-being and the health and well-being of your friends, your family, your community, Kennedy is disqualified, dangerous, and cannot be given the power to make critical healthcare decisions. I urge my colleagues to vote no on his nomination.

I see that Senator KAINE is here. Senator KAINE has been a tireless partner in the fight to help protect the Nation's healthcare system, and I appreciate his being here tonight.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, I am so happy that I follow my colleague from Massachusetts. I will build upon some of the points that she has made, but we have served as colleagues together on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee during earlier terms of Congress, and you won't find a better champion for the health of the American public than Senator WARREN.

I stand to continue the dialogue about Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and his unfitness for the position to which he has been nominated, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and I will give you the punch line but then go into it in some detail.

I don't believe Mr. Kennedy can separate fact from fiction. I don't believe Mr. Kennedy can separate conspiracy from content. Now, you wouldn't want someone suffering from that challenge in any position of leadership at any level of government—local, State, or Federal. But this particular position, the Secretary of Health and Human Services—one of the most important positions in the Nation as with respect to people's physical and mental health, is exactly the wrong kind of a position for someone who can't tell fact from fiction or content from conspiracy, because the American public needs to be able to rely on HHS and other critical Agencies for information that is not just about the state of their savings account or housing costs. This is about life and death. This is about life and death.

I want to talk about two elements of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.—my colleagues have been going into many of them—that lead me to the conclusion that here is a guy who can't separate fact from fiction or conspiracy from content.

The first was ably described by Senator WARREN, and that is Mr. Ken-

nedy's skepticism about vaccines. I know many of my colleagues trod this ground during speeches today, so I am not going to go into the breadth of his vaccine skepticism. I am going to talk about one vaccine in particular that is made in Virginia, Gardasil. I represent the Commonwealth of Virginia. There is a facility in Elkton, VA, in the Shenandoah Valley, near Harrisonburg, that makes Gardasil, the vaccine that has been effective—significantly effective—in preventing and reducing the incidence of cervical cancer.

Think about it for a minute. Vaccines do a lot of different things, but a vaccine that can prevent cancer is truly, truly revolutionary.

Cervical cancer and other associated cancers pose very significant challenges to men and women. In the early 2000s, the FDA approved a cervical cancer vaccine. There are a number of vaccine manufacturers, but one of the largest is Merck that manufactures Gardasil in Virginia. I visited the plant a couple of years back as a member of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. I went to the plant, and I talked to the workers and saw the pride that they have in being able to develop a product that has had such a significant impact around the world.

When I was Governor of Virginia, with two Republican houses, we acted to have a mandate around the Gardasil vaccination, around the cervical cancer vaccination. There are other cancer vaccine manufacturers as well. By making it mandatory, we enabled people to access it for free. We allowed any parent or student who didn't want to receive the vaccine to opt out with no excuse. But we have made it widely available in Virginia—we are one of three States to have done this—and it has had a tremendously positive benefit on folks' health.

So this is a relatively new vaccine. I mean, it started and got approval and began to be deployed significantly about 15 years ago; and even in 15 years, the results have been remarkable. And I want to just share with my colleagues and with the public some of the results between 15 and 20 years of the HPV cervical cancer vaccine. I will give you results from many countries and from many research institutions and hospitals to show you that this is not a question of significant medical controversy.

A publication that is one of the signature healthcare publications in England is called *The Lancet*, and there was an article in *The Lancet* in February of 2020, titled "The Impact of HPV Vaccination and Cervical Screening on Cervical Cancer Elimination." This particular article summarized the study that looked at data from 78 countries. The researchers who examined this data were from England, China, France, Canada, and Switzerland.

Their research in analyzing the data of hundreds of thousands of patients in 78 countries concluded:

High HPV vaccination coverage of girls can lead to cervical cancer elimination in

most low-income and lower middle-income countries by the end of the century.

Fancy that—eliminating cancer with a vaccine. This was from the data from 78 countries.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov), has a section: the “Impact of the HPV Vaccine”:

Among teen girls, infections with HPV types that cause most HPV cancers and genital warts have dropped 88 percent [because of the vaccine].

The American Society of Clinical Oncology, in 2024, published an article titled “Effects of HPV vaccination on the development of HPV-related cancers.” This is the American society for physicians who work in the clinical oncology area.

