



Weekly Checkup

RFK Jr. on the Hill

MICHAEL BAKER | MAY 16, 2025

This week, Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. went to Capitol Hill on a routine mission to discuss and defend the president's budget for his department. He [testified](#) first at the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies; he then trekked across the Hill to [testify](#) at the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP). **While department secretaries typically provide a predictable recitation of the administration's positions and postures at these budget hearings, there are a couple things from Secretary Kennedy's testimony that stood out.**

The first item of note came during the House hearing when discussing vaccines with Representative Mark Pocan (D-WI). The congressman asked whether the secretary would vaccinate his children now against measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases, and the secretary (as expected) equivocated on the subject, saying that he "probably" would. He then, however, announced he doesn't "think people should be taking medical advice from me." I wholeheartedly agree, but this is a disturbing admission considering his position. The HHS secretary has sweeping powers over the availability and dissemination of medical information and advice, and he oversees the federal agencies charged with research, evaluation, approval, and promotion of medical products and information. **To hear a secretary testify that it is not his place to provide advice is remarkable and should be concerning for those who rely on the federal health care apparatus for guidance and information.**

The second item that prompted concern was the commitment the secretary offered in the Senate HELP hearing to Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) to develop and implement legislation that codifies the president's recent [executive order \(EO\)](#) on most-favored-nation pricing. Senator Sanders acknowledged that the EO was on shaky legal ground (at least, one can hope; there are still many open questions about its mechanisms) and expressed desire to tackle the issue through legislation that implements

this scheme. **While this is not a surprising request from Sanders, it elicited a surprising affirmative response from the secretary. The American Action Forum has explored why this would be very bad policy, and this agreement between Sanders and the secretary raises the specter that this policy may have a chance.** While the senator and the secretary didn't commit to a meeting or timeline on drafting and introducing this legislation, the aggressive nature of the EO and the odd bipartisan appeal of this terrible policy demonstrate that this is an issue to watch.

Secretary Kennedy made several other points over the course of his hearings (on the subjects of autism research, substance use treatment access, and the defense of indefensible staffing cuts) that deserve their own analysis - in part because they directly contradict his "don't take advice from me" talking point - but none as potentially impactful as those highlighted. **If nothing else, these hearings underscore the need for continued congressional oversight to ensure cabinet officials make clear the administration's intentions to the American people.**