

INSIGHTS

Senate Finance
Committee Hearing on
Nominations for HHS
Deputy Secretary and
Assistant Secretary for
Planning and Evaluation

Senate Finance Committee Hearing on Nominations for HHS Deputy Secretary and Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation

On September 15, the Senate Finance Committee [held](#) a hearing to consider the nominations of Chris Klomp, to be Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), and Dr. Ge Bai, to be Assistant Secretary of HHS. Senators focused on the nominees' fitness for the roles as well as their views on vaccines. Members also discussed other topics such as hospital competition and pharmacy benefit manager (PBM) transparency. Ranking Member Ron Wyden (D-OR) shared that he would be voting against the nomination of Mr. Klomp. Both nominations must next be voted out of the Finance Committee before advancing to the full Senate for confirmation votes.

OPENING STATEMENTS

- [Chairman Mike Crapo \(R-ID\)](#)
- [Ranking Member Ron Wyden \(D-OR\)](#)

WITNESS TESTIMONY

- Chris Klomp, to be Deputy Secretary of HHS – [Testimony](#)
- Ge Bai, PhD to be Assistant Secretary of HHS – [Testimony](#)

MEMBER DISCUSSION WITH MR. KLOMP

Leadership and Competency

There was bipartisan interest in Mr. Klomp's leadership skills and competence for the role of HHS Deputy Secretary. Chairman Mike Crapo (R-ID) asked how Mr. Klomp would describe his leadership style and how he would use it to ensure the department fulfills its intended objectives. Mr. Klomp shared that he has had the chance to lead in many different settings, but what he has seen consistently across all teams is the importance of building trust. Mr. Klomp continued that trust is built on competence, respect, and integrity, which allows for conversations and collaborations which he said he hopes to deliver across HHS.

Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-GA) questioned if Mr. Klomp and HHS Secretary Kennedy had ever disagreed on a decision. Mr. Klomp responded that he has a reputation with the Secretary and President Trump for speaking plainly and sharing his opinion, even when he disagrees, and he was nominated with that knowledge in mind.

Vaccines

Committee Democrats voiced many concerns about vaccine rhetoric in the Trump administration. Ranking Member Wyden asked Mr. Klomp if he believed the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine causes autism. Mr. Klomp stated that the MMR vaccine is the most effective public health tool to prevent measles and that he does not believe the MMR vaccine causes autism. Ranking Member Wyden and Sen. Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM) both pressed Mr. Klomp on statements made by President Trump that called into question the safety of the MMR vaccine. Mr. Klomp responded that he believes in the safety of the MMR vaccine, but that President Trump believes in the power of parental choice for vaccines. Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO) asked if Mr. Klomp thinks conflicting messaging about vaccines from the president and CMS administrator is an issue. Mr. Klomp shared that HHS needs to communicate guidance clearly and earn the trust of the American people, and he stated that he is concerned about the increase in vaccine hesitancy.

Sen Ron Johnson (R-WI) asked for Mr. Klomp to explain why studies into the COVID-19 vaccine and vaccine injuries were ended by the department without being released. Mr. Klomp expressed his view that any research conducted by HHS should be published.

Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBM)

Sens. James Lankford (R-OK) and Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) asked how Mr. Klomp plans to implement new PBM regulations regarding price transparency. Mr. Klomp said he is not an expert in PBM practices, but he is committed to ensuring experts lead implementation strategies and will lend technical expertise to Congress as needed.

Mifepristone

Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) questioned the current safety review being conducted by the FDA on mifepristone, highlighting that it has been approved for over 20 years. Mr. Klomp stated that he has not been closely involved with the review but understood that the FDA is following regulatory guidance to rereview the drug now that it can be prescribed without an in-person visit with a provider. Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT) encouraged the FDA to complete the review and asked if the agency is on track to publish the review by the end of 2026. Mr. Klomp assured the senator that the review was being conducted and is on track to publish any required reports.

Biotechnology and US Competitiveness

Sens. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Daines both highlighted increased concerns about the US's ability to remain competitive with China in the biotechnology sphere. Mr. Klomp agreed and shared that the FDA is working to streamline the research and development process while ensuring that US biotechnology companies are not harmed.

Other Topics

- Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) raised the issue of Rhode Island's lower Medicare Wage Index compared to other local states and Mr. Klomp committed to working with him.
- Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) pressed Mr. Klomp to ensure the release of the contract deals made with pharmaceutical companies for TrumpRx. Mr. Klomp answered that information is available on the TrumpRx website.
- Sen. Cortez Masto questioned the change in federal funding for Medicare Fraud Control Units at the same time the administration has publicly called for combating fraud. Mr. Klomp stated that he would look into it to better understand the issue.
- Sen. Cassidy asked how Mr. Klomp would address what he described as a lack of regulatory alignment between the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and CMS for the approval of and reimbursement for new medical devices. Mr. Klomp acknowledged the issues that the differences between the agencies can cause and said he would work to reduce stakeholder frustration if confirmed.

Member Discussion with Dr. Bai

Member discussion with Dr. Bai was much more limited. Sen. Johnson asked Dr. Bai if she has an estimate of the level of fraud across HHS funding. Dr. Bai responded that addressing fraud is a structural issue, not a surface-level issue.

Sen. Cassidy questioned some states' proposed policies to cap hospital expenditures and asked for her thoughts on the topic of price controls. Dr. Bai shared that capping prices is addressing the symptom but not the cause of increased prices and that competition is needed to decrease costs.

We trust you found this summary useful. Please reach out to [us](#) with any questions.

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