

CAPITOL STREET

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HHS Nominee Kennedy Makes It Through Senate Finance Vote

Full Senate Confirmation by Valentine's Day

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RFK Jr made it through Committee (14 Yeses – 13 Nos) moments ago – now 50 votes are needed on the floor, which we think RFK Jr. will obtain. The Senate HELP committee will not vote on RFK Jr. Due to the slim Senate majority, RFK Jr. can only afford to have 3 Republicans oppose him with J.D. Vance's tie-breaking vote. Recall that the HHS Secretary, as with other nominees, only requires 51 votes. Now, the Finance Committee will look to Dr. Oz's nomination for CMS with hearings that will be scheduled in the coming weeks. FDA nomination, Dr. Martin Makary, will follow. It's been a good week for Trump nominees – see below for details.

»» Key Points

Cassidy (R-LA) is a yes vote & RFK Jr. helps his agenda. The vote is 14-13 in Committee. Senate HELP Chair Cassidy (R-LA) is keenly interested in working on prevention/wellness, chronic disease, nutrition, obesity drug coverage and NIH reform. These are all topics near & dear to RFK Jr.'s heart, and we think there is work to be done to move the ball forward, with material successes in the next 3-4 years.

Now what? RFK Jr will head to the Senate floor for a full confirmation vote. In a big week for nominees -- Chris Wright was confirmed with 59 votes for Energy Secretary last night while Gabbard continues to garner votes – RFK Jr will likely squeak through. We were 60/40 on his nomination moving forward since Dec 2024.

Another Trump loyalist appointed to HHS this week: Shana Weir, an attorney who aided President Donald Trump's bid to overturn the 2020 election ([here](#)), as the principal deputy assistant secretary for administration Weir sought to nullify Trump's loss in Nevada more than four years ago, is also a senior adviser to new HHS chief of staff Heather Flick. Weir most recently worked as a civil litigator based in Las Vegas and has little apparent government or health policy experience. However, she played a key role in Trump's failed attempt to challenge the 2020 election results. ([here](#))

In other news, Tulsi Gabbard's Intelligence nomination is looking less dicey, with Collins (R-ME) saying she will vote for the director of National Intelligence. Gabbard, the nominee for Director of National

Intelligence, received a boost on Monday when Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) said she would back the nominee. The final remaining obstacle in the Intel Committee for the DNI nominee is Sen. Todd Young (R-IN).

In healthcare land, all eyes will move to Dr Mehmet Oz for CMS (after HHS nominee is confirmed) then Dr. Marty Makary for FDA. Candidly, of all of the nominees, we think he is the least controversial. Our take on Dr Oz is [here](#). After CMS, Senate attention will move to the FDA Commissioner nominee, Marty Makary. Our take is [here](#).

BACKGROUND

The Senate Finance Committee questioned RFK Jr.'s views last week (1/29) on vaccines, thoughts on Medicare, MA, Medicare, abortion and drug pricing.

- **Senator Cassidy (R-LA) focused on Medicaid reform.** He grilled RFK Jr. on the administration's potential Medicaid reform. He asked about the potential impact on dual-eligibles, and how RFK Jr. would increase transparency and accountability.
- **RFK Jr. called for Medicaid pilot programs in each state.** He noted that he wants increased transparency and accountability in the Medicaid program, particularly for dual-eligibles. While he was unclear about the specifics of the reform, he supports implementing pilot programs in each state and ways to integrate Medicare and Medicaid for dual eligibles. He also noted that there are opportunities to improve Medicaid beneficiary outcomes with the advancements in telemedicine and AI.
- **Sanders pushed RFK Jr. on universal healthcare coverage, vaccines, and on climate change.** RFK Jr. stated that providing healthcare coverage has costs (particularly for those that made poor lifestyle choices), and he stated his views differ with Trump on climate change.

Most Favored Nation (MFN) is top of mind for the Trump administration. Trump tweeted on it this [weekend](#). RFK Jr. stated that President Trump has asked about drug costs in the context of global prices. He stated we should end that disparity in pricing between the US and other countries. It is unclear at this time how MFN could be implemented. With visible support of drug negotiation by Trump, MFN could be utilized in drug negotiations to significantly lower negotiated prices.

On drug pricing, RFK Jr. stated he would support PBM reform and drug negotiation. RFK Jr. stated there is a need to lower drug prices considering the rising costs to the federal government. He stated that President Trump supports negotiating prices. On PBMs, he stated he supports the Senate Finance anti-PBM package as PBMs are a vested interest that is draining the system.

RFK Jr. States firmly he is not anti-vaccine or anti-industry. He stated in his opening remarks that he is just "pro-safety". He also stated he support the measles and polio vaccines and would not make it difficult or discourage people from taking it. He also supports the childhood vaccine schedule. RFK Jr. has spoken at length in the past about the need to return to "gold standard, evidence-based science" and to collect additional evidence on vaccine safety.

Medicare advantage (MA) plans are likely to see a tailwind under Republicans and RFK Jr. RFK Jr. stated he likes MA and uses MA himself. When asked about moving FFS into MA, RFK Jr. stated that it is personal choice of the enrollee. On potential healthcare reforms, he is a fan of HSA, direct primary care and value-based programs. We could see initiatives that bring these factors into Medicaid or Medicare.

RFK Jr will work with lawmakers to fix the nursing home staffing rule. He notes the rule was well intentioned but unreasonable. He stated that the rule will lead to nursing home closures and be particularly disastrous for rural areas as closures take the elderly out of their communities, lowering their care quality. Our take [here](#).

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