

Testimony of James O'Neill

Nominee of President Trump to be

Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services

*before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions*

May 8, 2025

Good morning. Chairman Cassidy, Ranking Member Sanders, and distinguished members of this committee: thank you for inviting me to appear before you today.

Imagine every American waking up vibrant, energetic, and free of disease. That's President Trump's vision to make America healthy again, and I'm honored to be nominated to help turn it into reality.

I'm grateful to Secretary Kennedy for his bold leadership and for his trust in my experience to deliver results.

My children Eve, Sebastian, and Cecily are in school in California today, but they're why I'm here: I want them, and every child, to inherit a healthier nation.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that all Americans deserve to be healthy, happy, and prosperous. Most families try to make healthy choices, but our food system pushes ultra-processed foods, our official nutrition advice creates confusion, our health care system is difficult to navigate and it prioritizes pills over prevention. Providers spend too much time clicking through popup screens and fighting with insurance companies instead of looking patients in the eye. Federal policies can empower people to break this cycle. If confirmed, I'll help reform outdated rules, pursue transparency and gold standard science, and champion healthy lifestyles and prevention so Americans can thrive.

For three decades, I've worked to improve health care. As a Senate staffer in the 1990s, I helped senators shape bipartisan reforms including HIPAA—collaborating with lawmakers to protect patient privacy.

During the Bush Administration, I had the pleasure of working at HHS for six years with Secretary Tommy Thompson, Secretary Mike Leavitt, and thousands of talented career and appointed colleagues. I am proud of my work there, and I learned a great deal about the responsibilities, structures, and dedicated professionals of each of the operating divisions of the Department, and how those divisions can best serve the American people and improve their health and welfare.

At HHS, I helped pass the Medicare Modernization Act, modernize the FDA, and strengthen food safety. I improved preparedness for avian influenza and hurricanes by helping establish the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response after it was authorized by Congress. I conducted health diplomacy by visiting allied countries and working with ministers of health. I served on the President's Management Council and led HHS to earn the highest possible management score.

Most recently, in California, I've partnered with entrepreneurs to advance cutting-edge research, technologies, and therapies, and this experience has reinforced my conviction that government must support, not hinder, innovators to deliver effective and affordable results that get better every year. I've seen what happens when you pair the brightest minds with the best tools and data, and we must bring that same dynamism into government.

Sadly, America's health is in crisis. Three quarters of Americans are overweight or obese, leading to chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, and over time, heart attacks and kidney failure. Diabetes alone costs us \$400 billion every year, and it has exploded in prevalence tenfold since 1960. Fentanyl ravages our cities and our countryside. Addiction and mental health are urgent unsolved problems. Since 2000, suicide has increased by 37%. Medicare hospital insurance is headed toward insolvency. Families struggle to afford individual insurance. We spend \$4.1 trillion on health care—double the OECD average—

yet our life expectancy is actually shorter than it was in 2010. These aren't just numbers; they're a call to action. Overall, what we've been doing is just not working.

That's why I am so grateful to President Trump and Secretary Kennedy for taking on these challenges and promoting a vision for change.

Mr. Chairman, we have a century-scale opportunity to act. If confirmed, I'm eager to rejoin HHS and:

- reform our food system to prioritize health for our children and parents;
- pursue gold-standard basic and translational research that replicates;
- use science, economics, and artificial intelligence to improve the quality and affordability of health care; and
- accelerate development and access to life-saving and health-extending treatments.

I'm ready to work with this committee to make a generational change in our Nation's health.

For my children, for our families, and for every American, I pledge to fight for a future where everyone can enjoy a long, vigorous, and prosperous life.

I look forward to your questions.