

**“The Censorship Industrial Complex”**

**United States Senate  
Committee on the Judiciary  
Subcommittee on the Constitution**

**March 25, 2025**

**Statement for the Record**

**Benjamin Weingarten  
Investigative Journalist & Columnist**

## I. Introduction

Chairman Schmitt, Ranking Member Welch, and esteemed members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify, and particularly on a matter of such vital importance.<sup>1</sup>

Free speech is the bedrock of a free society.

Over the last decade, as litigation,<sup>2</sup> congressional oversight,<sup>3,4</sup> and shoe-leather journalism<sup>5,6,7</sup> have exposed, the federal government-led Censorship-Industrial Complex (CIC) has eroded that bedrock.

Our ruling elites have succumbed to the illiberal temptation to silence their critics by casting dissent from establishment orthodoxy as dangerous “mis-, dis-, and mal-information” (MDM),<sup>8</sup> and imposing a sprawling censorship<sup>9</sup> regime upon the dissenters accordingly.

Though its progenitors have claimed neutrality and dispassion, presenting their project as merely a technocratic exercise in democracy defense, as some of the CIC’s participants have acknowledged, it is “inherently political.”<sup>10</sup>

The censorship regime rests on subjective judgments about what news and views are legitimate. It is rooted in a paternalistic and progressive vision that the state and adjacent “experts” know best,

---

<sup>1</sup> While appearing today in part on account of my work as an investigative journalist at *RealClearInvestigations*, and including relevant testimony connected with the Censorship-Industrial Complex’s impact on RealClear Media Group, all opinions are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of these or any other media outlets or organizations with which I am affiliated.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/63290154/missouri-v-biden/?order\\_by=desc](https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/63290154/missouri-v-biden/?order_by=desc).

<sup>3</sup> <https://judiciary.house.gov/media/press-releases/final-report-weaponization-federal-government>.

<sup>4</sup> [https://smallbusiness.house.gov/uploadedfiles/house\\_committee\\_on\\_small\\_business\\_-\\_cic\\_report\\_september\\_2024.pdf](https://smallbusiness.house.gov/uploadedfiles/house_committee_on_small_business_-_cic_report_september_2024.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.twitterfiles.co/>.

<sup>6</sup>

[https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2023/11/06/documents\\_shed\\_new\\_light\\_on\\_feds\\_collusion\\_with\\_private\\_actors\\_to\\_police\\_speech\\_on\\_social\\_media\\_990672.html](https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2023/11/06/documents_shed_new_light_on_feds_collusion_with_private_actors_to_police_speech_on_social_media_990672.html).

<sup>7</sup>

[https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2024/10/08/global\\_crackdown\\_how\\_foreign\\_censorship\\_threatens\\_american\\_free\\_speech\\_1063521.html](https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2024/10/08/global_crackdown_how_foreign_censorship_threatens_american_free_speech_1063521.html).

<sup>8</sup> The Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), a key cog in the CIC, has defined “Misinformation” as that which “is false, but not created or shared with the intention of causing harm.” It has defined “Disinformation” as that which “is deliberately created to mislead, harm, or manipulate a person, social group, organization, or country.” It has defined “Malinformation” as that which “is based on fact, but used out of context to mislead, harm, or manipulate.” See: [https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/mdm-incident-response-guide\\_508.pdf](https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/mdm-incident-response-guide_508.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> I use censorship herein broadly to encompass “terminating speakers’ accounts, deplatforming speakers, temporarily suspending accounts, imposing warnings or strikes against accounts to chill future disfavored speech, ‘shadow banning’ speakers, demonetizing content or speakers, adjusting algorithms to suppress or de-emphasize speakers or messages, deboosting speakers or content, promoting or demoting content, placing warning labels or explanatory notes on content, suppressing content in other users’ feeds, promoting negative comments on disfavored content, and requiring additional click-through(s) to access content, and other methods,” as plaintiffs in *Hines v. Stamos* defined it. See: <https://aflegal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Doc-1-Complaint.pdf#page=9>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/2024-12/Part-3-Final-Weaponization-Report-Compilation.pdf#page=6>.

and have not only a right, but an obligation therefore to manage and regulate information and its flow – “for our own good.”

In other words, the CIC at core is a tool of coercion and control – an instrument of power.

