

Alliance of Unlikely Rivals: How to Save a Republic

by [Sarah Dillingham](#) (September 2024)



Last Friday afternoon, after a riveting week of [speculation](#) and 45 minutes later than scheduled, Americans witnessed a rarity in contemporary presidential politics—a genuinely surprising moment. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. [took the stage](#) to suspend his independent run for president and declare his enthusiastic endorsement of President Donald Trump.

The announcement was well-timed to steal momentum following the forced pageantry of the DNC convention, easily dwarfed by the gravity of the historical moment and the preceding series

of chaotic precursors. Over the course of the week, Kennedy's running mate Nicole Shanahan had by turns [telegraphed](#) a likely Trump endorsement and then [backpedaled](#), while Kennedy reportedly [wrestled](#) with disparate advice from close advisors and family members into Thursday afternoon. As he later [revealed](#), he sequestered himself for 24 hours to write his speech, finishing 10 minutes after he was slated to begin.

Kennedy's address was characteristically eloquent and surprisingly explosive as he laid out a scathing condemnation of the Democrats, citing a litany of transgressions against his campaign and the American people, including "canceling the primary to conceal the cognitive decline of the sitting president" and colluding with complicit media platforms to censor his campaign. He observed that "governments and oppressors don't censor lies. They don't fear lies. They fear the truth."

Kennedy explained that he could no longer see a "realistic path to electoral victory in the face of this relentless systematic censorship and media control." He framed the three core principles informing his decision, evoking the populist imagery of his forebears: free speech versus the "government censorship industrial complex," lasting peace and prosperity versus the military industrial complex, and protection of children's health versus the medical industrial complex.

Kennedy praised President Trump's promise to negotiate an end to the Ukraine war overnight, declaring "this alone would justify my support for his campaign." He characterized the premise for U.S. involvement as a "familiar comic book justification ... that this one is a noble effort to stop a super-villain," and described the ongoing conflict as a "first-class calamity for our country."

Kennedy went on to compare their emerging alliance with Abraham Lincoln's team of rivals, outlining additional shared goals on which he hoped to collaborate with the President:

securing the border, bolstering protection of the First Amendment, and “unraveling the corporate capture of regulatory agencies.”

But the most fundamental of these flagship issues, to which Kennedy has dedicated the bulk of his professional life, is the ongoing fight against chronic childhood illness. He revealed his discovery of a shared connection with President Trump, a relative newcomer to health and environmental advocacy whom Kennedy described as “the leading advocate for food safety, soil regeneration and ending the chronic disease epidemic.” The advocate, author and lobbyist Calley Means, had been advising both the Trump and Kennedy campaigns after the release of his 2024 bestseller [Good Energy](#), coauthored with his sister Dr. Casey Means.

Kennedy explained that it was Trump’s parallel discussions with Means which prompted him to reach out and explore the possibility of forging an alliance, which he and President Trump discussed during multiple meetings. Kennedy proclaimed his “moral obligation to use this opportunity to save millions of American children, above all things.” The final 20 minutes of his speech presented an array of troubling statistics which reflect the scope and urgency of the challenge, and the possible solutions he hopes to implement.

Later that day, Kennedy appeared at President Trump’s Arizona rally, where he enjoyed a hero’s welcome as he sauntered on stage cheered by approximately 17,000 enthralled spectators yelling “Bobby! Bobby!” The two men embraced with their silhouette illuminated by exploding fireworks, in an iconic moment reminiscent of the President’s triumphant raised fist after barely escaping an assassin’s bullets. Again, Kennedy echoed their shared connection with Means and the broad themes of their alliance, promising to rebuild the middle class, protect America’s freedom against totalitarianism, and create a safe environment for children. President Trump predicted that Kennedy would “have a huge influence on our campaign,”

forging “a beautiful coalition in defense of liberty and safety, prosperity and peace.”