Here is the conclusion they reach:

Males vaccinated for HPV were at decreased odds for HPV-related cancers. . . . Females vaccinated for HPV had lower odds for cervical cancers and HPV-related cancers overall.

Let's go to Scotland. The Journal of the National Cancer Institute in Scotland last year published a study titled “Invasive Cervical Cancer Incidence following bivalent HPV vaccination,” studying the healthcare results of people following vaccination. This was just published last year. Let me read you the quote:

No cases of invasive cancer were recorded in women immunized at 12 or 13 years of age irrespective of the number of doses. Women vaccinated at 14 to 22 years of age and given 3 doses of bivalent vaccine showed a significant reduction in incidence compared with . . . unvaccinated women.

Again, those first few words: “No cases of invasive cancer were recorded in women” who were vaccinated and studied in Scotland in this study that came out in 2024.

Another article in the *Lancet* looked not at 78 countries, but it looked at the effects of HPV vaccination programs in England. This article was published in 2021:

The HPV vaccination program [in the UK] has almost successfully eliminated cervical cancer in women born since September 1, 1995.

The elimination of cervical cancer, no cases of invasive cancer.

There was a study done in Australia in 2013 by BMC Medicine. The article was entitled “Impact of a population-based HPV vaccination program on cervical abnormalities.” This was still relatively early in the mass vaccination because Gardasil and any other HPV vaccinations weren't used until the mid-2000s—2007, 2008. Here is the conclusion reached about the Australians' experience:

Australia was one of the first countries to introduce a publicly-funded national HPV vaccination program that commenced in April 2007. . . . [It] significantly reduced cervical abnormalities . . . within five years of implementation, with the greatest vaccine effectiveness observed [in] the youngest women.

The New England Journal of Medicine, which, in many ways, is the gold

standard in the United States, published a study in 2020 about the effects of vaccination in Sweden:

Among Swedish girls and women 10 to 30 years old, quadrivalent HPV vaccination was associated with a substantially reduced risk of invasive cervical cancer at the population level.

All right, those are the studies by the researchers in the journals, but I also wondered—you know, I am not a great scientist. I don't generally read medical journals. But what about our healthcare institutions that are just in the business of providing health advice to everyday Americans who are seeking information about their health?

I went to the website of the Mayo Clinic. Here is what [mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org) says:

HPV vaccine: Who needs it, how it works.

They say on their website: “Getting vaccinated against HPV helps prevent cancer in men and women”—period. No qualification, no waffling, no wobbling. That is the advice that the Mayo Clinic gives to its patients and to all who go to [mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org) to seek health information.

The Cleveland Clinic, another internationally known healthcare provider, [my.clevelandclinic.org](https://www.clevelandclinic.org) in 2025, the website says as follows:

The HPV vaccine is an injection that prevents infections of two types of human papillomavirus. The vaccine lowers your risk of getting cervical cancer.

MD Anderson Hospital, another internationally known hospital based in Houston, TX—[mdanderson.org](https://www.mdanderson.org). Here is what they say to their patients or others going to the website to seek advice:

All males and females—

All males and females—

ages 9–26 should get the HPV vaccine. It is a safe and effective method of protection against HPV infection.

So what I have just done is read you a variety of conclusions from a variety of researchers and healthcare providers, from a variety of countries, all pointing to the effectiveness of HPV vaccinations to prevent HPV infections that lead to cancers and other serious medical conditions.

But what does Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., say? He has said that the vaccination is one of the most dangerous vaccines ever created. He has said that it is dangerous and defective.

On one of his website articles on his blog, he said:

It is inescapable that Gardasil kills girls.

The weight of medical evidence is that this is an effective tool to prevent cervical cancer. Robert F. Kennedy—with no medical training, with no scientific research background—claims otherwise. He cannot separate fact from fantasy, content from conspiracy.

Now, is that just because his brain doesn't wrap itself around facts, or is there something more serious? I needn't repeat at length what my colleague Senator WARREN said, but she laid out the facts that Robert F. Ken-

nedy, Jr., has a massive financial stake in lawsuits against the manufacturer of the HPV vaccine.

In fact, he disclosed it on his ethics form, that if there are recoveries against HPV manufacturers in lawsuits, he is entitled to 10 percent—10 percent—of the recovery in massive class-action lawsuits.

When we pressed him in the hearing, first he said he wasn't going to give up that 10-percent stake. But he eventually felt some pressure, and so he transferred it to his adult son. His family stands to gain significantly if these lawsuits hit.

