

CAPITOL STREET

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RFK Jr. in a Trump Administration?

Unlikely to Clear Senate; Pro-Industry FDA Commissioner More Likely

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We do not believe that Robert Francis Kennedy (RFK) Jr. is a serious contender for FDA/HHS in a potential Trump administration. Despite RFK's recent public comments on being promised a leadership role by Trump, we think he may be helpful in decision making for cabinet positions but not one himself. Trump has stated that RFK would play a major role in shaping healthcare and food policies in a second administration. Depending on the election outcome and makeup of Congress, RFK is likely out as a candidate as HHS secretary or FDA commissioner, both Senate confirmed positions (51 votes), due to his prior anti-vaccine rhetoric and history of disseminating misinformation. An influential leadership role is still possible with Trump-RFK priorities including (1) addiction, (2) obesity, and (3) chronic diseases.

»» Key Points

Trump/RFK priorities include improving nutrition, addressing obesity & addiction, and overhauls at major public health institutions. Trump appears to appreciate the direction that RFK would bring on health and environmental policies in a second administration. This past weekend, former President Trump made strong remarks that RFK would have a leadership role in healthcare in his next administration, noting during a campaign rally that "Having him is such a great honor... and I'm gonna let him go wild on health, go wild on the food, go wild on medicine."

RFK's prominence is a reflection of the continued populism of the Trump campaign. RFK is leading the [Make America Healthy Again PAC](#) (MAHA) initiative which broadly focuses on improving agriculture practices, environment preservation policies, improving nutrition, and addressing healthcare access. Notably, the campaign has rallied against "corporate takeover of government agencies that are supposed to protect public health and the environment."

RFK Jr. believes that the FDA is corrupt. Potential RFK reforms for the FDA include cutting funding or staffing and pivoting focus to food and wellness. As a reminder, FDA funding is determined by Congress so downsizing the agency is unlikely, particularly with the increasing number of submissions and approvals.

- RFK has criticized the agency as being corrupt given their supposed alignment with the pharmaceutical industry.

- He has been vocally against FDA regulation and “suppression of psychedelics, peptides, stem cells, raw milk, hyperbaric therapies, chelating compounds, ivermectin, hydroxychloroquine, vitamins, clean foods, sunshine, exercise, nutraceuticals...”

RFK’s anti-vaccine stance is challenging for public health leaders and vaccine manufacturers (NOTE: it also poses a barrier to a Senate nomination). RFK’s anti-vaccine stance is well known, and he founded (and has taken leave from) the nonprofit Children’s Health Defense, which promotes anti-vaccine rhetoric and content. Kennedy has also made false claims about the safety and efficacy of vaccines. His stance is unlikely to be popular and will make a Senate confirmation difficult if the Senate makeup remains relatively close between the two parties.

Other RFK priorities remain more environmental, and agriculture focused (and anti-industry). In his WSJ op-ed ([here](#)), he noted he would prohibit members of the US Department of Agriculture’s Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee from making money from food or pharmaceutical companies, keep NIH funding from going to researchers with conflicts of interest, and review standards for pesticides and chemicals. His proposed reforms reflect his environmental advocacy and anti-establishment stance.

Fun Fact: RFK Jr. offered Harris and Trump campaigns his endorsement as a trade for a cabinet post. Recall that he originally ran as a Democratic Presidential candidate in 2024 election but converted to an independent. He finally dropped out due to declining funds and support. Harris declined the RFK Jr. offer. This is an interesting reversal for RFK as he had previously stated he would "under no circumstances" join Trump on a presidential ticket, that his and Trump's positions "could not be further apart", and that Trump was a "terrible human being", a "discredit to democracy", and "probably a sociopath." About RFK Jr. (70 years old):

- RFK Jr obtained his undergraduate degree from Harvard, and later graduated from the University of Virginia Law School. He attended Pace University and graduated with a Master’s Degree in Environmental Law.
- 1982 - brief stint at Manhattan DA’s office (resigned after he failed the bar in 1983)
- 1984 - volunteer at Natural Resources Defense Council - requirement of his heroin possession conviction, Kennedy credits this as the end of his 14 years of heroin use
- 1984 - Riverkeepers - hired as a senior attorney after he passed the bar in 1985 after a year of volunteering
- 1987 - Pace Environmental Litigation Clinic - Kennedy founded the clinic and worked there for three decades as supervising attorney and co-director and Clinical Professor of Law
- 2000 - Kennedy & Madonna - founded environmental law firm

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