

How The White House Colluded with Twitter to Censor RFK Jr. and Children’s Health Defense

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New “[Twitter Files](#)” released today by investigative journalist Paul D. Thacker reveal new details about how nonprofit organizations and academic researchers colluded with social media platforms, media organizations and the White House to censor Children’s Health Defense (CHD) and Robert F. Kennedy Jr., CHD’s chairman on leave, for spreading “disinformation.”

In “[Twitter Files: Who Are the People Claiming RFK Jr. is ‘Disinformation?’](#)” Thacker cited documents he found while examining Twitter’s archives. They show that groups such as the [Center for Countering Digital Hate](#) (CCDH) worked with Twitter to censor Kennedy and others who questioned the establishment’s COVID-19 narratives.

CCDH drafted a list of the so-called “[Disinformation Dozen](#),” which included Kennedy, [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#) and Ty and Charlene Bollinger, founders of [The Truth About Vaccines](#) and [The Truth About Cancer](#) websites. The list was used by the White House and Twitter, prior to its purchase by Elon Musk, to censor those individuals.

CCDH was able to exert such influence even though its funding sources are not public. Imran Ahmed, CEO of CCDH, previously was connected to the United Kingdom Labour Party, and other CCDH board members have ties to George Soros’ [Open Society Foundations](#) and the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#).

CCDH also collaborates with online “fact-checking” firms like [NewsGuard](#).

The latest installment of the “Twitter Files” also revealed documentation indicating an Indiana University computer science and informatics professor, [Filippo Menczer, Ph.D.](#), contacted Twitter to say that according to his website ranking system, CHD was the “top source” of alleged “disinformation.”

In the same email, Menczer told Twitter that The Associated Press (AP) had cited his website's findings — and that CHD had misrepresented those same findings, a claim Thacker characterized as ironic.

“Menczer’s statement is itself misinformation,” Thacker said, noting that “In the [op-ed Menczer links](#) to in the email, Kennedy does NOT state that his organization is the ‘most trusted source of information about vaccines.’ Kennedy just repeats Menczer’s claims that his organization’s articles are widely shared.”

Thacker, citing recent data from Indiana University’s Observatory on Social Media, noted that “[CHD’s website is shared on Twitter more](#) often than those of the World Health Organization and CDC combined” and that its content “is more widely shared than that from Reuters, The Daily Mail, The Washington Post, Newsweek and CNN.”

Thacker told [The Defender](#),

“I think that this stuff just shows how ridiculous this entire Big Disinformation infrastructure is. It doesn’t make any sense. It’s oftentimes just designed to police and censor information that is not liked by those in power. That’s what it’s about.”

“These examples fit into a broader narrative,” he added.

Twitter Took ‘Action’ Against Kennedy Tweet After ‘Disinformation Dozen’ Report

Thacker said the “first thing” he found when examining Twitter’s internal documents for information about CHD were documents showing “[Twitter officials discussing action they were taking](#)” on Kennedy, because of the CCDH’s “Disinformation Dozen” report.

“But was the report credible?” Thacker asked. He wanted to know: “Who are these people? Who funds them? How did they become ‘disinformation experts’?”

The March 24, 2021, report by CCDH claimed “Just twelve anti-vaxxers are responsible for almost two-thirds of anti-vaccine content circulating on social media platforms,” and concluded that “platforms must act” against these individuals.

According to Thacker, Ahmed released the report just as the Biden administration rolled out its [COVID-19](#) vaccine campaign and shortly before the House held hearings on disinformation at social media companies.

In one example, Thacker said, Twitter employees took action on several accounts after the “shady, dark money group” — CCDH — released its report alleging that just 12 accounts produced the majority of anti-vaccine disinformation on social media.

A March 31, 2021, email from Twitter employee Brian Clarke listed several tweets by Kennedy, Mercola and others included in the CCDH’s “Disinformation Dozen.” The email, sent to an internal Twitter list called “COVID19-misinfo-inform,” said:

“COVID-19 misinfo enforcement team is planning on taking action on a handful of accounts surfaced by the CCDH report.

