



**Statement for the Record  
Full Committee Hearing  
United States Senate Committee on Finance  
Hearing to consider the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., of California, to be Secretary of Health  
and Human Services  
Wednesday, January 29, 2025**

*Submitted by*

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The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record concerning the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. to be Secretary of Health and Human Services (DHHS). FASEB is a coalition of 22 scientific societies representing over 110,000 researchers in the biological and biomedical sciences. As the nation's largest biomedical coalition, FASEB is the recognized collective policy voice of biological and biomedical researchers.

We have reviewed a transcript of the January 29 hearing prepared by Congressional Quarterly (CQ), the Responses to Questions for the Record to Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Part I, Part II, and Part III, the Further Responses to Questions for the Record to Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and the Further Responses to Senator Wyden Questions for the Record to Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. that were publicly posted on the Senate Finance Committee website. After reviewing those documents, we have serious concerns about several statements Mr. Kennedy made in response to questions during the hearing on January 29, as well as his written responses to the Questions for the Record that were posted on the committee website. These concerns make it clear to FASEB that Mr. Kennedy is not an appropriate choice to serve as Secretary of DHHS.

**Myth Perpetuated: Measles Is Not a Deadly Disease**

In an exchange with Senator Ron Wyden during the January 29 hearing, Mr. Kennedy was asked directly by the senator "So, my question here is Mr. Kennedy is measles deadly, yes, or no?" According to the CQ transcript, in his response to Senator Wyden, Mr. Kennedy did not answer the question but instead noted, "The death rate from measles historically in this country in 1963, the year before the introduction of the vaccine was 1 in 10,000." Mr. Kennedy's refusal to provide a direct answer to Senator Wyden's question is disturbing given that the World Health Organization website says, "Measles is a highly contagious, serious airborne disease caused by a virus that can lead to severe complications and death" and, "in 2023, there were an estimated 107,500 measles deaths globally, mostly among unvaccinated or under vaccinated children under the age of 5 years."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Key Facts About Measles: World Health Organization](#), November 14, 2024.



**Myth Perpetuated: COVID Is a Bioweapon That Targeted Specific Populations**

In an exchange with Senator Michael Bennett during the January 29 hearing, Mr. Kennedy was asked directly by the senator “So, I'm asking you yes or no, Mr. Kennedy, did you say that COVID-19 was a genetically engineered bioweapon that targets black and white people, but spared Ashkenazi Jews and Chinese people?” According to the CQ transcript, Mr. Kennedy responded, “I didn't say it was deliberately targeted; I just quoted an NIH funded, an NIH published study.” When Senator Bennett again asked Mr. Kennedy to clarify his remarks about whether COVID-19 targeted black and white people but spared Ashkenazi Jews, Mr. Kennedy replied, “I quoted a study, Your Honor. I quoted an NIH study that showed that.” Although it is not clear to which NIH study Mr. Kennedy was referring in that response, he may have been intending to reference an NIH-funded study entitled “New insights into genetic susceptibility of COVID-19: an ACE2 and TMPRSS2 polymorphism analysis<sup>2</sup>” that was published in *BMC Medicine* on July 15, 2020 (this study was also referenced in several press reports following similar public comments Mr. Kennedy made in July 2023). While the *BMC Medicine* paper did not conclude that Chinese people were less affected by the virus, it did speculate that the presence of certain genetic mutations might increase the severity of COVID-19. Mr. Kennedy’s inability to accurately cite the findings of a scientific paper during sworn testimony to a congressional committee with oversight authority for NIH brings into question his credibility as HHS Secretary, should he be confirmed.

