



Northern Virginia Health Policy Forum: Reporter's Panel

This Forum took place prior to the final approval of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to be Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

On February 7th, the Northern Virginia Health Policy Forum welcomed three reporters to discuss their coverage of the Trump Administration's roll-out of its healthcare policies and their potential influence on Federal agencies and Capitol Hill. The panelists were:

- **Maya Goldman**, health care reporter for Axios covering Medicare, Medicaid, health insurance policy generally, the healthcare workforce, and public health regulations;
- **John Wilkerson**, Washington Correspondent for STAT News covering Medicare, Medicaid, among other healthcare issues such as ACA Premium subsidies; and
- **Phil Galewitz**, senior correspondent for KFF Health News reporting on Medicaid, the intersection of health policy, health economics, public health, and consumer health.

Jim Scott, the President and CEO of Applied Policy, led the discussion.

THE NEW ADMINISTRATION AND WHAT TO EXPECT

Scott started the webinar by asking the panelists about the overall state of healthcare under the new Trump Administration. At the time of the Forum, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.'s nomination to serve as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), had cleared the critical Senate Finance Committee and was expected to be approved by the full Senate — which happened on Thursday, February, 13. All three reporters covered Kennedy's Senate confirmation hearings, and Wilkerson observed that "it was all focused on what he has said...we didn't get around to talking about what he has in store for HHS." The panelists agreed that, based on the hearings' content, few to no specifics are available about what Kennedy will implement at HHS.

The conversation then turned to Dr. Mehmet Oz's potential impact on the ongoing drug price negotiations if he is confirmed as CMS Administrator. As with Kennedy's plans for HHS, panelists noted that Dr. Oz has made only vague assurances that he will continue the Biden-initiated price negotiations with major pharmaceutical companies, although the Trump Administration has indicated that they will support the Drug Price Negotiation Program. On January 29, CMS published a [press release](#) noting their



support and that they plan to “provide opportunities for stakeholders to comment on potential areas of improvement for the program, consistent with goals of achieving greater value for beneficiaries and taxpayers and continuing to foster innovation.”

The panelists did note that the Trump Administration has already taken actions that will inform its health priorities. These include pulling back on health equity, which Goldman described as “. . . a concrete thing that has started to happen through President Trump’s executive orders.” Additionally, Goldman is tracking “how data flows in and out of the federal health agencies and what information the government is allowed to collect and allowed to put out,” processes impacted by the Administration’s recent regulatory and communications freeze.

MAHA MOVEMENT

The panelists also addressed the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) movement, led by Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., which, according to Kennedy, will seek to reduce corporate influence in healthcare and emphasize chronic disease prevention. Even with the popularity of the MAHA movement, Galewitz explains that “whether there’s anything new that this administration is going to do in terms of funding local efforts to help people better address these issues, that’s a wait and see.”

Closely associated with the MAHA movement is the narrative of vaccines in this Administration. Scott asked if the anti-vaccine movement that Kennedy has supported in the past could lead to ending current Medicare coverage of vaccines. Goldman noted that the Social Security Act requires Medicare to cover those vaccines, so Medicare cannot stop providing the vaccines without an act of Congress.

THE FUTURE OF MEDICAID

One of the most pressing topics discussed was the future state of Medicaid in the Trump Administration. Medicaid enrollment hit a record high during the Biden Administration with a correspondingly record low uninsured rate. Trump’s return to the White House, along with Republican control of the Senate and House, may change this. Galewitz explained that GOP-led efforts to reduce Medicaid spending could take several forms, such as implementing Medicaid work requirements, requiring monthly report-ins, undoing the expansion coverage, or adjusting the federal-state funding match. However, he noted that, despite widespread speculation, no formal legislative proposals have been introduced yet for Medicaid.

In their final comments, the panelists echoed Wilkerson’s comment that in this Administration, “healthcare is seen as an offset,” and policy details have not yet been

finalized. Goldman noted that given the absence of specifics, “be prepared for change a lot, and change quickly or be prepared for things to not change at all.”

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A video of the Forum can be found on both [Applied Policy’s website](#) and the [Northern Virginia Health Policy Forum website](#).

Applied Policy®, a leading health policy regulatory and reimbursement consulting firm based in Alexandria, Virginia, proudly sponsors the Northern Virginia Health Policy Forum. The Forum brings together key thought leaders, government officials, and industry experts to discuss critical trends in American healthcare.

This extract was prepared by Applied Policy®.