“While none of the 12 accounts are eligible for permanent suspension under COVID-19

misinformation policy, we did find several violations of the COVID-19 Misinformation policy across multiple accounts.”

In the same email, Clarke requested, “If there are no objections after 30 minutes, can you please take action on the following Tweets based on the table below?”

Among the tweets listed was a March 17, 2021, tweet by Kennedy linking to a [letter he sent to President Biden](#), “explaining how transparency, robust science and a functional surveillance system are the only ways to build public trust for the COVID vaccine.”

READ + RT my letter to President Biden explaining how transparency, robust science and a functional surveillance system are the only ways to build public trust for the COVID vaccine. [#TheDefender](#): SUBSCRIBE TODAY: <https://t.co/zL66EdwTnD><https://t.co/HRfrCbNdOr>

— Robert F. Kennedy Jr (@RobertKennedyJr) [March 17, 2021](#)

Clarke sent another email three hours later, saying, “Action has been taken on the aforementioned tweets.”

According to Thacker, Twitter placed a “Vaccine Safety” label on Kennedy’s tweet.

“What is wrong with [sending the President a letter](#)?” Thacker wrote. “How does this violate safety? It’s just odd.”

“Based on this discredited report, Twitter labeled [those] tweets,” [Thacker wrote](#). “When Elon Musk took over Twitter, these labels were removed.”

7. Twitter officials discussed taking action based on the CCDH report. “COVID-19 misinfo enforcement team is planning on taking action on a handful of accounts surfaced by the CCDH report.” <pic.twitter.com/khTr1w6GhF>

— Paul D. Thacker (@thackerpd) [July 18, 2023](#)

In a March “Twitter Files” release, [investigative journalist Matt Taibbi](#) noted that Clarke, along with other former Twitter executives, coordinated with Stanford University’s [Virality Project](#) in 2021 to receive weekly reports on “anti-vax disinformation” that Taibbi said “contained numerous true stories.”

Described by Taibbi as “[The Great Covid-19 Lie Machine](#),” the Virality Project, an initiative of the Stanford Internet Observatory, admitted it was flagging factual tweets as “misinformation” or “disinformation.” It also proposed the creation of a [disinformation board](#) just one day before the Biden administration launched its [Disinformation Governance Board](#).

Thacker noted that Clarke’s March 31, 2021, email also mentioned the CCDH report “was released right before the House [of Representatives] held a [hearing on disinformation](#),” during which Twitter’s then-CEO Jack Dorsey and other [Big Tech](#) CEOs testified.

“Note that [Imran Ahmed released his report](#) to coincide with Biden’s vaccine rollout and

congressional hearings [with] Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey,” Thacker wrote. “Who is Ahmed working with?”

Clarke’s email also referred to tweets by several medical professionals who were outspoken about COVID-19 vaccines and countermeasures, including Mercola, [Dr. Sherri Tenpenny](#), [Dr. Christiane Northrup](#), chiropractor [Ben Tapper](#) and the recently deceased [Dr. Rashid Buttar](#).

White House Used ‘Disinformation Dozen’ Report to Press for More Censorship

According to Thacker, “[White House spokesperson Jen Psaki](#) later cited the CCDH report during a July 2021 press briefing to bring greater pressure onto Facebook to censor accounts.”

In August 2021, [Facebook rejected the findings](#) of the “Disinformation Dozen” report and the White House’s concerns, saying “There isn’t any evidence” to support its claims and that the small sample used in CCDH’s analysis was “in no way representative of the hundreds of millions of posts that people have shared about COVID-19 vaccines.”

“There is no justification for [CCDH’s] claim that their data constitute a ‘representative sample’ of the content shared across our apps,” Facebook stated.

3. Facebook said [@CCDHate](#) report lacked credibility and posted a statement dismissing it. pic.twitter.com/kQzZcEUMSk

— Paul D. Thacker (@thackerpd) [July 18, 2023](#)

“Nonetheless, the report’s simplistic findings proved catnip to the White House and most media outlets,” Thacker wrote.

