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Evan Blake

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## **Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s confirmation as Trump's HHS secretary and the fascist assault on public health**



President Donald Trump congratulates Robert F. Kennedy Jr., after he was sworn in as Health and Human Services Secretary in the Oval Office at the White House, Thursday, Feb. 13, 2025, in Washington. [AP Photo/Alex Brandon]

The confirmation of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. as Donald Trump's health secretary marks a critical milestone in the deepening war on public health and the consolidation of a fascist government in the United States. The most notorious purveyor of anti-vaccine disinformation in the world is now directly in charge of the public health institutions of the American state, whose influence extends globally.

As head of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Kennedy will dictate policy and funding for 11 critical public health agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institutes of Health (NIH), Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Under his

leadership, the stated aim of these agencies will shift from preventing disease to deliberately creating the conditions for pathogens to flourish.

Alongside the world's richest man, Elon Musk, Kennedy will soon embark upon his longstanding plan to gut each of these agencies as part of the financial oligarchy's broader mission to destroy all remaining vestiges of social programs won by the working class through decades of struggle.

Kennedy's anti-science and anti-vaccine record is too voluminous to describe in detail here, but certain key facts stand out.

For decades, he has promoted conspiracy theories and quack science, including long-debunked claims that vaccines cause autism and other developmental disorders. As chairman of the misnamed Children's Health Defense (CHD) since 2015, Kennedy has filed dozens of lawsuits against the very public health agencies he will now oversee. Due to the group's lobbying efforts, multiple states have loosened vaccination requirements, prompting a resurgence of the long-eliminated measles in recent years, as well as whooping cough and other vaccine-preventable illnesses.

Kennedy has campaigned against water fluoridation—a practice proven to reduce dental decay—and has questioned the necessity of pasteurizing milk, a process that has saved countless lives by preventing foodborne illnesses. He has pushed HIV/AIDS denialism, including in a 2021 book where he questioned the “theology that HIV is the sole cause of AIDS.”

In 2019, Kennedy was implicated in the deaths from measles of 83 people, almost all children, in Samoa, after he fueled vaccine hesitancy on the island amid a devastating outbreak of the disease.

As head of CHD at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kennedy amplified numerous conspiracies surrounding COVID-19, earning him a spot on the Disinformation Dozen list of those most responsible for spreading anti-vaccine disinformation. Alongside other far-right influencers, he promoted the quack remedies ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine, while presenting the life-saving COVID vaccines as more harmful than good. As a result, he bears enormous responsibility for the relatively low vaccination rates in the US, which caused hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths.

In May 2021, when over 600 Americans were officially dying of COVID-19 every day, Kennedy and Children's Health Defense filed a petition to the FDA to “revoke Emergency Use Authorizations for existing COVID vaccines and refrain from approving and licensing them.” Throughout the subsequent period Kennedy vocally opposed vaccine mandates,

temporary lockdowns, masking and every other public health measure known to save lives. He oversaw the filing of nearly 30 lawsuits by CHD since 2020, challenging vaccine mandates and public health policies.

In a fascistic twist on the Wuhan Lab Lie, in 2023 Kennedy developed the novel antisemitic conspiracy theory that SARS-CoV-2 was “ethnically targeted ... to attack Caucasians and Black people.” He stated, “The people who are most immune are Ashkenazi Jews and Chinese,” suggesting a conspiracy between Jewish and Chinese scientists to sicken and kill Christians.

Kennedy will soon be joined at the hip with Musk, a purveyor of eugenicist and fascist ideology. Their shared mission will be to utilize the unconstitutional auspices of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to steer their wrecking ball towards what were once the world’s preeminent public health agencies. The centerpiece of DOGE’s plans to slash trillions from the federal budget is the evisceration of the deeply popular programs Medicare and Medicaid, upon which over 100 million Americans rely for healthcare.

Working with DOGE, Kennedy also plans to fire untold numbers of public health workers throughout the HHS and its subsidiary agencies. At a November 2023 anti-vaccine conference, Kennedy stated that he would fire 600 NIH workers, adding, “We’re going to give infectious disease a break for about eight years.” Last Friday, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the Trump administration has imminent plans to cut thousands of positions at the HHS, CDC, NIH, FDA and CMS, only a foretaste of the jobs bloodbath to come.

The implications of all of these deeply reactionary policies are far-reaching and ominous.