As the Secretary of HHS, he would have the ability to have a huge influence on the Vaccine Injury Compensation Program.

Vaccine manufacturers get an immunity from civil suit until a case has gone through the vaccine compensation court. That was put in place many years ago because the number of vaccine manufacturers were in precipitous free fall. They were going out of business or stopping making vaccines because they were getting hit with big lawsuits. So there is a special court that focuses on any arguments against vaccines in these courts.

He would have significant ability to even remove immunity protection from the manufacturers of vaccines. And if you remove immunity protection, the value of lawsuits goes up, and the value of his family's 10 percent stake goes up.

This should cause everyone serious concern about putting someone in who stands, without any medical training, against the weight of medical evidence saying that vaccination against cervical cancer is a remarkable thing that should be done and that has been successful since the mid-2000s.

I am going to conclude in a minute because my able colleague from Colorado is here, but I want to raise one more issue. I want to raise one more issue.

This inability to tell the difference between fact and fiction and content and conspiracy would be dangerous enough if it was just about health information, if it was just about vaccines. That, in and of itself, should disqualify Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., from being the HHS Secretary. But this individual's inability to tell the difference between fact and fiction and between conspiracy and content is not limited just to health.

In July of 2024, when he was running for President of the United States, Robert F. Kennedy tweeted this:

My take on 9/11: It's hard to tell what is a conspiracy theory and what isn't. But conspiracy theories flourish when the government routinely lies to the public. As President, I won't take sides on 9/11 or any of the other debates. But I can promise is that I will open the files and usher in a new era of transparency.

“I won't take sides on 9/11”—I represent the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Pentagon was attacked on 9/11. The World Trade Center in New York

was attacked on 9/11. A plane went down in a farm field in Pennsylvania on 9/11. A lot of Virginia families lost loved ones that day. I know people who were in the Pentagon on 9/11 who had to race through a burning building to go to the childcare center to make sure they could get their child out and that their child was safe. I don't take it very well when someone says they won't take sides about 9/11, when someone admits: "It's hard to tell what is a conspiracy theory and what isn't."

I asked Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.: Is this a common problem for you? I mean, that is kind of a candid thing to admit: "It's hard to tell what is a conspiracy theory and what isn't."

No, it is not. It is not hard for Virginians to understand what happened on 9/11. They lost loved ones. They went to funerals. Their family members never came home. And then, in the aftermath of 9/11, we were in 20 years of war, where tens of thousands of Virginians were deployed to battle against al-Qaida, the perpetrators of 9/11, and many lost their lives then.

"I won't take sides on 9/11"—well, like, what side is there? What side is he talking about?

I mean, it is a bad thing. Does he think it is a good thing? It was an attack by Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida. Does he think it was an inside job or something else?

And why would he even do this? This tweet is dated July 5, 2024. It was 23 years after 9/11—23 years after 9/11. For some reason, on July 5, he just says: Well, why don't I just share with people that I won't take sides on 9/11; that I still can't tell, 23 years later, what is a conspiracy theory and what isn't.

If you cannot tell what happened on 9/11, if you decide to just freelance an opinion 23 years later and tell the American public—and he was running for President at the time—I will not take sides on 9/11, you should not have been nominated for this position in the first place.

I am finding it very hard to believe that my colleagues in this body, whom I sat with on the Armed Services Committee, whom I sat with on the Foreign Relations Committee, who have invested their time and energy in making investments to battle terrorism around the world, to battle al-Qaida and other terrorist groups, the group that perpetrated the 9/11 attack—many of my colleagues served in the military and were deployed in the War on Terror in the aftermath of 9/11. They are now going to be OK with a guy who says he won't take sides on 9/11; who says he can't tell the difference between what is a conspiracy theory and what isn't?

This is a very, very dangerous vote that we will cast tomorrow. Of any position in the Federal Government that needs somebody who can tell the difference between fact and fiction, conspiracy and content, HHS Secretary is that position, and Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., so badly flunks the test of what is needed—careful, reasoned, information

that people can count on—that I urge my colleagues, even if you voted in a committee, even if you voted on a procedural resolution to move this to the floor, stop now. You can still stop now. Don't hurt this country. Don't hurt the health of this country by putting someone in office who can't even understand what happened on 9/11.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the Presiding Officer to the U.S. Senate. I hadn't had a chance, really, to do that, as you sit in the chair.

