

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.**

***Hearing on “Aging Technology, Emerging Threats: Examining the Cybersecurity
Vulnerabilities in Medical Devices”***

April 1, 2025

The topic of this hearing—while important during normal times—is completely divorced from the reality we are in. The Trump Administration has launched an unprecedented attack on the federal health workforce, but Committee Republicans are ignoring that fact and instead examining the narrow issue of cybersecurity in legacy medical devices. In fact, at this very moment there are civil servants at HHS buildings who have shown up to do their important work but are being told that their position has been terminated. They deserve much better than how they are being treated, and this is a shameful day for the Trump administration.

What we should really be doing is conducting oversight of how the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are supposed to function after massive restructuring and layoff announcements. Last week, HHS Secretary Kennedy announced his plan to cut 20,000 full-time employees from the department—that’s 25 percent of the agency’s total workforce. He also wants to consolidate the functions of several operating divisions. Kennedy claims that health care services will not be harmed by the dramatic downsizing, but he is wrong, and everyone who is paying any attention knows it.

You cannot cut 3,500 employees from FDA and say to the American people that there will be no effect on their health and safety. You cannot cut 2,400 employees from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—some of whom are working to protect the public against bird flu and measles that are actively spreading through our communities—and tell the American people everything will be just fine. And you cannot cut 1,200 scientists from the National Institutes of Health and say that America will continue to be at the cutting edge of innovation and developing lifesaving medical breakthroughs.

This needless destruction is already hurting people and it will only get worse unless Congressional Republicans join Democrats in demanding accountability and saying enough is enough. Secretary Kennedy must testify before this committee immediately on this drastic action and how it will affect public health and safety.

It is also inexcusable that the Republican Majority has ignored Committee Democrats’ request for an oversight hearing on the measles outbreak that has already resulted in two deaths and 483 cases—across 31 states and the District of Columbia. There have already been more cases of measles than was reported all of last year. This is a disease that was declared eradicated 25 years ago, but that status is in serious jeopardy with experts telling us the outbreak might rage on for a year.

In addition to massively downsizing the CDC that responds to outbreaks like these, Secretary Kennedy has pushed unproven treatments while stripping billions of dollars of grant funding from local health departments, including in Lubbock, Texas, which is the center of the measles outbreak. And last week, the Trump Administration pushed out Dr. Peter Marks, the FDA's top vaccine official. In his resignation, Marks wrote, "it has become clear that truth and transparency are not desired by the secretary, but rather he wishes subservient confirmation of his mismanagement and lies."

This is a crisis that the Trump Administration is actively making worse. And yet, Committee Republicans have refused to schedule a hearing on this critical issue.

The American people cannot wait any longer for Congressional Republicans to start holding this administration accountable. We have had numerous cybersecurity hearings over the years. We know cybersecurity in health care is a problem that needs to be addressed, but nothing will improve if thousands of federal employees who work to solve health challenges every day are laid off.

FDA cannot address cybersecurity vulnerabilities of legacy medical devices if cybersecurity experts at FDA are fired. We still don't have firm details on the results of the first round of DOGE layoffs at HHS. Committee Democrats have asked multiple HHS agencies for specific details about how many employees were terminated, what programs they were working on, and how many were reinstated. These are basic questions, but none of them have been answered by the Trump Administration. We are sending another letter to Secretary Kennedy today on the massive layoffs and reorganization announced last week. It is time that this Committee start getting answers from this Administration, and I invite the Republican majority to exercise oversight and join us in our request for information. Maybe they'll have better luck at getting answers.

Under ordinary circumstances, I would welcome a hearing on the topic of medical device safety because it is important. But I simply cannot pretend these are ordinary circumstances. Americans are going to get hurt by President Trump and Elon Musk's recklessness and we have a responsibility to prevent it. That's what we should be doing.

I have to say, Mr. Chairman, I'm getting caretakers, doctors, constituents that say they can no longer rely on medical and scientific advice from HHS or FDA. We were the gold standard and now every day doctors say, "I can no longer rely on the advice from FDA or CDC. I have to assume that it's false." It's a sad situation.

I yield back.