

Trump's FDA Nominee Sails Through Confirmation Hearing



Dr. Marty Makary, a Johns Hopkins surgeon known for challenging medical orthodoxy, defended his record and vision for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on Thursday during a Senate confirmation hearing on his nomination to lead the agency.

Makary, President Donald Trump's pick for FDA Commissioner, vowed to restore public trust in the agency and improve efficiency, striking a conciliatory tone as lawmakers probed his stances on pandemic policy, food safety, and drug oversight.

If confirmed, Makary would take charge of an agency overseeing everything from pharmaceuticals and vaccines to food supply and tobacco—a roughly \$7 billion enterprise.

The hearing before the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee was a key test for the outspoken physician, whose nomination has drawn both praise and scrutiny for his past comments on COVID-19 and health policy.

A first-generation Egyptian-American and longtime Johns Hopkins professor, Makary has built a reputation as a reformer: he has lambasted hospital price gouging and called for greater transparency in health care, even helping craft a bipartisan Trump administration order to lower hospital and drug costs through transparency measures.

At the same time, Makary has courted controversy with his blunt critiques of federal health agencies—notably declaring the U.S. government the “greatest perpetrator of misinformation” during the COVID-19 pandemic. He was skeptical of policies like blanket vaccine mandates and prolonged school closures. Supporters say Makary’s independent streak and on-the-ground medical experience make him ideal to “shake up” a bureaucratic FDA.

COVID-19 Policy and Vaccine Oversight

Pandemic policy emerged early in the hearing, with senators pressing Makary on how he would handle vaccine decisions and public health messaging. Makary has been an outspoken critic of certain COVID-19 measures—he opposed broad vaccine mandates and was outspoken on the benefits of natural immunity from infection from the outset. At Thursday’s hearing, however, he presented himself as pro-vaccine and science-driven.

“I do believe that any child who dies of a vaccine-preventable illness is a tragedy in the modern era,” Makary told the panel.

The remark was a direct response to Sen. John Hickenlooper (D-Colo.), who raised concerns about anti-vaccine sentiment by citing recent comments from Makary’s prospective boss, Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., suggesting cod liver oil could treat measles. Makary acknowledged that vitamin A from cod liver oil can aid measles patients with deficiencies, but

he firmly defended childhood immunizations.□

Lawmakers also queried Makary about the role of scientific advisers in vaccine decisions. The issue has been in the spotlight after the FDA, under the new administration, abruptly canceled a meeting of its expert advisory committee on seasonal flu vaccines. Makary, who was not involved in that decision, flipped the script and pointed out that the Biden administration didn't convene the same panel when it came to rolling out COVID shots for kids.

Abortion Pill Debate and Reproductive Health

The future of the abortion pill mifepristone was another focal point, showcasing partisan divisions. Republican senators, led by HELP Committee Chairman Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.), pressed Makary on whether he would revisit the FDA's recent loosening of restrictions on mifepristone—a drug used in over half of U.S. abortions—and restore stricter dispensing rules that were rolled back under President Joe Biden.□

Democrats sought assurances that Makary would not use the FDA post to curb access to the medication, which is legal but facing bans in several GOP-led states.□

Makary trod carefully, repeatedly stating he has “no preconceived plans” to change mifepristone's regulatory status but said he would take a hard look at the data and meet with professional career scientists. □

Food Safety, Nutrition and “Making America Healthy”

Though less combative, questions on food safety and nutrition policy also arose, aligning with Makary's well-known critiques

of the American diet. In writings and media appearances, Makary has blasted the prevalence of unhealthy ingredients, at one point going so far as to label America's food supply "poison." He has argued that poor nutrition is driving epidemics of obesity, diabetes and even some cancers.

On Thursday, senators gave a nod to these concerns. Chairman Cassidy highlighted that "Americans deserve to know that the food they buy for their families is safe to eat," noting the FDA should re-examine how it vets additives and ingredients.

Makary's opening statement reinforced that focus. He praised President Trump and Secretary Kennedy's "Make America Healthy Again" initiative for tackling chronic diseases through better nutrition, calling it a "generational opportunity" to rally a grassroots movement for healthier food.

Tone, Reception and Next Steps

Democratic senators, for their part, largely avoided personal attacks on Makary's credibility, even if some remain skeptical. The sharpest criticism came from Ranking Member Sanders, but it was aimed at the administration writ large (and Musk in particular) rather than Makary's qualifications.

Other Democrats acknowledged Makary's renowned surgical career and at times thanked him for candid answers.

"I appreciate your commitment to follow the science," said Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.), even as he cautioned he would hold Makary to that promise if confirmed.

There were no explosive confrontations or gaffes—a contrast to some other Trump nominees' hearings. By the end, Makary appeared to have secured the support of the committee's Republican majority and possibly swayed a couple of centrist Democrats, positioning him on a likely path to confirmation.

A committee vote is scheduled for next week (March 13) on his

nomination□, where he is expected to advance.□