

HHS Nominees Sail Through Senate HELP Confirmation Hearing

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Summary by Bloomberg AI

- Three nominees for positions within the Health and Human Services Department faced relatively little pushback on Wednesday from Senate Democrats during their confirmation hearing.
- The nominees considered were Chris Klomp to be deputy secretary of Health and Human Services, Nicole Saphier to be surgeon general, and Timothy Westlake to be assistant secretary for mental health and substance use at HHS.
- Saphier was asked about her intended public health messaging on vaccines and stated she has not seen reputable evidence that would suggest vaccines cause autism.

Three nominees for positions within the Health and Human Services Department faced relatively little pushback on Wednesday from Senate Democrats during their confirmation hearing before a key health committee.

“We need leaders at HHS who understand and affirm the long-standing scientific consensus that vaccines are safe and effective,” said Sen. [Tammy Baldwin](#) (D-Wis.), who delivered Democrats’ opening statements. The panel’s ranking member [Bernie Sanders](#) (I-Vt.) was absent from the hearing.

The hearing took place before the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, where they considered Chris Klomp to be deputy secretary of Health and Human Services, Nicole Saphier to be surgeon general, and Timothy Westlake to be assistant secretary for mental health and substance use at HHS. It was less contentious than Tuesday’s Senate Finance Committee confirmation hearing.



Timothy Westlake, assistant secretary for mental health and substance use nominee for US President Donald Trump, during a Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee

Photographer: Daniel Heuer/Bloomberg

At that hearing, Klomp **faced Democrats' ire** over his **tax returns**, vaccine views, and involvement in White House drug pricing deals. Finance ranking member **Ron Wyden** (D-Ore.) announced his opposition to Klomp's nomination at its conclusion.

Only the Finance Committee has the power to advance Klomp's nomination to the Senate floor.

Surgeon General's Questions

One notable moment was when Senate HELP Chair Bill Cassidy (R-La.), pressed Saphier, the Trump administration's third surgeon general pick, about her intended public health messaging on vaccines.

"You would be the nation's doctor, charged with messaging. What would be your message to a parent regarding vaccines?" asked Cassidy, who then asked if she believed the combined measles vaccine causes autism or if the measles vaccine is lethal — similar lines of questioning that Klomp faced in his Tuesday hearing. Saphier took a similar stance to Klomp.

“Humbly, I don’t know what causes autism. But I have not seen reputable evidence that would suggest that vaccines cause autism,” said Saphier, who also responded she didn’t believe the combined measles vaccine to be lethal. The nomination for Casey Means, one of Trump’s previous surgeon general picks, **was pulled over** senators’ concerns about her past statements on vaccines.

Sen. **Susan Collins** (R-Maine) asked if Saphier agreed with the **Food and Drug Administration’s decision** to allow flavored e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches.

“The adolescent brain is very vulnerable to nicotine,” said Saphier, who tried to thread the needle on her answer. “But, looking at the harms of combustible cigarettes, I also believe that if there is data and evidence to show that any cessation product can be treated to help adults as an off-ramp, I will review that data and work with the FDA and others.”

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