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CENSORSHIP/SURVEILLANCE

# Government Spending Millions on 'Cognitive Vaccines' to 'Protect' Public From 'Fringe' Viewpoints

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How can we restore trust in our public institutions — governments, universities, media, science and medicine — when the government spends \$100 million to create “cognitive vaccines”: a mix of propaganda and censorship strategies designed to “protect” the public from dissenting viewpoints?

This question was the focal point of the “**Council of the Canceled**,” a discussion broadcast live on X (formerly Twitter) on Wednesday, hosted by **Nicole Shanahan** and featuring **Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, Eric Weinstein, Ph.D., and Mike Benz**.

The panel — experts who have faced  **censorship**  and de-platforming — delved into the complex web of government-funded research, corporate interests and institutional practices they allege are eroding public trust and stifling the debate that is indispensable to science and democracy.

“We’d like to restructure consensus-building so that ... governance represents the people,” said Shanahan, a Silicon Valley tech entrepreneur and the vice-presidential running mate of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., **Children’s Health Defense’s** (CHD) chairman on leave.

The participants explored how this might be achieved in the face of what they described as coordinated efforts to control public opinion and suppress alternative viewpoints.

Benz, a former U.S. Department of State official and founder of **Foundation for Freedom Online**, discussed the concept of cognitive or psychological “vaccines” developed by academic institutions with government funding.

“They have glitzy 10-minute promo videos,” he said, describing attempts to create psychological inoculations against what authorities deem “fake news.”

The panelists agreed that these programs, far from protecting democracy, are undermining it by attempting to preemptively discredit dissenting voices.



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## Dissenting voices often labeled as fringe or dangerous

The panel painted a stark picture of eroding trust across multiple pillars of society: government, media, universities and scientific institutions. Each speaker shared experiences and insights illustrating how actions meant to build consensus have instead fostered skepticism and distrust.

Bhattacharya, a Stanford University professor of health policy, shared his experience of how institutional narrative control has undermined credibility in public health.

He pointed to the **Great Barrington Declaration** that he co-authored, which the **Center for Science and Democracy** labeled a “**fringe idea**” because it advocated for focused protection of vulnerable individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The declaration was signed by 30,000 medical and public health scientists and practitioners and over 1 million others.

Benz pointed to the amendment of the **Smith-Mundt Modernization Act of 2012**, which lifted the ban against domestic dissemination of U.S. **government-produced propaganda**, giving rise to the **ensorship-industrial complex**.

Weinstein, a mathematician, economist and founder of **The Portal Group**, described how academic institutions have become entangled with national security interests.

He shared an anecdote about the University of Chicago’s economics department, suggesting it was partially set up as a “bulwark against totalitarian communism, funded from inside the intelligence world.”

This intertwining of academia and national security, he argued, has led to a situation where dissenting voices are often labeled as fringe or dangerous.

“There’s this thing with an adjective, a profession, and then a proper name,” he said, giving the examples of “fringe epidemiologist Jay Bhattacharya” and “controversial professor Jordan Peterson” — labels meant to signal the public to be skeptical of or avoid such individuals.

The panel also discussed the erosion of trust in science, particularly in light of controversial research practices.

Bhattacharya brought up **gain-of-function research**. “**Tony Fauci** signed off on these experiments,” he said, mentioning that in a 2012 paper Fauci “explicitly wrote that even if these experiments result in a worldwide pandemic, it’ll be worth it because of the knowledge gained.”

The panelists also discussed how **de-platforming**, narrative control and censorship have contributed to a loss of faith in traditional media outlets that were once trusted to be objective and unbiased.



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### Google 'censoring dissenting opinions while cashing out'

The panelists examined the complex interplay between **government agencies**, tech giants and academic institutions in controlling information flow.

Benz highlighted lesser-known government initiatives aimed at shaping public opinion, such as the National Science Foundation's **Convergence Accelerator Track F program** — "Course Correct: Precision Guidance Against Misinformation" — and the **Secure and Trustworthy Cyberspace Program**.

"These programs distributed \$100 million to this web of universities," Benz explained, detailing how this research often focuses on developing strategies to counter narratives that challenge the institutional consensus.

Benz criticized the U.K.-developed **Misinformation Susceptibility Test** as "the most ridiculous, politically rigged" tool that could be used to justify increased censorship of certain groups.

Weinstein touched on lesser-known aspects of American history, particularly regarding information control and civil liberties.

"We don't even know that there's a secret history of the **McCarran [Internal Security] Act**," he said, explaining that this act, passed in the 1950s, sought to apply tactics used during the **Japanese American internment** to a new perceived threat.

According to Weinstein, the act aimed to set up detention camps for suspected communists, mirroring what some in the national security establishment viewed as a successful strategy during World War II.

Shanahan pointed out potential conflicts of interest in how information is controlled on major social platforms. **“Google is a major investor in vaccines.** So they’re both censoring dissenting opinions while cashing out.”

Benz introduced the concept of a nongovernmental organization “soft-power swarm army” — a network of organizations and institutions working in concert with government agencies to shape public opinion.

He quoted a high-ranking official to illustrate the mindset behind these efforts. “You have this situation where hate speech gives rise to ethnocentrism, which gives rise to nationalism, which gives rise to opposition to the **rules-based international world order.**”

Those in power do not want the civilian class to speak freely online for fear of losing control of this order, according to Benz.

### **‘Cowboy culture is all about challenging each other’**

Dissent is critical for maintaining healthy scientific discourse and democratic institutions, the panelists said.

Bhattacharya highlighted the historical importance of scientific dissent, citing the example of **Frances Kelsey, M.D., Ph.D.**, a U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) scientist who prevented the approval of the dangerous pregnancy drug **thalidomide** in the U.S.

“She worked for the FDA and ... was just an honest scientist inside the FDA bureaucracy,” Bhattacharya explained.

Weinstein expanded on this theme, emphasizing the unique strength that dissent has historically given American institutions.

“How did the U.S. as a young country end up with the lion’s share of the world’s great research institutions?” he asked. “The short answer is ‘dissent.’ Cowboy culture ... is all about challenging each other and going out for a drink afterwards.”

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### The need for a 'whole-society freedom alliance'

The panelists offered several strategies to address the challenge of reforming public institutions.

Bhattacharya emphasized the importance of political engagement. "You can ask your ... congressional candidates, 'Where do you stand on **free speech**? Where do you stand on the censorship complex? Where do you stand on regulation of science?'"

Shanahan called for a restructuring of scientific publishing and peer review processes. "We are due for a new model of publishing and reviewing scientific literature."

Weinstein suggested creating a glossary of terms to help the public understand the language used in national security and information control contexts. "We have to arm ourselves with the information, the terminology and the history."

Benz advocated for a "whole-society freedom alliance" approach similar to what arose during the pandemic, including congressional committees, state attorneys general, private sector lawyers, alternative media and others who are "able to do their part."

### Watch 'Council of the Canceled':

Video not found