We are now going to get somebody else, but I thank the Presiding Officer for being here.

(Mr. HUSTED assumed the Chair.)

I also want to thank my colleague from the Commonwealth of Virginia, Senator KAINE, for his heartfelt remarks.

I think we are through the looking glass in many ways, and there is a pattern here that is reflected in what you were talking about, this idea of being able to tell the difference between fact and fiction—fact and fiction.

I know that when you were the mayor of Richmond, it was probably pretty important for people who were working with you to know the difference between fact and fiction. When you were the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, it probably was pretty important for you to do that as well.

It does seem like, in President Trump's administration, he is really at war with the facts and trying to muddle what is fact and fiction, to be kind about it.

I can't think of a time in the history of this country when families have wanted to know more about what is real and what is false—with their kids, what is real and what is false.

I was the superintendent of schools in Denver, as the Senator from Virginia knows, and it is a great irony that at a time when parents want their kids to be able to distinguish between what is real and what is false—because of all the falsehoods that are coming over social media and other places—the President has decided to nominate the head of the WWE to be the Secretary of Education in this administration.

You were talking about the inability of Bobby Kennedy to pick which side he was on when it came to what happened on 9/11. It reminds me exactly of the situation with Congresswoman Gabbard, who decided over and over again that she was going to choose not America's side but our adversaries' side, whether it was the chemical weapons in Syria—I mean, it is hard to even contemplate that—or the fact that at 12:30 at night, or I guess it was 11:30 at night, literally the night that Putin invaded Ukraine, a country that was at peace, a crossing of a peaceful border—the first time a tyrant had done that in Europe since

World War II when the United States had led the international and global order that created these incredibly important institutions, NATO being one of those. And she had to reach out at 11:30 at night to basically mimic the talking points from Vladimir Putin. And I am not saying that she was a Russian spy or anything; I am just saying that it is the same stuff that he was using. Two days later, the Russian propaganda television in Moscow was running that stuff on the TV in Moscow.

So I think it really does matter that people are telling the truth to the American people and that, where possible, where there are differences of opinion, that we try to get to the bottom of the truth. There are a lot of reasons to have differences of opinion. We live in a democracy, and we have the freedom to have differences of opinion. We have the freedom to have a different understanding of the facts, but we need to be pretty certain about that when it comes to public health, when it comes to healthcare in this country.

Mr. President, we live in the richest country in the world. We are blessed to live in the richest country in the world. If you look at our national wealth as a function of our population, there is nobody who is remotely even close to us. That is the reflection of an economy that has been much more dynamic than economies across the world, innovation that is much more dynamic, and, I would say, a culture that is not beset by corruption in the way many countries around the world are.

But even though we are the richest country in the world and the richest per capita, shockingly, we have some of the worst health outcomes of any country that is wealthy. We have the lowest life expectancy among large, wealthy countries. We have the highest maternal mortality rate of any other high-income country in the world, and it is getting worse every single year. We have the highest hospitalization rates for chronic conditions—like congestive heart failure and diabetes and asthma—of all our peer countries.

We spend twice as much per capita as any other industrialized country for worse results. It is a bad deal for patients, and it is a terrible deal for taxpayers.

This isn't just about our physical health. We have the highest suicide rate among high-income countries. We have the second highest drug-related death rate among high-income countries.

We have some of the lowest numbers of mental health practitioners per capita in many parts of the country. In my own home State of Colorado, there are entire counties that really don't have any mental health expertise at all. And at a time when there is an epidemic in our country, I would say especially among young people, that is a shameful failure on our part.

Americans in every corner of our country are getting sicker in 2025.

They are spending more on healthcare, they are traveling farther, and they are waiting longer to see fewer doctors.

The citizens of Colorado, I can tell you, are deeply, deeply unhappy with our healthcare system—deeply unhappy.

I will actually say I was here when we passed the Affordable Care Act during the Obama years, and it has not fixed the issues we are facing.

My constituents, when they think about healthcare, they think about scarcity; they think about the unavailability of drugs that their moms and dads have been prescribed but they either can't get or they can't afford even though they have been prescribed.

Unlike other countries around the world, this is a nation where our senior citizens actually spend their retirement going from pharmacy to pharmacy to pharmacy to get the drugs they have been prescribed by a doctor, to be able to get the inhaler that will keep them healthy so that they don't end up in the emergency room.