Kennedy takes the helm of the HHS under conditions in which the highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1 “bird flu”) has been spreading among poultry and dairy cattle across the US for over a year, in the process likely infecting hundreds of farmworkers. Just last week, the more dangerous D1.1 genotype of bird flu—which recently killed a Louisiana man and placed a Canadian teenager on life support—was detected among dairy herds in Nevada.

The US is presently mired in its worst flu season since 2017, with the CDC estimating that upwards of 650,000 people have been hospitalized this winter. Scientists have repeatedly warned of the dangers of genetic reassortment between seasonal flu and bird flu, which could produce the capability of human-to-human transmission in the latter.

Already in the first month of the Trump administration, an unprecedented gag order has been imposed on public health agencies, with thousands of web pages scrubbed of vital public health information. Last week, the White House announced a nearly 50 percent cut to the

NIH's reimbursement rate for research facilities and administration costs, which will have untold consequences for scientific research across the country.

The elevation of Kennedy to head the HHS is the logical extension of the bipartisan assault on public health throughout the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which only intensified under the Biden administration. Biden's normalization of a "forever COVID" policy of perpetual waves of mass infection, death and debilitation with Long COVID, which killed nearly 1 million Americans on his watch, cultivated the political climate in which Kennedy's anti-science positions gained traction.

As with all of Trump's cabinet appointments, the Democrats put up no real opposition to Kennedy's Senate confirmation and issued no calls for the population to mobilize against Trump's efforts to destroy public health, overthrow the Constitution and create a fascist dictatorship.

Not a single Democrat rebuffed Kennedy's lies, repeated twice, that his May 2021 petition to the FDA was limited to the vaccines for children, and that this was because science supposedly showed that COVID-19 is harmless to children. In reality, COVID-19 has officially killed over 1,000 children in the US, with the real figure well above 2,000, and more than 1 million children in the US are now suffering from Long COVID. These basic facts are suppressed by the Democratic Party due to its culpability in this needless death and debilitation.

The son of Senator Robert F. Kennedy and nephew of President John F. Kennedy, RFK Jr. was clearly deeply traumatized by their assassinations in 1968 and 1963, respectively. He started using heroin at the age of 15 and was addicted for the next 14 years. In a letter published on the eve of Kennedy's Senate confirmation hearings, his cousin Caroline wrote that in college he "enjoyed showing off how he put baby chickens and mice in the blender to feed his hawks," in a "perverse scene of despair and violence."

In a sense, Kennedy's life and political trajectory embody the political, social and cultural degeneration of the United States. While his father and uncle represented the height of postwar American liberalism and reformism, Kennedy's alliance with Trump signals the descent into fascist barbarism.

A critical feature of fascism is the rejection of modernity, the Enlightenment and a scientific, materialist world outlook, all of which found their highest expression in the development of Marxism starting in the mid-19th century. In his monumental June 1933 essay on rise of fascism in Germany, "What Is National Socialism?" Leon Trotsky, the great co-leader of the October 1917 Russian Revolution, wrote:

Fascism has opened up the depths of society for politics. Today, not only in peasant homes but also in city skyscrapers, there lives alongside of the twentieth century the tenth or the thirteenth. A hundred million people use electricity and still believe in the magic power of signs and exorcisms. The Pope of Rome broadcasts over the radio about the miraculous transformation of water into wine. Movie stars go to mediums. Aviators who pilot miraculous mechanisms created by man's genius wear amulets on their sweaters. What inexhaustible reserves they possess of darkness, ignorance, and savagery! Despair has raised them to their feet, fascism has given them a banner. Everything that should have been eliminated from the national organism in the form of cultural excrement in the course of the normal development of society has now come gushing out from the throat; capitalist society is puking up the undigested barbarism. Such is the physiology of National Socialism.

Today, alongside the staggering technological advances in computing and artificial intelligence (AI), medical breakthroughs like mRNA vaccines, gene therapy and more, American imperialism is puking up the barbarians Kennedy, Trump and Musk, under the Orwellian banner, "Make America Healthy Again."

By enabling the spread of diseases through a deliberate rejection of science, the American ruling class is openly sanctioning a eugenicist policy of "natural selection" in which those no longer deemed "productive," the elderly and disabled, are sacrificed at the altar of profit.

The working class cannot and will not accept the decimation of its living standards and a return to the Dark Ages. The war on public health, science and all the social gains won through prior generations' social struggles will inevitably confront growing opposition and resistance. This must be guided by a socialist leadership fighting to put an end to imperialist war and dictatorship, and which aims to rebuild society on the basis of social needs, including a vast expansion of public health resources internationally.