For instance, a May 13, 2021, NPR report repeated CCDH’s claims that “[just 12 people](#) are responsible for the bulk of the misleading claims and outright lies about COVID-19 vaccines that proliferate on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.”

In the same report, [NPR](#) quoted Ahmed, who said “The ‘Disinformation Dozen’ produce 65% of the shares of anti-vaccine misinformation on social media platforms.”

“Like other outlets, NPR ignored Facebook’s later statement rejecting the findings of Ahmed’s group, and the reporter never bothered to ask Ahmed who funds his organization and how he acquired his expertise in disinformation,” Thacker wrote.

CCDH Does Not Disclose Funders, Board of Directors

Thacker tried but failed to discover who funds and supports CCDH.

“I emailed CCDH a few questions to try and understand who they are and who funds them” and also asked, “Have you ever done a fact check or report on misinformation by one of the pharmaceutical companies?” However, “CCDH did not respond to requests for comment.”

“Who runs Imran Ahmed and @CCDHate?” [Thacker asked on Twitter](#). “Is it governments? Is it [pharma](#) interests? I asked. Imran Ahmed won’t respond.”

According to Thacker, “A few years before rebranding himself as a vaccine and disinformation expert,” Ahmed was a British Labour Party political operative best known for writing the book “[New Serfdom](#),” which argued against free market ideology.

“New Serfdom” was published by the U.K.-based [Fabian Society](#), which brands itself as “a left-leaning think tank dedicated to new public policy and political ideas” affiliated with Labour, and as “The future of the left since 1884.”

Its [executive committee](#) includes National Health Service vaccinator Zach Griffiths, while one of its vice presidents is London Mayor Sadiq Khan. The Fabian Society also lists recent “[partnerships](#)” with Google, the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry and the National Pharmaceutical Association.

Thacker told The Defender he believes CCDH is “a dark money group,” adding:

“They don’t tell you who is funding them and wouldn’t respond to questions about who funds them. I do not understand how some guy becomes a Labour Party political operative in London and then transforms himself across the Atlantic into an ‘expert’ on vaccine ‘disinformation’ and the D.C. media and political class. It’s just impossible ... I’m convinced he’s a front for someone else.”

Thacker said he has “no clue” who funds CCDH. “It could be some government agency, it could be some of these big ‘disinformation’ funding groups, it could be corporate interests, or all of them combined.”

According to Thacker, CCDH “sprang out of nowhere in late 2017 or early 2018,” soon after Ahmed left his previous role within Labour. [Ahmed also worked](#) for Merrill Lynch. “How this background as a political operative prepared Ahmed to brand himself as an expert in disinformation is unclear,” Thacker wrote.

[Ahmed’s LinkedIn account](#) makes no mention of his work as a political operative in England, although his [biography at CCDH](#) states that he is an “authority on social and psychological malignancies on social media, such as identity-based hate, extremism, disinformation, and conspiracy theories,” Thacker wrote.

CCDH’s website does not list its board of directors. However, an [archived version of its website](#) from February 2022 lists Kirsty McNeill as a board member. She is also a member of the U.K. Council of the [European Council of Foreign Relations](#), funded by such entities as the Open Society Foundations, the U.N. and the Gates Foundation.

McNeill has been the policy director of the [Save the Children Fund](#) since 2016, a period during which the [Gates Foundation donated](#) more than \$40 million to the organization. The fund has also partnered with [Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance](#). Gavi maintains a [core partnership](#) with the World Health Organization and the [World Bank](#).

Another CCDH board member as of February 2022, Simon Clark, was affiliated with the Center for American Progress, which proposed a “[comprehensive COVID-19 vaccine plan](#),” including “a massive vaccination campaign” involving “medical experts, sports stars, celebrities, and community leaders,” aiming to change people’s opinions.

CCDH Leads a ‘Digital Counter-enlightenment’

[Described by Mercola](#) as “a progressive [cancel-culture leader](#),” CCDH has “extensive ties to government and global think tanks that have labeled questioning the COVID-19 injection as ‘threats to national security.’”