**Myth Perpetuated: Effectiveness of COVID Vaccines**

In an exchange with Senator Thom Tillis during the January 29 hearing, Mr. Kennedy was asked, “Are you a conspiracy theorist?” Mr. Kennedy replied, “That label was applied to me because I said that the vaccines – the COVID vaccine didn't prevent transmission and it wouldn't prevent infection when the government was telling people, Americans, that it would.” Publicly available information on federal agency websites at the time discussed the benefits of COVID vaccination and the safety profile of the vaccines and shared data indicating vaccination could potentially lessen the severity of illness and prevent some hospitalizations. The evidence of the effectiveness of the COVID vaccine has been clearly demonstrated in the last few years. Mr. Kennedy’s attempt to spread disinformation about the effectiveness of the COVID vaccine under oath is deeply concerning given that he will have access to multiple communication vehicles and opportunities to reach the American public should he be confirmed as HHS Secretary.

**Myth Perpetuated: Misinterpreted Data Regarding COVID Vaccination Rates**

In an exchange with Senator Todd Young during the January 29 hearing, he noted that there has been a lot of skepticism about the nation’s public health institutions in recent years, particularly during the COVID pandemic, that has created a pervasive lack of trust from the public that these institutions are acting in bad faith or failing to act in the best interests of the public. Senator Young asked Mr. Kennedy how he would work to regain the public’s trust if confirmed as HHS Secretary. In his response, Mr. Kennedy acknowledged the lack of trust and said, “At the beginning of COVID, everybody was rushing to get that vaccine. We had over 90 percent vaccination uptake. CDC's most recent recommendation is that Americans take the eighth booster. Only 23 percent of Americans are complying.

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<sup>2</sup> [New insights into genetic susceptibility of COVID-19: an ACE2 and TMPRSS2 polymorphism analysis - PubMed](#)



That means 77 percent of Americans no longer trust the CDC, and that is the problem.” Mr. Kennedy failed to present any evidence proving that 77 percent of Americans no longer trust the CDC and conflated the data he presented about the vaccination rate for the eighth COVID booster. Given the HHS Secretary’s extremely prominent role in informing Americans about public health issues, Mr. Kennedy’s inability to correctly interpret data about vaccination rates is very disturbing.

### **Myth Perpetuated: Stem Cell/Fetal Tissue Research**

In an exchange with Senator Maria Cantwell during the January 29 hearing, she noted that the University of Washington has conducted groundbreaking stem cell research with fetal tissue and asked Mr. Kennedy, “So, yes or no, do you commit to protecting stem cell research for scientific agencies if confirmed?” Mr. Kennedy replied, “I will protect stem cell research. Stem cell research today can be done on umbilical cords, and you don’t need fetal tissue.” Mr. Kennedy’s response failed to acknowledge the breadth of research encompassed within the term “stem cell research,” and that these research activities rely on stem cells of different origins. Although there are advantages to perinatal stem cell-based treatments, many are still in the earliest stages of discovery. Similarly, Mr. Kennedy failed to acknowledge key limitations for this alternative, including the limited number of cells recovered, slower engraftment, and costs associated with maintaining cord blood repositories. As previously stated by FASEB<sup>3</sup>, fetal tissue research has and continues to play a critical role in scientific advances pertaining to vaccine development, treatment of chronic disease, and understanding the effects of viruses on fetal development.

### **Myth Perpetuated: Lack of Rigor and Transparency in Science**

In an exchange with Senator Todd Young during the January 29 hearing, he noted Mr. Kennedy had stated that one of his goals is to return public health agencies to the gold standard of scientific review and asked the nominee to elaborate on what he meant by gold standard. Mr. Kennedy replied, “The gold standard means real scientific research with replication of studies, which very rarely happens now at NIH. We should be giving at least 20 percent of the NIH budgets to replication. We should have the – make sure that all the science is published with the raw data. We should make sure that the peer reviews are also published.” The statement that NIH very rarely funds replication studies is false. In fact, NIH supplemented its existing resources<sup>4</sup> supporting research rigor and transparency with the launch of the Replication to Enhance Research Impact Initiative<sup>5</sup> supported by the Common Fund that supports direct third-party replication of NIH-funded studies. Furthermore, FASEB is gravely concerned that Mr. Kennedy does not appear to have a basic understanding of NIH’s peer review process even though NIH is an agency of the department he has been nominated to lead. Globally, the NIH peer review process is recognized as the gold standard, with many international science agencies and research funders choosing to replicate its two-prong structure that provides expert scientific assessment and alignment with organizational research priorities. NIH also adheres to an approach of continuous improvement to ensure the peer review process upholds the agency’s stewardship of federal funds and is free of implicit bias. Similarly, Mr. Kennedy’s statement regarding publication of raw data indicates a lack of familiarity