This is a country, unlike our competitors, where it is very common for moms and dads to spend 2 hours or 3 hours or 4 hours on the phone with an insurance company denying their claim—their legitimate claim—for their kid.

This is a country, as I mentioned, where we do not have ready access to mental health care, which people living in other countries far less wealthy than we are have as a reasonable expectation of being a citizen of that country.

When we are in the midst of a physical and mental health care crisis like this, unlike many of the other Cabinet positions we are going to fill—and for some of them, it is true as well—the Secretary of Health and Human Services is a job of life and death. That is why Mr. Kennedy's confirmation, I think, would be so dangerous.

We are on the precipice of allowing a practiced trafficker of vaccine conspiracy theories—admitted, of these theories—to administer healthcare to over 29 million children in America who receive routine, lifesaving vaccines through Medicaid; a man who has made his fame and fortune by treating our most vulnerable children as his personal science experiment.

Mr. Kennedy has peddled bunk science that claims vaccines cause autism, sowing confusion and fear and causing heartbreak among parents who are now afraid to vaccinate their kids because they are so worried that it is going to cause autism—that they won't have a vaccine for their kid for fear of autism. But the failure to get that vaccine means their kids are exposed to profoundly important childhood and serious childhood illnesses.

He makes his claims with incredible conviction. He is not shy about it. He claimed that the measles vaccines “poisoned an entire generation of children” and went further to say that the “only thing that cures measles is nutrition and clean water.”

Before the measles vaccine was developed in the 1960s, hundreds of American kids died every year, and measles is a completely preventable disease with two vaccines administered in childhood. Without it, measles can spread like wildfire, leaving behind serious complications like blindness and encephalitis. We don't know that. We don't remember that because the pages that are on this floor can't remember a time when we weren't having the measles vaccine in the United States of America. It would be a very different world if we hadn't had them, but we do.

Doctors in sub-Saharan Africa, where measles runs rampant, describe watching children die from this preventable disease in their dire warnings they are now sending to the United States.

The CDC warns that kindergarten MMR vaccine rates have dropped below the 95-percent threshold needed to prevent worldwide measles outbreaks.

As I stand here tonight, as the Presiding Officer sits here tonight, five States have reported measles cases. An outbreak in Gaines County, TX, has rapidly grown to 24 reported cases, all of them unvaccinated children. Nine are in the hospital. Nine of these children are in the hospital. Vaccine exemptions in Gaines County are among the highest in the State of Texas. Mr. President, 17.5 percent of Gaines County kindergartners have vaccine exemptions. That is almost 20 percent.

It is not just Mr. Kennedy's vaccine conspiracies that are of grave concern, however. He has spent 50 years muddying the waters of scientific consensus with half-truths and misinformation and bad science.

In his hearing before the Finance Committee, Mr. Kennedy showed an alarming inability to answer simple questions about his past statements. He appeared to have selective memory regarding some of his most outlandish claims.

I asked him point-blank about his claims that COVID-19 was a genetically engineered bioweapon—these are his words: genetically engineered bioweapon—that targets Black and White people but spared Ashkenazi Jews and Chinese people. He never denied this. He never denied that he said it and instead pointed to a debunked theory study as flimsy proof of his claims.

I asked him further, based on what he had said—again, quoting him:

Did you say Lyme disease is a highly likely militarily engineered bioweapon?

To this he answered:

I probably did.

“I probably did” say that Lyme disease was a militarily engineered bioweapon. How can we consider someone for the highest health office in the country who believes that America's own military engineered Lyme disease and uses it as a weapon against us? What could go wrong?

He said on his podcast that exposure to pesticides could cause children to become transgender—a statement he

claims not to remember, but he said it. It is on the record.

He insisted he forgot writing in his own book that “it's undeniable that African AIDS is an entirely different disease from Western AIDS” and could provide no explanation for this false statement either.

Mr. Kennedy likes to talk about the need for more research. In fact, that was his answer to many of my colleagues' questions. He even told me to look at an NIH study when I asked him about some of his unfounded claims about COVID-19.

Now, the NIH, as you know, is under attack tonight as we are here, and all Mr. Kennedy has to say about that is that he will look into that.

The NIH is the gold standard worldwide for scientific research and innovation. The University of Colorado is telling me that the system could lose \$85 million a year in research dollars to study Alzheimer's, brain injuries, mental illness, and heart disease. If confirmed, Mr. Kennedy would oversee NIH.