It was an electrifying day which marked a palpable catalyst in both the momentum and essence of the Trump campaign. Both candidates have been unfairly attacked in myriad ways which undermine the tenets of our democracy and demonstrate the necessity of their alliance. Kennedy’s decision to endorse President Trump will likely close the door on any remaining allegiances with the Democratic party and has strained his family relationships; several family members immediately published a [scathing and unnecessary public rebuke](#). The decision to take this path was courageous and personally costly, but also discernably optimistic. As Kennedy described, “it’s with a sense of victory and not defeat that I’m suspending my campaign activities.”

As I [discussed](#) in a previous article, I believe that Mr. Kennedy is in fact better positioned to realize a legacy of reversing chronic disease in a possible cabinet position or adjacent role in the private sector working closely with the president, rather than leading a presidential administration. His lifetime of successful litigation and coalition building across diverse grassroots networks lends itself to direct advocacy work. The action plan Kennedy introduced last Friday reflects inspiring, radical optimism characteristic of the iconic Kennedy era and JFK administration—which nonetheless may not be broadly applicable to the full array of 21st century predicaments we must navigate.

This plan, as laid out by Kennedy, is the brainchild of Casey and Calley Means, who left their respective careers in surgical medicine and corporate lobbying after their mother died of cancer in 2022. They collaborated to apply their talents and experience toward understanding and eradicating the causes of epidemic chronic disease. In addition to coauthoring [Good Energy](#), an immediate bestseller, Dr. and Mr.

Means launched [Truemed](#), a functional medicine-based company which directly markets supplements and treatments to consumers. They are partnered with popular functional health gurus such as [Dr. Mark Hyman](#), while their work is also endorsed by more traditional pioneers of 20th century nutrition theory such as [Dr. Dean Ornish](#). Most recently, Dr. and Mr. Means appeared on Tucker Carlson's X platform in an in-depth [two-hour interview](#), in which they articulated their hypotheses of chronic diseases and public health. The closing 20 minutes of Kennedy's speech encapsulated the information in Carlson's interview, which Kennedy acknowledged as he encouraged his audience to watch it.

What I find fascinating about Kennedy's plan, having followed his work for decades, is an apparent subtle shift in his new philosophy of eradicating chronic childhood illness. Kennedy laid out a bold proposal in which he promised, if given the chance, to dramatically lift the chronic disease burden within two years and restore the health of all Americans within four years. Specifically, he declared that "if President Trump is elected and honors his word, the vast burden of chronic disease that now demoralizes and bankrupts the country will disappear." Kennedy outlined a three-pronged approach to achieve these goals: "root out the corruption in our health agencies, change incentives in our healthcare system," and "inspire Americans to get healthy again."

This plan seems to pivot toward a relatively mainstream, perhaps more broadly palatable focus on organic "unprocessed" foods and exercise, and "soil health," in contrast to Kennedy's previous work focused on rooting out and removing untested and harmful pharmaceutical products from the market, and the daunting task of restoring the rigor and impartiality of medical research. The latter, pre-2024 campaign perspective reflects the complexity and nuance of multifaceted, interdependent, confounding causes and effects of epidemic chronic disease. Dr. and Mr. Means present a somewhat

hyperbolic interpretation of chronic disease which presents private and public institutions as profit-driven and fundamentally malevolent causative drivers of epidemics, which propagate the broad use of trace additives in “ultra-processed” foods causing the massive chronic health epidemics plaguing Americans to a much greater degree than other national populations. While the duo explores numerous fundamental questions which must be considered—and much of the information they present is valid and relevant—veteran medical freedom advocates may find their hypotheses over-simplified, and some of their supporting data to be dubious.

