

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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April 1, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We write regarding the widespread outbreaks of avian influenza, or bird flu, and your recent comments appearing to minimize the health and economic threat that such outbreaks pose. Not only has avian influenza infected 70 Americans and killed one, but this pathogen has killed more than 168 million birds since 2022 and is leading to skyrocketing egg prices for consumers as it spreads through poultry and cattle farms.¹ We request information about how the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is addressing outbreaks of avian flu and the associated costs, including any coordination with other federal agencies.

Given the dangers posed by bird flu, I was troubled to hear that you consider the “possibility of letting [avian flu] run through the flock so that we can identify the birds, and preserve the birds, that are immune to it,” to be a potentially effective strategy to end the bird flu epidemic.² It is especially concerning that United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Brooke Rollins agreed with this plan, stating, “There are some farmers that are out there that are willing to really try this on a pilot as we build the safe perimeter around them to see if there is a way forward with immunity.”³ We were shocked to see Secretary Rollins embrace this plan after she previously demonstrated an understanding of the need to proactively address avian flu—USDA has pledged \$1 billion to fund a separate five-pronged strategy to combat the disease.⁴

¹ *Your Questions About Bird Flu, Answered*, NBC News (Mar. 9) (online at www.nbcnews.com/health/bird-flu/bird-flu-egg-prices-vaccines-chickens-raw-milk-what-know-rcna193916); Centers for Disease Control, *Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)* (Mar. 24, 2025) (online at www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/data-map-commercial.html); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *H5 Bird Flu: Current Information* (Mar. 24, 2025) (online at www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html).

² *We Will Make Sure Anyone Who Wants a Vaccine Can Get One, Says HHS Secretary*, Fox News (Mar. 11, 2025) (online at www.foxnews.com/video/6369907937112).

³ *Kennedy’s Alarming Prescription for Bird Flu on Poultry Farms*, New York Times (Mar. 18, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/03/18/health/kennedy-bird-flu.html).

⁴ Department of Agriculture, *Press Release: USDA Invests Up To \$1 Billion to Combat Avian Flu and Reduce Egg Prices* (Feb. 26) (online at www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/02/26/usda-invests-1-

Allowing avian flu to ravage flocks across the country is dangerous and reckless, and is an approach unsupported by scientists, public health officials, and veterinarians.⁵ This “strategy” also coincides with the emergence of a new strain of a highly pathogenic bird flu known as H7N9, which surfaced at a poultry farm in Mississippi earlier this month and led to the deaths of 46,000 birds.⁶

Your proposal to let avian flu spread in an effort to create “immunity” contradicts the prevention plans previously announced by other federal agencies under the Trump Administration, including USDA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Coordination between relevant federal agencies is critical in addressing the rapid spread of avian flu. The conflicting plans announced by the federal agencies tasked with stopping the spread of avian flu call into question the Trump Administration’s broader strategy to tackle this epidemic and its consequences for the American people.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Health Care and Financial Services is tasked with ensuring the Administration is effectively responding to public health crises and protecting the American people. We request that you provide the following information by April 18, 2025:

1. All documents and communications related to coordination between HHS, USDA, CDC, and NIH regarding mitigation of avian flu.
2. A full and complete list of any non-governmental experts consulted by HHS related to the federal response to avian flu, such as public health officials, epidemiologists, scientists, veterinarians, etc.
3. A full and complete list of the individuals who recommended that the federal government allow avian flu to “run through the flock” in an effort to build immunity. For each individual listed, please include:
 - a. A complete list of their credentials and expertise that qualifies them to make this recommendation.
 - b. Whether the individual has ever provided recommendations to the federal government in the past. If so, to which agencies and departments and on which topics?
4. A detailed description of the potential risks to human beings from allowing avian flu to mutate and spread.

billion-combat-avian-flu-and-reduce-egg-prices).

⁵ *Id.*

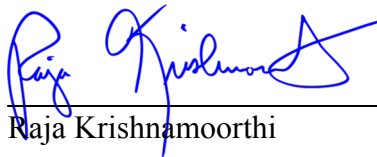
⁶ *New Strain of Bird Flu Wipes Out Mississippi Poultry Farm; Human Flu May Offer Immunity*, Los Angeles Times (Mar. 19, 2025) (online at www.latimes.com/environment/story/2025-03-19/bird-flu-developments-new-strain-discovered-and-research-on-immunity#:~:text=A%20new%20strain%20of%20a,chickens%20are%20raised%20for%20breeding).

5. A detailed explanation of the potential effects on children and families if eggs and related avian products continue to increase in price.
 - a. A full and complete list and description of steps being taken by HHS, alone and in conjunction with federal and state agencies, to ensure eggs remain affordable for all American families.

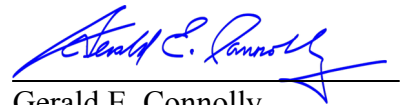
Combating, containing, and eliminating avian flu will take a concerted and coordinated effort across all relevant federal agencies to prevent this situation from causing even more health and economic hardship than it has already. One federal agency taking an approach that undermines the efforts of another threatens to exacerbate and prolong the dire consequences of this disease, and it is the responsibility of this Subcommittee to prevent such an outcome.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

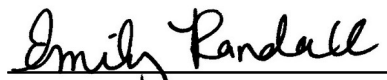
Sincerely,



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health Care
and Financial Services



Gerald E. Connolly
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform



Emily Randall
Member of Congress



Wesley Bell
Member of Congress



Lateefah Simon
Member of Congress