I guess I really think that we could do better than a known peddler of junk science to run the most important medical research in the country.

Is a vaccine denier the best we can do for our doctors who are working around the clock and our nurses, too, in the midst of the worst flu outbreak in 15 years? Is a man who became a millionaire many times over by claiming vaccines cause autism the best we really can do for our kids?

Do we really want parents making a choice that is unsafe for them and for their communities because people at the highest offices in the country are making false statements about science? Out of 330 million Americans, we can surely do better than this.

I appreciate the Presiding Officer's patience.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. KIM. Mr. President, I rise today because there is nothing—nothing—that keeps a parent up at night like the health of their child. It doesn't matter if you are a Democrat or a Republican, if you live in the reddest rural areas or the bluest cities. One of the things that binds us as Americans, as people, is that every parent looks at their kids and wants to know that they are doing everything that they can to keep them safe.

And let me tell you, that is not an easy task. I am a father of a 7-year-old and a 9-year-old, two little boys, and I every day wonder, am I doing the right thing for them? Am I being the kind of father that they deserve? Am I looking out and being thoughtful about what they eat, about whether or not I am keeping up with their health, and that they are exercising?

And like most families, I can tell you it is tough to know that you are always doing the best thing for your kids. But like most families, we do what we can.

My wife and I, we try our very best. But we don't have all of the answers.

I mean, how many parents out there, when your kid gets sick and it is too late in the night to find a way to call the doctor or the nurse, you are trying to figure out where to turn to for information?

Where do we go when it is that we feel like we have reached the limits of our own personal knowledge and we need to find a place that we can trust? And that is what this is about. It is about knowing that there is someone you can trust when you feel like you don't know where else to turn, that someone can have your back and you can trust that they have your best interests at heart.

When we think about our doctors, when we think about our nurses, our health professionals, when we think about those making decisions in this great Nation of over 330 million people about our healthcare, we want to trust those individuals, these people that are making these decisions.

And I know for the people in New Jersey, over 9 million people there in the State of New Jersey, they are wondering who they can trust. We live in tough times. In fact, we live in the time of the greatest amount of distrust that we have ever seen in modern history of this country.

And that is most pronounced, most clear when it comes to our health. And one of those people we need to trust the most in our country is the person who runs the Department of Health and Human Services.

I rise today because I have met with Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. I have questioned Mr. Kennedy in committee. I have read his statements and examined his record, and I want to say here on the floor of the Senate that he is not someone I can trust with my kids' health. And in good conscience, I cannot vote for him.

If I cannot trust him with the health of my own kids, how can I ask the families of 9 million other New Jerseyans to go do it or for families across our country to trust this man?

I have had the chance to be able to meet him, talk to him in person, ask him questions, that is more than most anyone in my own State is going to have a chance to talk to him. I took that as a deep responsibility to try to use that time and that opportunity to try to deduce whether or not this man rises to the level of trust that I think the people of New Jersey and this country deserve.

And I have come to the conclusion that I cannot support Mr. Kennedy to lead an Agency in charge of our Nation's health. And he has too often diminished that trust in the very healthcare that he would be in charge of and too often has spread disinformation about the diseases and challenges and threats that we face.

Now, what you will hear from his supporters is a story of an advocate for change. They will tell you that he is

fighting against a broken system, that he simply wants to make America healthy. And, look, I think all of us, hopefully, can say that we want to make America healthy, that we care about the health of Americans across this Nation.

And I don't think anyone in this Chamber would disagree that there are broken problems that we face when it comes to our healthcare, to our government, to so many aspects of our society.

But, unfortunately, like most things coming out of this current administration, what we are seeing is corruption and conspiracy disguised as false promises of change. It is important that we take this moment to call it out and to expose it, to explain to the American people why this is a position—the Secretary of Health and Human Services is a position where trust is so important.

Because if he is confirmed, Mr. Kennedy will have an incredible platform, well beyond the strong platform that he already has developed—a bully pulpit. But this would be an official platform of the United States, of our government, paid for by the taxpayers, to shape the health of my children and yours.

Let's begin with the Agency he is nominated to lead. HHS employs more than 80,000 people across the United States and around the world. Their mission is simple: to enhance the health and well-being of all Americans. And to put that another way, their job is to make it easier for parents to sleep at night by making sure their kids can stay healthy.