To examine one example of many questions raised in their interview, Means repeats the claim that “processed grains and sugars didn’t exist 100 years ago.” Some ultra-processed foods were created in the mid- to late 20th century, but as Gary Taubes points out in his exhaustively researched seminal work [The Case Against Sugar](#), refined table sugar—sucrose—has been in use for several centuries. The Means team cites the combined obesity and overweight prevalence among adults in the U.S. as 74%, which is the statistic cited by the [World Obesity Observatory](#). However I could not with any source replicate their claim, echoed by Kennedy, that the childhood combined obesity and overweight prevalence is 50% (World Obesity Observatory [reports 36%](#), also alarming). Dr. Means cites “ultra-processed food” as the cause of metabolic disruption and insulin resistance driving this frightening obesity rate, but the overarching international data is significantly more confounding than they seem to recognize and doesn’t overtly support their hypotheses. For instance, the U.S. is ranked 10th in obesity prevalence among adult males, 36th among adult females, and 22nd among male children. We are outranked by American Samoa, the Cook Islands, and Qatar, among other disparate nations. Clearly there are both inherited and environmental factors bearing upon obesity risks in individual subjects and populations.

Relative rankings can also be misleading because the differences between national obesity prevalence rates are often relatively small. The World Obesity Observatory currently ranks the U.S. 10th in adult male obesity prevalence at 42%. Argentina ranks 24th in the same category, at 36% obesity among adult males. What is fairly consistent across populations and nationalities is the steep growth rate of overweight and obesity prevalence. In Japan, for instance, the obesity rate is 4.6% while the combined obesity and overweight prevalence is 27%. Between 1986 and 2000, the obesity prevalence in Japan increased 53%. While Dr. and Mr. Means may certainly be citing statistics derived from multiple rigorous sources other than those cited above, there is no source I discovered which supports their stated conclusions. What we can all conclude though, is that the entire world population seems to be in trouble—and if not now, then trouble lurks on the horizon.

Chronic, degenerative, endocrine-mediated epidemic disease is infinitely complicated and confounding. We can draw the very distilled, over-simplified conclusion that many of these illnesses began to explode approximately around the early to mid-20th century, after petroleum discovery facilitated broad use of pharmaceuticals, fuels, and plastics. (However there are documented cases of [diabetes](#) and [cancer](#), for instance, which occurred in prior centuries.) What we cannot extrapolate from that observation is the conclusion that all international obesity is driven by the U.S. food industry, which nefariously invented chemicals to make food addictive; nor can we eradicate the problem by replacing all employees at the FDA.

Processed food is a natural outgrowth of ultra-concentrated fossil fuel availability, human innovation, and the resultant feedback loop of explosive of population growth. This loop has been observable and recorded since the dawn of agriculture, which triggered rapid population growth. The resultant

civilizations were then stuck with relatively large populations who had to subsist on food sources with higher yields and lower nutrient density.

Nonetheless, pesticides should be regulated for safety and all populations should have access to fresh, nutrient-dense foods. There is overwhelming evidence that sugar consumption—along with other carbohydrate consumption—exacerbates the obesity epidemic, and that's a problem we can address both individually and collectively. Many of the Means' premises, though not new, are both valid and vitally actionable; and most importantly, their message is broadly accessible to a wide swath of voters. Regulatory agencies must be held accountable to the extent possible, and corruption must be addressed incrementally. That said, these goals will almost certainly take longer than 12 weeks or 2 years to achieve. Elected officials, as well as public and private institutions, can embark upon the tectonic shifts necessary to understand and reverse chronic disease now that it's painfully apparent, but ultimately, it's up to each citizen to take responsibility for our own and our family's healthcare and well-being. We can't do that if we lack the legal, physical, or financial means to do so, which is why we must elect public servants who won't abolish our rights to bodily autonomy, our freedom to produce and distribute food locally, or our right to own, use, and defend private property.

I don't raise these points to be contrarian, but rather to suggest that hope, inspiration, realism, and compromise are all necessary components in an unlikely coalition of erstwhile rivals who must convene if we want to save our republic. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr, in his brave and unprecedented alliance, has initiated an invaluable cultural pivot: he has created space for liberals and progressives to move past the dictated monotone of our captured media, and recognize President Trump's complexity, accomplishments, and potential. He has forged a path for voters across the political spectrum

to join us in defending our precious fragile liberties. We cannot lose this election if we value our health and our children's lives. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and President Trump have paved the way; it's time for peers to follow suit.

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