<sup>3</sup> [FASEB Comments on Human Fetal Tissue Research](#). April 7, 2021

<sup>4</sup> [NIH Resource: Enhancing Reproducibility through Rigor and Transparency](#). Accessed February 3, 2025

<sup>5</sup> [NIH Replication to Enhance Research Impact Initiative](#). Accessed February 3, 2025



with trans-governmental efforts initiated by the White House Office of Science and Technology in 2013 to improve data management and sharing<sup>6</sup> and broaden public access to research results in 2022<sup>7</sup>.

### **Myth Perpetuated: Impact of OMB Freeze on Funding for Federal Grants**

In a multi-question exchange with Senator Mark Warner during the January 29 hearing regarding the freeze on all new regulations, guidance, and announcements per OMB Memorandum M-25-13, Mr. Kennedy was provided several examples of federal funds that were being frozen or were inaccessible to grantees and asked directly by the senator, “So, does that mean you're not going to freeze the funding that is currently frozen? You'll work to unfreeze it?” Mr. Kennedy replied, “The White House is clear that none of that funding is supposed to be frozen.” Mr. Kennedy’s evasive answer to Senator Warner’s question is particularly concerning given that many current grantees, including FASEB, were unable to access federal funds even after OMB issued Memorandum M-25-14 rescinding Memorandum M-25-13. If Mr. Kennedy believes that the White House was clear that funding is not supposed to be frozen, why was he not able to provide a direct response to Senator Warner’s question?

### **Myth Perpetuated: NIH Responsiveness to Congressional Requests**

In an exchange with Senator Ron Johnson during the January 29 hearing regarding his attempt to seek responses to over 70 oversight letters he sent to federal health agencies under the Biden administration, Johnson noted that what he did receive included heavily redacted files and pages of talking points. Senator Johnson asked Mr. Kennedy, “As secretary of HHS, will you honor these requests from Congress and will you make HHS transparent?” Mr. Kennedy replied, “Yeah. My approach to HHS, I said before, Senator, is radical transparency. Democrats and Republicans ought to be able to come in and get information that was generated at taxpayer expense that is owned by the American taxpayer. They shouldn't get redacted documents. Public health agencies should be transparent.” FASEB supports transparency but recognizes that there are existing laws and federal rules and regulations mandating that agencies redact certain sensitive information. We are alarmed that Mr. Kennedy’s response to Senator Johnson did not provide any context about these existing laws and regulations and could place federal agency employees in the position of breaking the law if they are forced to provide unredacted documents should Mr. Kennedy be confirmed as HHS Secretary.

### **Concerns About Additional Responses to Written Questions for the Record**

Mr. Kennedy provided written responses to additional questions for the hearing record that were publicly posted on the Senate Finance Committee website. In many instances, the written responses submitted by the nominee were incomplete, vague, or evasive, raising concern about Mr. Kennedy’s intentions should he be confirmed as HHS Secretary. Some examples include:

#### **[Responses to Questions for the Record, Part 1](#)** –

- Wyden Question 7b. If confirmed, will you commit to reversing the freeze within two hours of your swearing in? Response: I will review the items paused and make a determination. *The*

<sup>6</sup> [Memorandum: Increasing Access to the Results of Federally Funded Scientific Research](#). Issued February 22, 2013

<sup>7</sup> [Memorandum: Ensuring Free, Immediate, and Equitable Access to Federally Funded Research](#). Issued August 25, 2022.