Now, I am not going to go over every single one of the 13 operating divisions of HHS, but let me name a few you have probably heard of. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, they are on the frontlines of preventing the next pandemic; the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, they operate Medicare, Medicaid; the Children's Health Insurance Program, otherwise known as CHIP; and the Health Insurance Marketplaces. All of these provide healthcare for more than 100 million Americans, including my mother and my father who are under Medicare. That is about one in three people under the services of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Then there is the Food and Drug Administration, or the FDA. You probably know them because when there is some sort of outbreak that impacts the food supply, they issue the recalls. But they do a lot of other stuff, too, from approving new medicines to countering bioterrorism.

Now, those are three of the divisions you have heard of. Maybe you haven't heard of the National Institutes of Health, an Agency that sits at the cutting edge of medical research—not just in the Nation but around the world. Or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, an Agency that does work to combat the real addiction and mental health crisis our country is facing.

The Lakewood Community Service Corporation, Lakewood, NJ, received a \$2.5 million grant to improve mental health care in one of our State's fastest growing services. Cape May County Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse received a \$300,000 grant to tackle substance abuse issues in South Jersey, both important causes that my colleagues from both sides of the aisle can agree to support.

And then, finally, there is the Administration for Children and Families, and whether you heard of it or not, you or someone you know probably is touched by it. It is the second largest Agency in HHS, and it is the Agency that manages temporary assistance for needy families: Head Start, childcare and foster care programs.

I wanted to outline all of this because I want you to understand the enormity of the task ahead of the next HHS Secretary. This is not just someone who can walk in and just say: We need to be healthy again. This is someone who will be tasked with operating programs on a day-to-day basis that mean the very life and death of over a third of all Americans.

So when I say that trust is important, it is not just a buzzword. Who do you trust with your health? Who do you trust with your children's health? Who do you trust with your parents' health, as they age and face challenges of physical and cognitive decline?

Let's look at some of the things that show why we should not trust Mr. Kennedy. One of the first things that many parents have to deal with—vaccines. A lot of us have had to hold our kids through those vaccines. We talk to our pediatricians—people we trust—and they talk to us about the importance of making sure that our kids are protected.

Mr. Kennedy has used his stature to push lawsuits that he personally stands to profit from—including over a common vaccine given to children. And throughout all of this, Mr. Kennedy has claimed that he is “not anti-vaccine.” While it is clear that we cannot trust him, what is even more clear is that his deception has had a real impact on the lives of people.

Mr. Kennedy's push to sow distrust in Samoa in 2019 helped lead to a measles epidemic that claimed the lives of 83 people, mostly children under the age of 5. While Kennedy said in his hearing that “We don't know what was killing them,” the Samoan Director-General of Health, Dr. Alec Ekeroma, called his words “a total fabrication.”

The doctor said that if Mr. Kennedy is confirmed, he would be “a danger to us, a danger to everyone.”

That is not someone we can trust.

In a speech on the Senate floor in the 1960s, then-Senator John F. Kennedy, said that “the treatment of its older citizens is said by anthropologists to be one of the most basic tests of how civilized a society or nation has become.”

I would broaden that test to be our most vulnerable, our neighbors who are

targeted simply because of who they are.

And when Mr. Kennedy spreads false claims like the COVID-19 virus was engineered to spare Jewish Americans and Asians, he uses the trust that he has been given to divide and spread anti-Semitism and anti-Asian hate.

And when Mr. Kennedy, in response to the questions asked of him by Members of this body, refused to acknowledge the importance of taking commonsense steps in our foster care system to protect trans youth, he uses the trust he has been given to divide and spread hate and fear. That is not someone we can trust.

My reasons for opposing Mr. Kennedy's nomination don't just come from the concerns I have for my children; it comes from an understanding I have from my parents.

A little over 50 years ago, my parents came to America from South Korea to start a better life. They did so by working to keep Americans healthy. My father earned his Ph.D. and became a genetic researcher trying to cure cancer and Alzheimer's. My mother worked as a nurse in hospital systems across New Jersey.

They worked hard to earn the trust of people around them, their colleagues, their patients that they had worked on every single day, but also the trust that they had in the people around them for their own health.

My father was a polio survivor; my mother struggled with Lyme disease. They have had their fair share of health struggles. And through them, I have seen a common denominator that our public health system only works when we have people working together with trust and that we the public, in turn, trust them.

