

5 questions for Sen. Angela Alsobrooks

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Democratic Sen. [Angela Alsobrooks](#) of Maryland has expressed disdain for Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and his skepticism of vaccines whenever she's had the opportunity to question him at congressional hearings.

In an interview with POLITICO, she said her goal is to expose the danger as she sees it and mitigate the damage. She didn't mention any prospect for cooperation on issues of potential mutual interest, even though two health department agencies are headquartered in her state. It's a sign of just how much Kennedy has polarized the management of the Department of Health and Human Services since he became its secretary last year.

Alsobrooks was at the center of one of the most highly charged moments of Kennedy's confirmation hearing [when she asked him](#) to explain his past statement that Black people should have a different vaccine schedule than white people.

Kennedy defended himself, saying that was what a peer-reviewed study had concluded, but Alsobrooks wasn't convinced.

Alsobrooks hasn't had one-on-one meetings with the leaders of the two agencies in her state, Mehmet Oz at the Baltimore-based Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and Jay Bhattacharya at the Bethesda-based National Institutes of Health, and isn't sold that it makes sense to give Kennedy a platform to testify before the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on which she serves.

She's concerned that hearings have given him an opportunity to spread disinformation. She didn't vote to confirm Kennedy, Oz or Bhattacharya, and said she doesn't intend to vote for any Republican nominees to the health department so long as Kennedy is in charge of it.

More than a year into Kennedy's tenure, she says Kennedy has done exactly what she feared he would do: substitute people who agree with him for experts.

“What we know is that these are not individuals whose backgrounds reflect the kind of experience that's necessary,” Alsobrooks said.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Do you see yourself or your Democratic colleagues voting for any HHS nominee, as long as Kennedy is health secretary?

Unfortunately, not.

I think we now have enough experience with both Secretary Kennedy and with this administration, to know to distrust the nominees that have been put forward.

We know that he's already replaced or fired the people with true science backgrounds and experience in favor of political hacks, the people who will line up with their ideology.

The NIH and CMS are headquartered in your state. Have you met the two leaders of these agencies?

Not in any one-on-one conversations.

I've been in hearings and had the opportunity to question some of the leaders who have been put forward, but I tell you who I have been able to have conversations with: the employees inside of NIH and some of the other agencies who have come here to the Capitol.

I've also had a chance to meet with some of them, because they are my constituents, where they shared with me that the resources were so scarce at varying points that they didn't have the basic supplies they needed to do their work.

When it comes to Kennedy's Make America Healthy Again agenda, a POLITICO poll found recently that most of the MAHA issues around regulation of food and agriculture are popular. But many of those surveyed said they [associate Democrats, in some cases](#), more with those priorities than Republicans. Does that give your party an opportunity to win back Trump voters?

The way that [Kennedy]'s approached it has been a total betrayal of the people who supported him, and I think that they will come to see that. I think many of the people involved in the MAHA movement are now beginning to understand that these are decisions that have gone beyond what he promised.

My own agenda has been to try to pass legislation in a bipartisan way that would help us to actually fund the efforts that would help us to get more research and screening and detection, for example, for fibroids, a condition that affects close to 70 percent of all American women by 50; heart disease, the leading killer of women in our country.

Has the committee approved them?

Not yet, but having a Republican cosponsor has been really important, because these are not partisan issues. They affect women of every background. So, the [Heart Health Expansion Act](#) is one that I'm working on with Katie Britt, the [Uterine Fibroid and Gynecological Health Treatment Act](#) is the other one that we're working on, with Cynthia Lummis.

Do you expect Kennedy to testify soon before the Senate's health committee?

I don't think anyone wants that guy to see the light of day, to expose how inept and to expose the dangerous lies that he's told.

I'd be afraid to bring him, if I were them, back before the committee. Why give anybody a second look at that train wreck?