

Trump picks RFK Jr. to oversee the Department of Health and Human Services

UPDATED NOVEMBER 14, 2024 · 5:01 PM ET

HEARD ON ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

By Jeongyoon Han, Susan Davis

[3-Minute Listen](#)

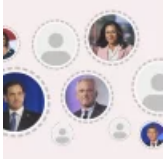
[Download
Transcript](#)



Robert F. Kennedy Jr. speaks during a campaign rally for Donald Trump at Macomb Community College in Warren, Mich., on Nov. 1. Trump has now tapped Kennedy for his administration.

Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

President-elect Donald Trump has tapped Robert F. Kennedy Jr. — a former independent presidential candidate who has a history of spreading conspiracy theories, including about vaccines — to oversee the Department of Health and Human Services.



POLITICS

Here's who Trump has picked as Cabinet members and key advisers

"For too long, Americans have been crushed by the industrial food complex and drug companies who have engaged in deception, misinformation, and disinformation when it comes to Public Health," Trump said in a statement on Truth Social. "The Safety and Health of all Americans is the most important role of any Administration, and HHS will play a big role in helping ensure that everybody will be protected from harmful chemicals, pollutants, pesticides, pharmaceutical products, and food additives that have contributed to the overwhelming Health Crisis in this Country. Mr. Kennedy will restore these Agencies to the traditions of Gold Standard Scientific Research, and beacons of Transparency, to end the Chronic Disease epidemic, and to Make America Great and Healthy Again!"

The announcement on Thursday came as no surprise. For weeks, Trump had made clear that Kennedy would have a role in his administration.

"He's going to help make America healthy again," Trump said of Kennedy during celebratory election night remarks. "He's a great guy and he really means it. He wants to do some things and we're going to let him go do it."



SHOTS - HEALTH NEWS

No more fluoride in the water? RFK Jr. wants that and Trump says it 'sounds OK'

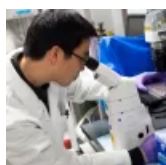
In an interview with NPR before the choice was announced, Kennedy said, "President Trump has given me three instructions: He wants the corruption and the conflicts out of the regulatory agencies. He wants to return the agencies to the gold standard empirically based, evidence-based science and medicine that they were once famous for. And he wants to end the chronic disease epidemic with measurable impacts on a diminishment of chronic disease within two years."

If confirmed by the Senate, the role would give Kennedy the chance to actualize a vision of public health that is often at odds with mainstream health and science.

Kennedy's baseless claims have included that Wi-Fi causes cancer and "leaky

brain"; that school shootings are attributable to antidepressants; that chemicals in water can lead to children becoming transgender; and that AIDS may not be caused by HIV. He's also long said that vaccines cause autism and fail to protect people from diseases.

In the NPR interview, Kennedy said, "[O]f course, we're not going to take vaccines away from anybody. We are going to make sure that Americans have good information right now. The science on vaccine safety particularly has huge deficits, and we're going to make sure those scientific studies are done and that people can make informed choices about their vaccinations and their children's vaccinations."



HEALTH

With Trump coming into power, the NIH is in the crosshairs

Even before Trump's announcement, Kennedy said he would advise the incoming administration to remove fluoride from all public water — though putting small amounts of fluoride in the water supply has proven to have prevented cavities and improved dental health. He also proposed replacing 600 employees at the National Institutes of Health.

Kennedy first challenged President Biden in the 2024 Democratic primary before mounting a long-shot independent presidential bid. He suspended that campaign in August and backed Trump.

Kennedy is the son of Robert F. Kennedy, the late U.S. attorney general, New York senator and Democratic presidential candidate, and is the nephew of former President John F. Kennedy. He had spent the earlier part of his career as an environmental lawyer best known for cleaning up the Hudson River and spearheading a global effort to protect waterways.

Kennedy joins a growing crop of nominees named by the president-elect whose qualifications have been questioned and who could face difficult paths to confirmation, even in a 53-seat Republican-controlled Senate. It's a list that includes former GOP Rep. Matt Gaetz for attorney general and former Democratic Rep. Tulsi Gabbard for director of national intelligence.

Unlike Gaetz and Gabbard, however, Kennedy enjoys enthusiastic levels of support from some of Trump's most loyal senators, including Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis. Johnson told reporters Wednesday that Kennedy had been in talks with Trump to lead the health agency since around the time he dropped his own independent presidential bid and endorsed Trump.

"When he called me up asking, for example, his chances of confirmation, first words out of my mouth: 'Bobby, this is the answer to my prayers,' and I sincerely believe that," Johnson said. "I think Bobby Kennedy can do more working with President Trump to advance America's health than anybody, really, in history. This could be completely game-changing."

Senate Democrats were quick to criticize the Kennedy selection — even as they lack the votes to block his confirmation without GOP defections.

"Mr. Kennedy's outlandish views on basic scientific facts are disturbing and should worry all parents who expect schools and other public spaces to be safe for their children," Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said in a statement. "When Mr. Kennedy comes before the Finance Committee, it's going to be very clear what Americans stand to lose under Trump and Republicans in Congress."

Correction

Nov. 14, 2024

In an earlier version of this story, the last name of former Rep. Tulsi Gabbard was misspelled in one instance.