But then when I hear Mr. Kennedy say this about Lyme disease. He said:

Another thing that keeps us from enjoying the outdoors and keeps us locked inside and the idea that this may have been, is highly likely to have been a military weapon, and we cannot say 100 percent for sure, but we do know that they were experimenting with ticks there. Now, the American Lyme Disease Foundation wrote:

Some claim that Lyme disease was introduced into the northeastern region of the U.S. by a man-made strain that escaped from a high containment biological warfare lab on Plum Island.

They said:

However, there is ample evidence to indicate that both the Ixodes ticks and the bacteria causing Lyme disease were present in the U.S. well before the Plum Island facility was ever established."

According to a Washington Post article written by a Professor Sam Telford, "It's an old conspiracy theory enjoying a resurgence with lots of sensational headlines and tweets. Even Congress has ordered that the Pentagon must reveal whether it weaponized ticks. And it's not true."

When it came to the disease of polio that disabled my father since he was a baby, Mr. Kennedy had this to say about the vaccine that nearly eradicated polio from the face of the planet.

He said the vaccine, for a period of time, may have led to cancer due to a contamination with a virus that "killed many many many many more people than polio ever did."

So with the polio vaccine he said: "Did it cause more deaths than it averted? I would say, I don't know."

And he said this just a year and a half ago.

A large study was published that concluded that the polio vaccine under concern was not associated with increased rates of cancer, and other studies showed that the virus of concern was killed by the same process used to inactivate the polio virus.

And in that same podcast, Mr. Kennedy said:

There is no vaccine that is safe and effective.

Again, this was just a year and a half ago. Now he is coming to us and saying: I am all for the polio vaccine.

What are the American people left to believe?

Again, our health and our Nation is founded on trust. That is part of the compact we have as Americans for generations. We want trust for our families.

As I said, I am a father of two little boys. All I want for them is to be healthy and happy. They are the reason that I am here in the U.S. Senate, to take actions to be able to give them the best type of lives, to give other kids and other grandkids the kind of lives they deserve.

And I worry about the foods that they eat, and I support efforts to address ultraprocessed foods in America, to try to make sure we can have Americans eating healthy. But I also want someone who is not going to shoot from the hip and spread disinformation.

Our healthcare is far from perfect, and we do need major reforms to get it in a place where it can better serve the American people. We do need massive changes in the way our healthcare, childcare, elder care, and nutrition systems are run, but not without trust.

We need research—more and more research—to understand safety and to power the innovation that will come up with the cures and the medicines of the future. But, this week, we see efforts to undertake massive cuts at NIH, cuts that would set back the very research we need to keep improving our health.

As I conclude here, these efforts to cut and slash our research at NIH and elsewhere would continue under the leadership of Mr. Kennedy. HHS Secretary is a big job. We can't just hand it to someone we can't trust—not for my kids or for my parents or for yours.

I encourage my colleagues, again: Reject this nomination so that every parent in America can go to sleep having trust in a person tasked with ensuring that our children will be healthy in the morning.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, the postcloture time with respect to the Kennedy nomination expire at 10:30 a.m., Thursday, February 13. I further ask that, following disposition of the Kennedy nomination, the cloture motion with respect to the Rollins nomination be withdrawn and the Senate vote on confirmation of the Rollins nomination with no intervening action or debate; further, that following disposition of the Rollins nomination, the Senate resume consideration of the Lutnick nomination, and the Senate vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the Lutnick nomination at 1:45 p.m.; and if cloture is invoked on the Lutnick nomination, that all time be considered expired, and the Senate vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the Loeffler nomination; and if cloture is invoked on the Loeffler nomination, that all postcloture time be expired, and the Senate vote on confirmation of the Loeffler and Lutnick nominations at a time to be determined by the majority leader in consultation with the Democratic leader no earlier than Tuesday, February 18.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business for debate only, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

U.S. COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS RULES OF PROCEDURE

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions has adopted rules governing its procedures for the 119th Congress. Pursuant to rule XXVI, paragraph 2, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that the accompanying rules for the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions be printed in the RECORD.

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

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS RULES OF PROCEDURE

Rule 1.—Subject to the provisions of rule XXVI, paragraph 5, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, regular meetings of the committee shall be held on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month, at 10:00 a.m., in room SD-430, Dirksen Senate Office Building. The chair may, upon proper notice, call such additional meetings as the chair deems necessary.