CCDH, which says it leads a “[digital counter-enlightenment](#),” has partnered with “[fact-checking](#)” firm [NewsGuard](#) — specifically, its [HealthGuard](#) product, described as “a vaccine against medical misinformation,” targeting the healthcare industry and global public health authorities.

CCDH also claims it has “[forced social media companies](#) to establish precedent and remove hateful or dangerous speech by holding them directly accountable for their tolerance of hateful content,” adding that its “solutions have proven effective against a number of different types of hate and misinformation,” including “health misinformation.”

Regarding COVID-19 vaccines, CCDH warned that the “[anti-vaccine movement](#) could undermine the roll-out of any future vaccine against COVID-19.”

According to an article by [Off-Guardian](#), CCDH claimed the COVID-19 pandemic “will only be overcome by the most ambitious vaccination programme in human history” and those who question this program have fringe and extremist views, which should not be permitted and should indeed be banned. They have also advocated for the imprisonment of “anti-vaxxers.”

More on ‘Disinformation Expert’ Filippo Menczer

Menczer, the Indiana University professor who contacted Twitter with his “disinformation” rankings, has long been involved in the “misinformation” space, according to Thacker.

17. In December 2021, Menczer emailed a misinformation group “Our CoVaxx dashboard quoted in the article, ranks CHD as the top source of COVID vaccine disinformation,” Menczer wrote. The abbreviation “CHD” stands for Children’s Health Defense, the group Kennedy runs. pic.twitter.com/v0TDeooxYz

— Paul D. Thacker (@thackerpd) [July 18, 2023](#)

Menczer came under criticism for such endeavors as early as 2014, when Ajit Pai, then a member and later chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, wrote an op-ed in [The Washington Post](#) warning that Menczer’s research and his “[Truthy](#)” platform “seems to have come straight out of a George Orwell novel.”

11. Fact checkers w/ NBC News “verify unit” fell for CCDH’s report, “Google has banned two far-right websites from its advertising platform after research revealed the tech giant was profiting from articles pushing unsubstantiated claims about the Black Lives Matter protests.” pic.twitter.com/eXnxf5NO2L

— Paul D. Thacker (@thackerpd) [July 18, 2023](#)

Following Pai’s op-ed, [Menczer](#) and [Indiana University](#) issued denials, claiming that such

research was not being used “to track political misinformation in a way that would somehow limit free speech.” In remarks shared with the [Columbia Journalism Review](#), Menczer accused his critics of misinformation.

Thacker told The Defender that such responses are par for the course for “misinformation” and “disinformation” experts, saying that they consider “any criticism or questioning of what they’re doing as prima facie evidence of disinformation.”

“These people have no identifiable credentials other than simply saying ‘I’m an expert on this and anyone who questions my expertise is evidence of the fact that I’m an expert.’ It’s totally self-confirming,” Thacker added.

20. When explaining his research, Menczer sometimes makes it appear abstract and nebulous. When he won a recent \$1.2 million Department of Defense grant to study misinformation, his university put out a statement.

QUESTION: What does this mean? pic.twitter.com/QcbiHgr4tT

— Paul D. Thacker (@thackerpd) [July 18, 2023](#)

“Fast forward several years and what is Menczer doing? Defining types of speech as hateful misinformation, tracking people’s social media, and creating an online database,” despite previous denials that he was doing this, Thacker wrote.

In January, Menczer published an essay on how “[Science could help policymakers](#) understand which regulations work and what their unintended consequences can be, whether they are internal platform policies or rules imposed by legislation.”

Thacker also noted that Menczer is the recipient of a \$1.2 million [U.S. Department of Defense grant to study misinformation](#), issued in 2017, while an [online bio](#) states that Menczer’s research has also been supported by the [National Science Foundation](#).

Thacker told The Defender

“There’s so much money sloshing around and no one pays any attention to the disinformation put out by these ‘disinformation’ groups. They just swallow this stuff.”

“‘Disinformation’ is some sort of magic word signifying that everything coming after that is ‘true,’” Thacker said. “It’s something that didn’t even exist in any real substantive manner 6-7 years ago, but now, it’s like these people are gold-plated experts.”

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