

## 8 key players inside RFK Jr.'s HHS

Conservative stalwarts, Trump loyalists, friends of Bobby's — a look at notable names

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WASHINGTON — A general is nothing without his colonels, and in the war against chronic disease, health secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. will need help.

While the Senate works to confirm the remaining of President Trump's picks to lead federal agencies, the Department of Health and Human Services is filling out with allies to both Trump and RFK Jr.

Taken together, they reveal a pattern: Trump loyalists and those with a conservative pedigree are front and center, but Kennedy has some who share his priorities, too.

Here are eight people to know inside of the nation's giant health agency.

### Heather Flick

*HHS chief of staff*

A figure from the first Trump administration, Flick brings years of experience as a legal and administration adviser at HHS. She previously was part of the Republican National Committee's Campaign Election Integrity Council, according to her LinkedIn. Flick also worked at the Trump-loving boutique law firm Binnall Law Group in the D.C. suburbs, according to a post on the group's Facebook page.

As chief of staff, she is a right hand to Kennedy, and has been at key meetings, including the first MAHA Commission gathering at the White House last Tuesday.

## **Hannah Anderson**

*HHS deputy chief of staff (policy)*

Anderson was most recently director of the Center for a Healthy America at the Trump-connected America First Policy Institute (a role she took on after Heidi Overton, who is now deputy director of the White House Domestic Policy Council). Anderson was also a health policy adviser to the Senate HELP Committee Republicans, primarily focused on prescription drug pricing and private health insurance. She has years of experience in Congress as an aide and policy adviser in the House of Representatives, including to Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R-Texas). She was also a health care industry consultant at Boston Consulting Group.

## **Shana Weir**

*HHS principal deputy assistant secretary*

Weir, who is a deputy assistant secretary for administration, is perhaps best known for working to overturn the 2020 election results in Trump's favor. In late 2020, she brought a lawsuit on the president's behalf in Las Vegas, alongside Jesse Binnall — another Trump lawyer and partner at the law group where Flick worked. The suit alleged over 130,000 mail-in ballots were improperly inspected or verified and should be thrown out. The case was dismissed with prejudice that December. Weir is also listed on documents registering two MAGA political action committees, Save America PAC and Make Liberty Win, in Nevada.

## **Stefanie Spear**

*HHS principal deputy chief of staff and senior counselor*

Spear is Kennedy's most enduring ally in the top ranks of HHS. She served as his campaign press secretary. In 2020, Spear helped start The Defender, a blog that Kennedy's vaccine-fighting nonprofit, Children's Health Defense, uses to distribute related news and promote his work.

Spear's long-held liberal views on environmental and other issues have unnerved some conservatives who are worried about her influence at HHS. She started and for years ran EcoWatch, an environmental news website that Kennedy helped scale nationally around 2011. He also served as a board member and adviser.

Spear has also reportedly clashed with other high-level officials, such as Thomas Corry, a top HHS spokesperson who abruptly quite earlier this month amid a worsening measles outbreak in the U.S.

## **Matthew Memoli**

*Acting NIH director*

A veteran at the National Institutes of Health, Memoli has been acting director of the agency since January. He is expected to be replaced by Trump pick Jay Bhattacharya, but Memoli has nevertheless had an eventful tenure as agency head. He's handed down or overseen numerous sweeping Trump orders, such as the attempted cap on indirect research costs, communications freezes, the termination of millions of dollars in research grants, cancellation of summer internships, slashing of jobs, and stalling of new patents. Last month, two top NIH deputies, Michael Lauer and Lawrence Tabak, left in quick succession.

Memoli could land another job within NIH even once Bhattacharya arrives, considering his new boss once called him a "brave man who stood up when it was hard" for opposing Covid vaccine mandates. In 2021, Memoli, a respiratory virus researcher, privately and publicly pushed back on vaccine mandates. He led the clinical studies unit in the Laboratory of Infectious Diseases at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases formerly led by Anthony Fauci.

## **Drew Snyder**

*Director of Medicaid*

Snyder arrives at Medicaid at a time when the program is under intense scrutiny from Congress and facing steep cuts as lawmakers try to meet

Trump's budget goals. Snyder has experience managing money challenges. As Mississippi's longest-serving Medicaid director in two decades, Snyder succeeded at balancing what was initially a budget \$47 million shortfall, according to the Magnolia Tribune. He also implemented a plan to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates to hospitals, and an extension of postpartum coverage, as well as an expansion of prenatal care, Mississippi Today reported. Snyder, who has expressed support for Republicans' Medicaid reform ideas, including work requirements, left his state government post in late 2024.

Since becoming deputy administrator and director of the Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services, Snyder rescinded Biden-era guidance on funding requests for "health-related social needs." The change, published March 4, could make it more challenging for states to get Medicaid and CHIP to cover services related to the social determinants of health — they will from now on be considered on "a case-by-case basis," Snyder's letter said.

## **Christopher Carroll**

*Principal deputy assistant secretary at SAMHSA*

Christopher Carroll is another long-term HHS employee, having moved around to different positions within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Centers for Medicaid and CHIP Services. But he was to many a surprising choice as acting head of SAMHSA, since his focus for decades has mostly been on finances, policymaking, and payment systems.

Most recently, Carroll has been atop an agency in turmoil since the Trump administration fired at least 10% of its workforce. Employees have told STAT Carroll lacks the skills to protect the core health goals of SAMHSA, an \$8 billion division that funds opioid addiction treatment, suicide prevention, and numerous other initiatives. He and other SAMHSA leaders have yet to ask fired workers to come back (other HHS departments have).

## Michael B. Stuart

*HHS general counsel (pending confirmation)*

Stuart is, in a way, a blend of Trump and Kennedy: A Republican state senator from West Virginia, he was at the forefront of the fight over vaccination requirements in a state plagued by chronic disease. He introduced a bill in early 2023 to remove vaccination requirements for students in virtual public schools and allow private and parochial schools to set their own vaccine rules. He has also expressed support for expanding religious exemptions to vaccine policies.

Stuart, a lawyer, was nominated by Trump during his first term to serve as the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of West Virginia. He most recently served as chair of the state Senate's Judiciary Committee. He will need Senate confirmation to become HHS general counsel, and then would lead a reorganized office at the agency.

Stuart has been key in bringing the “Make America Healthy Again” gospel to the state. On his Facebook page, where he previously shared photos of birthday meals (McDonalds) and power outage dinners (hot dogs, tater tots, chocolate donuts), he proudly posted photos from the MAHA Ball in Washington around Trump's inauguration. “America is ready for MAHA. West Virginia is ready for Make WV Healthy Again!” he wrote in one post.

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