*nominee did not directly answer the question or commit to any time frame to lift the pause on HHS communications until they are approved by a political appointee, despite the memo from HHS indicating the pause would only remain in effect until February 1, 2025.*

- Wyden Question 28. Beyond the human cost of lost cures, treatments, and prevention, NIH scientists and staff are among the best in the world and will leave if their work is paused. Regaining that capability for NIH would take years and may not ever truly recover. How do you plan to quantify and make up for these losses in breakthrough research? Response: If confirmed, my goal is for NIH to be the global leader in breakthrough, transparent research accountable to the American people. *This response did not address the Senator's question about creating a plan to quantify and make up for losses in breakthrough research that might occur during the pause in disbursing grant funds following the issuance of OMB Memo M-25-13.*
- Wyden Question 35. On January 27, 2025 the Trump Administration announced a "pause" on nearly all federal grants. While the impact of the "pause" will depend on ongoing litigation, and the administration may even withdraw or rescind this order, its immediate impact caused chaos among federal grantees. Considering that the Trump administration made clear its attempt to withhold federal funds through this order, it is important to understand which specific grants or programs you believe this pause applies to within HHS. Which specific grants or programs within HHS do you believe should not be subject to this type of pause? Response: OMB rescinded Memo 25-13 on January 29, 2025. HHS will continue to implement the President's Executive Orders. *The nominee referenced a memo from OMB that continues to cause confusion and did not answer the question about which specific grants/programs at HHS to which he believes the pause in funding applies.*

### Responses to Questions for the Record, Part 2 –

- Question 10. How would you ensure that accurate, science-based information reaches Americans during a pandemic? Response: I will bring radical transparency to HHS to increase public trust; this in turn will engage more people. *This answer is vague and provides no concrete information nor does it acknowledge the role of HHS agencies in providing information to the public.*
- Question 148. The NIH recently had all funding frozen and was instructed to stop all activity including meetings of groups of professionals that support their work. All travel was also discontinued. These actions effectively halted the function of the NIH, putting at risk vital research including, but not limited to cancer research. Will you commit to immediately restore full funding and function to the National Institutes of Health? If not, why not? Response: OMB rescinded Memo 25-13 on January 29, 2025. HHS will continue to implement the President's Executive Orders. *The nominee referenced a memo from OMB for which implementation continues to cause confusion and did not provide a timeframe for when disbursement of NIH funds would be restored.*
- Cantwell Question 8:1. Stem cell research today comes from embryonic or fetal tissue. Do you personally believe that innovative research should be allowed to continue? 2. During the first Trump term, the administration banned NIH funding for research involving fetal tissue from abortions – meaning that in-progress research projects were suspended. The Biden





administration rescinded that ban. Will you reinstate that ban, if confirmed? Response 1-2: Present-day regenerative medicine, which relies on stem cells, is based on adult stem cells derived from bone marrow, adipose tissue, or other specialty cells in the body. There is no need to use stem cells from fetal tissue or embryos. *Nominee did not answer question 2 regarding what Senator Cantwell described as banning research using fetal tissue from abortions and is incorrect that “there is no need to use stem cells from fetal tissue or embryos.” As noted above, fetal tissue research has implications for vaccine development, treatment of chronic disease, and understanding the effects of viruses on fetal development, among other research areas.*

### Responses to Questions for the Record, Part 3 –

- Question 168: OMB’s memo is vague about which federal financial assistance programs must be suspended. How would you determine which, if any, of HHS’ grant programs would be frozen? Response: If confirmed, I will work to faithfully execute the Executive Orders signed by the President. *This answer is vague and provides no concrete information.*
- Question 11: Under what circumstances, if any, would you overrule decisions made by scientific experts within HHS and its agencies, and what criteria would guide that decision? Response: President Trump and I have assembled the greatest team of health care experts HHS has ever had. This team will work collaboratively to ensure HHS functions at its highest level to make America healthy again. All voices will be heard, and we will be transparent in our decisions. *This answer is vague and provides no concrete information.*

FASEB respectfully requests that the entirety of this statement be entered into the official record of the January 29, 2025 hearing considering the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., to serve as Secretary of Health and Human Services. We look forward to working with the Senate Finance Committee to address any questions you may have about this statement.

Sincerely,

Beth A. Garvy, PhD  
FASEB President