

ABC News Censors Democratic Presidential Candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

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Before he was assassinated, Robert F. Kennedy declared that "hand in hand with freedom of speech goes the power to be heard." That does not appear to be the view of ABC News, which censored his son who is now running for the Democratic presidential nomination. ABC objected to Kennedy's views on COVID-19 vaccines, so it simply announced that it was preventing viewers from hearing those views to protect them from dangerous ideas.

ABC's Linsey Davis began the interview by introducing Kennedy as "one of the biggest voices pushing anti-vaccine rhetoric, regularly distributing misinformation and disinformation about vaccines, which scientific and medical experts overwhelmingly say are safe and effective based on rigorous scientific studies."

That apparently was not enough. After telling viewers that this is one of his most famous stances (and its own disagreement), it then censored those views.

After airing the interview, Davis announced "[w]e should note that during our conversation, Kennedy made false claims about the COVID-19 vaccines. We've used our editorial judgment in not including extended portions of that exchange in our interview."

Kennedy [tweeted](#) that "47 USC 315 makes it illegal for TV networks to censor Presidential candidates but Thursday, ABC showed its contempt for the law, democracy, and its audience by cutting most of the content of my interview with host Linsey Davis leaving only cherry-picked snippets and a defamatory disclaimer."

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[The provision](#) is designed to guarantee equal time for presidential candidates and does add “such [licensee](#) shall have no power of censorship over the material broadcast.” However, that does not mean that a candidate is given carte blanche and cannot be edited. In this case, however, ABC is affirmatively stating that it censored his remarks because it disagreed with them.

Putting aside the federal law, this is wrong. ABC can challenge such views, but it is actively seeking to prevent voters from hearing a presidential candidate on an issue of great public interest and debate.

It is particularly troubling after prior media censorship has been shown to have been wrong in silencing dissenting scientific views.

We have seen various [journalistic and scientific figures banned](#) for expressing skepticism over pandemic claims from the origins of the virus to the efficacy of certain treatments. For example, when many people raised the possibility that the virus may have been released from the nearby Chinese virology lab (rather than the “wet market” theory), they were denounced as virtually a lunatic fringe. Even [objections to the bias of authors of a report dismissing the lab theory](#) were ridiculed. The [New York Times reporter covering the area called it “racist” and implausible](#). Now, even W.H.O. admits that the lab theory is possible and [Biden officials are admitting that it is indeed plausible](#).

The same is true with the debate over the efficacy of masks. For over a year, some argued that the commonly used masks are ineffective to protect against the virus. Now, the CDC is warning that [the masks do not appear to block these variants](#) and even CNN’s experts are calling the cloth masks “[little more than facial decorations](#).”

Yet, the W.H.O. head is now embracing censorship as [a means of combating the “infodemic](#).” There are also calls, including from the White House, for Spotify [to ban or curtail Joe Rogan’s show](#) for allowing dissenting views to be aired on Covid or its treatment.

If there had not been such extensive censorship of dissenting viewpoints, there might have been more discussion on the costs and science behind the lockdowns. Instead, there was a chilling effect on such dissenting voices and those expressing doubts were labeled extremists or conspiracy theorists. Recently, for example, [scientists have come forward](#) to admit that they also suspected the Wuhan lab was the origin of virus but were silenced by the backlash at the CDC and universities.

It is also not clear where ABC draws the line. Joe Biden has made so many false statements that [the Washington Post gave him a “bottomless Pinocchio](#).” Likewise, many view contested claims over climate change and transgender issues to be dangerous. Will ABC now be censoring these other candidates or positions?

As noted by ABC, the overwhelming weight of scientific opinion still disagrees with Kennedy. That is fair to note. However, ABC is now claiming the right to censor presidential candidates to protect the public from harmful thoughts or disinformation, including major issues behind a campaign. It is wrong for both the country and for journalism.

We do not have to be protected from dangerous thoughts by the media. A far greater danger lurks in the indoctrination and orthodoxy that comes from censorship.

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