



Protecting the Equal Rights  
of Nonreligious Americans

January 27, 2025

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The Honorable John Thune  
Office of the Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Office of the Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Thune and Schumer,

As a coalition of twenty organizations dedicated to the separation of church and state, freedom of religion or belief, and the rights of the nonreligious, the Secular Coalition for America is writing to ask you to oppose the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. to be Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS). The Secular Coalition does not support government policies or legislation which promote or are based on religious beliefs. Instead we believe in government policies and legislation that are based in evidence and science.

Most of Mr. Kennedy's career in healthcare has been dedicated to policies free of science and evidence. This nomination belies any interest in experience, qualifications, or understanding of health science in nominating someone who would run HHS and oversee its \$1.8 trillion budget.

Mr. Kennedy has made a career out of spreading misinformation about the supposed ill effects of vaccinations despite being wrong on the science: vaccines are among the safest and most beneficial advances in modern medicine. His organization, Children's Health Defense, has promoted the harmful belief that vaccinations cause childhood autism in the face of strong scientific consensus to the contrary.

In 2019 Mr. Kennedy personally claimed to the Prime Minister of Samoa that a measles epidemic was due to mothers and children receiving the measles vaccine. This led to less than one-third of eligible one-year-olds in Samoa receiving the vaccine; 83 people died before vaccinations controlled the epidemic.

In one of his hearings this week, Mr. Kennedy told senators that if there are studies that show he's wrong on vaccines, he will now accept them, which raises the obvious question of why Mr. Kennedy doesn't already know about and believe the many studies that show he's wrong.



Atheists. Agnostics. Humanists. Americans.


Mr. Kennedy is not the first person to renounce decades of beliefs on an important issue when nominated for a cabinet position and he won't be the last, but his about-face on vaccines renders unreliable everything else he says now about his policy goals.

The hearings raised many other troubling issues. Mr. Kennedy dodged the question when Senator Warren asked if he would continue to profit from lawsuits against drug companies. A simple "No" would have been the right answer. Instead he tried to answer with "You're asking me not to sue drug companies?" which was not the question. When asked by Senator Bennet, "Did you say Lyme disease is a highly likely militarily engineered bioweapon?" Mr. Kennedy responded, "I probably did say that." When asked by Senator Sanders about anti-vaccine products sold by his organization, Children's Health Defense, he dodged whether he would stop selling (and profiting from) those products.

Nothing demonstrates the problems with Mr. Kennedy's mistaken beliefs better than the fact that he filed a petition with the FDA in May 2021 demanding that officials rescind authorization for the COVID vaccination and refrain from approving any COVID vaccines in the future. He should not be overseeing the FDA if another pandemic develops. Thousands, if not millions, of lives are at stake here.

In conclusion, we ask that you oppose this absurd nomination so that someone with more experience and more credibility can be nominated and confirmed. In short, we ask you to first do no harm. That phrase comes from *Of the Epidemics* by Hippocrates, which provides more reliable medical advice on the subject than anything written by Mr. Kennedy two thousand years later.

Sincerely,

  
Steven Emmert  
Executive Director

American Atheists

American Ethical Union

American Humanist Association

Association of Secular Elected Officials

Atheist Alliance of America

Black Nonbelievers

Center For Inquiry/Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science

Camp Quest

Ex-Muslims of North America

Freedom From Religion Foundation

Freethought Society



Atheists. Agnostics. Humanists. Americans.

Hispanic American Freethinkers

Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers

Recovering From Religion

Secular Student Alliance

Secular Woman

Society for Humanistic Judaism

The Clergy Project

Unitarian Universalist Humanist Association