

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Ranking Member Yvette Clarke

Hearing on “Examining Biosecurity at the Intersection of AI and Biology”

December 17, 2025

It has been nearly a year since the Trump Administration began its crusade on Americans’ health care. In that time, President Trump and Secretary Kennedy have decimated America’s preparedness tools for pandemics. Because of this administration’s actions, we are less prepared for a pandemic threat than we have ever been—be it a natural pandemic virus or a virus created by Artificial Intelligence. And they have done it all with the green light from Congressional Republicans.

This Administration’s lack of seriousness about public health threats was clear right from the beginning. In January, there was a meeting between the outgoing and incoming administrations to discuss the country’s response to a pandemic emergency. While several incoming Trump Administration cabinet officials attended Secretary Kennedy decided he could not be bothered and did not show up.

The Administration then illegally froze all federal grant funding, including grants for biomedical research, and has completely terminated hundreds of them. Since he was sworn in, Secretary Kennedy has gutted the HHS workforce, led an unprecedented campaign of lies about the safety of vaccines, and retaliated against individuals who dared to challenge his ideological agenda.

This Administration’s failure to protect the American people from public health threats is already becoming evident. This year, two children and one adult—all unvaccinated—died of measles, a disease that was declared eliminated in the United States 25 years ago. Under Secretary Kennedy, HHS has not been able to contain the growing outbreak. Hundreds have been quarantined in South Carolina in an attempt to prevent the virus from spreading.

Secretary Kennedy has continued to lie about the safety of measles vaccines, which have proven safe and effective for decades. And, in two weeks, because of Republicans’ failure to extend premium subsidies for the Affordable Care Act, millions of Americans are going to be priced out of access to health care—the first line of defense if they get sick in a pandemic emergency. Now, with two days left before Congress recesses for the holidays, Republicans are scrambling. On the floor, they are making a last-ditch and half-hearted effort to make it look like they are doing something about more than 20 million Americans losing access to affordable health care.

Despite all the upheaval and chaos over the past year, the Republican majority has simply refused to ask the administration any tough questions or hold serious oversight hearings.

Republicans have ignored Democrats' calls to have Secretary Kennedy testify on the measles outbreak, and have allowed their colleagues in the Administration to avoid Democrats' numerous legitimate Congressional oversight into their actions.

At the beginning of this Congress, Energy and Commerce Democrats introduced twenty three amendments to the Committee oversight plan in order to commit to actual oversight over Secretary Kennedy and HHS. Republicans said these amendments were unnecessary. They have given Secretary Kennedy the green light to carry out his ideological agenda undeterred.

I understand the importance of examining biosecurity and AI, and appreciate the witnesses and their testimony. But how can we address AI threats of tomorrow if Republican leadership refuses to address the public health crises of today? And how can we take seriously any bipartisan effort to talk about AI risks when the President has issued an Executive Order seeking to punish states that put up guardrails?

History has shown that it is not a matter of if there will be another pandemic, but when. It does not matter if it is a natural virus or a virus created by AI. Every day that Congressional Republicans enable President Trump and Secretary Kennedy's recklessness, we are less prepared for the next pandemic threat. It is an abdication of this Committee's leadership, and extremely dangerous for Americans across the country. And the health of the American people is going to continue to suffer until the dangerous, unqualified, and anti-science officials in this administration are held accountable.