

Is Free Speech Killing Us? FDA Commissioner Declares “Misinformation” a Medical Risk

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Last year, we [discussed](#) the declaration of WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus that censorship was needed to combat what he called the “infodemic.” It was a jarring position given the censorship of experts and scientists who have now been vindicated in raising questions over mask protection to natural immunities to school closings to the origins of Covid 19. Nevertheless, U.S. Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Robert Califf added his own voice to call for censorship. Califf declared that life expectancy rates are being suppressed due to “misinformation.” His call for action against ill-defined “disinformation” or “misinformation” is being echoed throughout the Biden Administration.

In a [CNBC interview](#), Califf lashed out at “health misinformation” which he said was one of his top priorities to address through “specific authorities at FDA, FTC and other areas.”

Califf noted:

“You think about the impact of a single person reaching a billion people on the internet all over the world, we just weren’t prepared for that. We don’t have societal rules that are adjudicating it quite right, and I think it’s impacting our health in very detrimental ways.”

He does not elaborate on what would be those “societal rules” for “adjudication” of access

to information. However, it holds a familiar ring for free speech advocates.

In recent months, the Twitter Files revealed an extensive and [secret effort by the FBI and other agencies](#) to censor citizens on social media. I [testified](#) on that effort. [New emails](#) uncovered in the ongoing *Missouri v. Biden* litigation reportedly show that the Biden Administration's censorship efforts extended to Facebook to censor private communications on its WhatsApp messaging service.

We also know of [backchannel communications with the CDC](#) and other agencies. As officials like Califf call for continued crackdowns, there is no recognition of how the government worked to silence opposing views that have been vindicated in recent months.

For years, scientists faced censorship for even raising the lab theory as a possible explanation for the virus. Their reputations and careers were shredded by a media flash mob. The Washington Post declared this a "[debunked](#)" coronavirus "[conspiracy theory](#)." The New York Times' Science and Health reporter Apoorva Mandavilli was [calling any mention of the lab theory "racist."](#)

When a Chinese researcher told Fox News that this was man-made, the network was attacked and the left-leaning [PolitiFact slammed her](#) a "pants on fire rating."

The mask mandate and other pandemic measures like the closing of schools are now cited as fueling emotional and developmental problems in children. The [closing of schools and businesses](#) was challenged by some critics as unnecessary. Many of those critics were also censored. It now appears that they may have been right. Many countries did not close schools and did not experience increases in Covid. However, we are now facing alarming drops in testing scores and alarming rises in medical illness among the young.

The point is only that there were countervailing indicators on mask efficacy and a basis to question the mandates. Yet, there was no real debate because of the censorship supported by many Democratic leaders in social media. To question such mandates was declared a public health threat and what the WHO called our "infodemic."

A lawsuit was filed by Missouri and Louisiana and joined by leading experts, including Drs. Jayanta Bhattacharya (Stanford University) and Martin Kulldorff (Harvard University). Bhattacharya previously [objected](#) to the suspension of Dr. Clare Craig after she raised concerns about Pfizer trial documents. Those doctors were the co-authors of the [Great Barrington Declaration](#), which advocated for a more focused Covid response that targeted the most vulnerable population rather than widespread lockdowns and mandates. Many are now questioning the efficacy and cost of the massive lockdown as well as the real value of masks or the rejection of natural immunities as an alternative to vaccination. Yet, these experts and others were attacked for such views just a year ago. Some found themselves censored on social media for challenging claims of Dr. Fauci and others.

The media has quietly acknowledged the science questioning mask efficacy and school closures without addressing its own role in attacking those who raised these objections.

What is most striking about Califf's comments is the failure to address how censorship in the last three years may have increased public health risks by suppressing opposing or dissenting scientific views. Indeed, just this week, [a new British study](#) came out directly refuting CDC guidance on masks and suggesting that, while not appreciably reducing the

risk of serious Covid symptoms, masks may have caused health problems. Other studies have rejected the mask efficacy argument though this remains [a matter of intense debate](#).

The point is that there is now a debate after social media companies allowed people to discuss these views and the media is no longer labelling dissenters as conspiracists or racists.

Before we continue to make these government efforts a top priority, we should have a public debate over the means used to combat misinformation and what constitutes misinformation. That should start with a full investigation of past government efforts to censor or blacklist individuals or groups.

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