



Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is pictured here in his 2024 campaign for president, addressing the Libertarian Party's national convention in Washington last May. (OSV News/Reuters/Brian Snyder)



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Anti-abortion advocates have expressed concern but not opposition to Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s nomination as Health and Human Services secretary, despite his previous support for abortion rights.

One notable exception has been former Vice President Mike Pence who [said in a statement](#) that Kennedy would be "the most pro-abortion Republican appointed secretary of HHS in modern history."

Kennedy's [confirmation hearings](#), scheduled for this week, on Jan. 29-30, before two U.S. Senate committees, hinge on whether Republican senators would waver over the long-standing medical activist's [support](#) for abortion access. If confirmed, Kennedy would lead an agency with arguably the greatest impact over abortion policy. Democrats meanwhile are sure to confront his anti-vaccination views.

"We believe we can work with this administration," said Kristi Hamrick, vice president of media and policy for Students for Life of America.

Likewise, Kristan Hawkins, president of Students for Life of America, argued in a recent [Federalist article](#) that "pro-life Americans can work with this team," especially if HHS is "staffed with administration officials who will represent all our interests."

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Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, agreed.

"There's no question that we need a pro-life HHS secretary, and of course, we have concerns about Robert F. Kennedy Jr. I believe that no matter who is HHS secretary, baseline policies set by President Trump during his first term will be reestablished," she said.

Anti-abortion groups have credited Trump for appointing Supreme Court justices who overturned *Roe v. Wade*, while disagreeing with the president's stance that abortion should be regulated largely by individual states. But this disagreement has been overshadowed by the alliance with the new administration as shown in a [speech by Vance](#) at the annual March for Life, Jan. 24, and a remote address by Trump.

[HHS](#) oversees federal programs with a direct impact on abortion, including regulation of abortion medications and policies on implementing laws such as the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits federal funding of abortions.

## **Other Trump administration Catholic Cabinet members or nominees**

Vice President JD Vance

Marco Rubio, secretary of state — confirmed

Lori Chavez-DeRemer, labor secretary

Sean Duffy, transportation secretary

Linda McMahon, education secretary

Elise Stefanik, UN ambassador

Kelly Loeffler, small business administrator

John Ratcliffe, CIA director — confirmed

Kennedy, who is Catholic and an environmental and medical activist, has gone back and forth on his abortion views, and [has said](#) vaccines are unsafe. Kennedy ran as a third-party presidential candidate last year, with his campaign culminating in an endorsement of Trump and later his nomination as HHS secretary. He has [told](#) Republican senators that he will support Trump's position on abortion if he were approved.

Kennedy, who previously supported keeping abortion legal through all nine months of pregnancy, issued a [video](#) during his presidential campaign describing a change in his position arguing for limits on what he described as elective late-term abortions.

"I support the emerging consensus that abortion should be unrestricted up until a certain point. I believe that point should be when the baby is viable outside the womb. Therefore, I would allow appropriate restrictions on abortion in the final months of pregnancy, just as *Roe v. Wade* did," Kennedy said. Beyond that he did not specify time limits.

Sen. Ted Budd of North Carolina [told National Public Radio](#) that, after a meeting with Kennedy, the nominee said he would support anti-abortion policies.

"He has been moderate on that in the past, and now he's gonna align himself, by choice, with President Trump on pro-life policies," Budd told NPR.



Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and then-Republican presidential candidate and former U.S. President Donald Trump greet each other at a campaign event in Duluth, Georgia, on Oct. 23, 2024. Trump, as president-elect, announced Nov. 14 that Kennedy is his pick for secretary of Health and Human Services. (OSV News/Reuters/Carlos Barria)

Pence, and the political action group he founded called [Advancing American Freedom](#), is not buying Kennedy's conversion and is sponsoring a series of [ads](#) to oppose the nomination. Tim Chapman, the group's president, [told](#) The New York Times that most anti-abortion activists agree with Pence but are unwilling to go public.

Pence's group believes there is "little reason for confidence" that Kennedy will "have a firm commitment to protect unborn children," Chapman wrote in a [recent letter](#) to senators. He echoed the views of Pence, a long-time opponent of abortion, who fell

out of Trump's graces after he ratified the results of the 2020 presidential election.

"I believe the nomination of RFK Jr. to serve as Secretary of HHS is an abrupt departure from the pro-life record of our administration and should be deeply concerning to millions of Pro-Life Americans who have supported the Republican Party and our nominees for decades," Pence [wrote](#) on the group's website.

Still, despite the former vice president's objections, unless something startling is revealed this week about Kennedy in his confirmation hearings, it is expected that, with the anti-abortion community sitting on its collective whistle, the nomination will sail through the Senate.

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