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Opening Statement
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
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Chairman Cassidy, Ranking Member Sanders, and members of the Senate HELP committee, I am honored to speak with you today and deeply humbled by President Trump's nomination. I am delighted to have my wife Cathy, my son Matthew, and my brother Deep with me today. My other two adult children, Jodie and Benjamin, unfortunately could not attend today but are here in spirit.

The NIH has played a pivotal role in my career. I served as a standing member of NIH grant review committees. I helped many trainees prepare for scientific careers with NIH support. And I won NIH funding to study population aging, chronic disease, and obesity. I have made the study of scientific institutions – including the NIH itself – a focus of my own scientific work.

The NIH is the crown jewel of American biomedical science, with a long and illustrious history supporting breakthroughs in biology and medicine. I have the utmost respect for NIH scientists and staff over the decades who have contributed to this success. The NIH's mission – to support scientific discovery to enhance health and lengthen life – is vital to our country's future and, indeed, the world's.

I love the NIH, but post-pandemic, American biomedical sciences are at a crossroads. A November 2024 Pew study reported that only 26% of the American public had "a great deal of confidence" in scientists to act in the public's best interest; 23% have not too much or no confidence at all.

So, how can I help NIH better achieve its mission? I have five concrete goals if confirmed as director of the NIH.

Chronic Disease Crisis

First, NIH research should focus on research to solve the American chronic disease crisis. American health is going backwards. Life expectancy flatlined between 2012 and 2019, plummeted during the pandemic, and has still not bounced back to pre-pandemic levels. The chronic disease crisis is severe, with hundreds of millions of American adults and children suffering from obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

If confirmed, I will carry out President Trump and Secretary Kennedy's agenda of Making America Health Again and committing the NIH to address the dire chronic health needs of the country with gold-standard science and innovation.

Reliability Crisis

Second, NIH-supported science should be replicable, reproducible, and generalizable. Unfortunately, much modern biomedical science fails this basic test.

The NIH itself just last year faced a research integrity scandal involving research on Alzheimer's disease that throws into question hundreds of research papers.

If the data generated by scientists is not reliable, the products of such science cannot help anyone. It is no stretch to think that the slow progress on Alzheimer's disease is linked to this problem.

The NIH can and must solve the current crisis of scientific data reliability, and under my leadership, if confirmed, it will do so.

Crisis of Scientific Dissent

Third, if confirmed, I will establish a culture of respect for free speech in science and scientific dissent at the NIH. Over the last few years, top NIH officials oversaw a culture of coverup, obfuscation, and a lack of tolerance for ideas that differed from theirs.

Dissent is the very essence of science. I will foster a culture where NIH leadership will actively encourage different perspectives and create an environment where scientists – including early career scientists – can express disagreement respectfully.

Crisis of Innovation

Fourth, the NIH must recommit to its mission to fund the most innovative biomedical research agenda possible to improve American health. My plan is to ensure that the NIH invests in cutting-edge research in every field to make big advances rather than just small, incremental progress over years and sometimes decades.

Crisis of Gain of Function Research

Fifth, the NIH must vigorously regulate risky research that has the possibility of causing a pandemic. It should embrace transparency in all its operations. While the vast majority of biomedical research poses no risk of harm to research subjects or the public, the NIH must ensure that it never supports work that causes harm.

If confirmed, I will work with Congress and the Administration to guarantee that happens.

Conclusion

While I believe there are real problems that need to be addressed, I want to finish by reiterating my great respect for the work and mission of the NIH.

If confirmed, I will carry out President Trump's agenda of making the public science institutions of the country worthy of trust and Make America Healthy Again.