

# [***Who is Nicole Shanahan, the philanthropist picked by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as his running mate?***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BN1-7MK1-DYMD-62VP-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Nicole Shanahan, [*Robert F. Kennedy Jr.*](https://apnews.com/hub/robert-f-kennedy-jr) 's pick to be his running mate in his independent bid for president, brings youth and considerable wealth to Kennedy’s long-shot campaign but is little known outside Silicon Valley.

Shanahan, 38, is a California lawyer and philanthropist. Shanahan leads the Bia-Echo Foundation, an organization she founded to direct money toward issues including women’s reproductive science, criminal justice reform and environmental causes. She also is a Stanford University fellow and was the founder and chief executive of ClearAccessIP, a patent management firm that was sold in 2020.

On Tuesday, Shanahan talked about her hardscrabble upbringing in Oakland, the daughter of a mother who immigrated from China and an Irish and German-American father “plagued by substance abuse” who “struggled to keep a job.” Touching on her family’s reliance on government assistance, Shanahan said that, although she had become “very wealthy later on in life,” she felt she could relate to Americans being “just one misfortune away from disaster.”

“The purpose of wealth is to help those in need. That’s what it’s for,” Shanahan said. “And I want to bring that back to ***politics***, too. That is the purpose of privilege.”

She also referenced discredited theories about vaccines as [*Kennedy and his allies have been accused of doing*](https://apnews.com/article/rfk-kennedy-election-2024-president-campaign-621c9e9641381a1b2677df9de5a09731).

The attorney talked about her overall passion to help fight “chronic disease,” referencing her own struggles with fertility and her five-year-old daughter, who she said has autism. Shanahan cited “toxic substances in our environment,” “electromagnetic pollution” from devices like cellphones and — drawing her largest applause of the day — the lack of research surrounding long-term effects of childhood vaccinations.

“Our children are not well, our people are not well, and our country will not be well for very much longer, if we don’t heed this desperate call for attention," she said.

Any link between vaccines and autism has long been debunked, and repeated scientific studies in the U.S. and abroad have found no evidence that vaccines can cause autism. Research has also discredited concerns that children get too many vaccines at once.

Vaccines have been proven to be safe and effective in laboratory testing and in real world use in hundreds of millions of people over decades. The World Health Organization credits childhood vaccines with [*preventing as many as 5 million deaths a year*](https://www.who.int/health-topics/vaccines-and-immunization#tab=tab_1).

While no medical intervention is risk-free, doctors and researchers have proven that risks from disease are generally far greater than the risks from vaccines.

Shanahan was married to Google co-founder Sergey Brin from 2018 to 2023, and they have a young daughter. She was raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, where Kennedy made his announcement.

Before the announcement, Kennedy's campaign manager and daughter-in-law, Amaryllis Fox Kennedy, praised Shanahan's work on behalf of “honest governance, racial equity, regenerative agriculture and children’s and maternal health.” She said the work "reflects many of our country’s most urgent needs.”

Kennedy, who said in an interview Monday with “The State of California" on KCBS radio that his VP search placed a priority on ”somebody who could represent young people," said Tuesday that Shanahan — who he said, like him, has “left the Democratic Party” — also shares his concerns about government overreach and his distrust in major political parties' abilities to make lasting change.

“She’ll tell you that she now understands at the defense agencies work for the military industrial complex, that health agencies work for big pharma and the USDA works for big ag and the processed food cartels,” Kennedy said at his Oakland rally. “The EPA is in cahoots with the polluters, that the scientists can be mercenaries, that government officials sometimes act as censors, and that the Fed works for Wall Street and allows millionaire bankers to prey upon on Main Street and the American worker.”

Kennedy also said that, in part, Shanahan's heritage played at least some role in his selection of her.

“I wanted someone who would honor the traditions our nation, as a nation of immigrants, but who also understands that to be a nation, we need to secure borders,” he said.

Kennedy had previously signaled interest in picking a celebrity or a household name such as NFL quarterback Aaron Rodgers, “Dirty Jobs” star Mike Rowe or former Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura, who was a wrestler and actor.

According to campaign finance records, Shanahan has long donated to Democratic candidates, including giving the maximum amount allowed to Kennedy when he was still pursuing that party's nomination before [*switching to an independent bid*](https://apnews.com/article/rfk-jr-presidential-campaign-independent-2024-30d940109c4956de9c81f332ec418463) in October.

It was unclear if Shanahan would use her own money on the campaign, but she has already opened her wallet to back Kennedy.

She was a driving force and the primary donor behind [*a Super Bowl ad*](https://apnews.com/article/robert-kennedy-joe-biden-2024-democrat-super-bowl-e4dee4be456e643be11735c6e4029377) produced by a pro-Kennedy super PAC, American Values 2024, for which she contributed $4 million. In response to criticism following the ad's release, the super PAC said its “idea, funding, and execution came primarily” from Shanahan.

The super PAC can accept unlimited funds but is legally barred from coordinating with Kennedy's team.

But as a candidate for vice president, Shanahan can give unlimited sums to the campaign directly. That's potentially a huge boost for Kennedy's expensive [*push to get on the ballot*](https://apnews.com/article/robert-kennedy-president-election-utah-ballot-863513ec2bf75d1efc9b202cb8ddcc4a) in all 50 states, an endeavor he has said will cost $15 million and require collecting more than 1 million signatures.

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Jonathan J. Cooper contributed from Oakland.

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