Its emergence in the wake of Brexit and President Donald Trump’s first election is no accident. “The people voted wrongly,” our betters told us, namely because “bad” ideas proliferated on social media.

The censorship regime spawned as a corrective, with the security state as its leading edge. The ostensible justification was that some percentage of the “Wrongthink” circulating with some nexus to the presidential contest could be tied to Russia; the proliferation of claims about Trump-Russia collusion only further fueled the regime’s rise.

Quickly, however, mission creep set in. The national security apparatus working to defend the nation from malign foreign influence operations dispensed with the pretense and trained its sights, alongside a slew of other authorities, instead on Americans. The administrative state writ large would seek to suppress disfavored speech on an ever-growing array of topics – starting with elections, moving to COVID-19, and then covering all manner of contested issues<sup>11</sup> – and it would do so pursuant to an ever-growing array of rationales.<sup>12,13,14</sup>

The censorship dragnet disproportionately targeted anti-establishment voices including conservatives, populists, and nationalists – betraying its political character.

The CIC’s political hue can also be seen in its present inaction. One will note that with the GOP enjoying “trifecta” control, and vigorous debate about all manner of policies Republicans are pursuing, no censorship apparatus has kicked in to quash criticism of efforts to restrain illegal immigration, rein in recalcitrant agencies, or resolve international conflicts.

---

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2022-08/OIG-22-58-Aug22.pdf#page=9>.

<sup>12</sup> The targeting began largely with a focus on skepticism of the integrity and outcome of the 2020 election; it expanded to encompass derogatory views to those of federal authorities – including those ultimately proving true and even known to be true contemporaneously – concerning virtually every aspect of COVID-19, and particularly around mitigation efforts and their efficacy; since, federal officials have shown their intent to expand such targeting to cover “abortion, climate-related speech, ‘gendered disinformation,’ economic policy, the financial services industry, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the war in Ukraine, and other[.]” topics, per testimony from litigation counsel in *Missouri v. Biden*, then-Special Assistant Attorney General for the Louisiana Department of Justice D. John Sauer. See: <https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/2023-03/Sauer-Testimony.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/HM/HM09/20230511/115901/HHRG-118-HM09-Wstate-WeingartenB-20230511.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://docemetproductions.com/how-dhs-went-from-fighting-jihadists-to-targeting-your-tweets/>.

Conversely, prior to 2025, members of the Judiciary committee<sup>15,16</sup>, witnesses at this very table,<sup>17,18,19</sup> and countless fellow Americans found their core political speech secretly surveilled and targeted for suppression.

Millions were bereft of the ability to speak about or hear information and ideas on critical matters of politics and policy, including even from the president of the United States.

Domestic media and technology companies came under withering attack, threatening their viability. I can attest that the *RealClear*<sup>20</sup> family of sites with which I am affiliated perversely appears to have been targeted by the CIC despite – or perhaps because of the fact – the brands’ model and mission rests on viewpoint diversity.

Efforts to demote, deplatform, demonetize, and destroy those who failed to toe the Ruling Class<sup>21</sup> line on consequential and contentious issues no doubt contributed to additional self-censorship.

In terms of the size, scope, and scale of these depredations, a recent study documented that under President Biden, some 90 federal agencies initiated 57 censorship initiatives.<sup>22</sup>

The outgoing administration would spend \$267 million on projects pertaining to combatting “misinformation.”<sup>23</sup>

As revealed in a landmark May 2022 lawsuit brought by the Chairman, then-serving as Attorney General of Missouri, our government helped drive censorship on specific stories like the *New York Post*’s Hunter Biden laptop exposé;<sup>24</sup> people including the so-called “Disinformation Dozen;”<sup>25</sup> and narratives on matters ranging from election processes and outcomes to COVID-19’s origins and mitigation measures.<sup>26</sup> This was domestic interference in our political system of the highest order.

The district court judge presiding over the case, *Missouri v. Biden*, asserted that evidence of federal censorship unearthed by the plaintiffs suggested we may have suffered “the most massive

---

<sup>15</sup> <https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/cisa-staff-report6-26-23.pdf#page=25>.

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2023/11/06/how\\_the\\_federal-private\\_speech\\_police\\_operated\\_in\\_election\\_2020\\_with\\_a\\_dominant\\_focus\\_on\\_the\\_right\\_990725.html](https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2023/11/06/how_the_federal-private_speech_police_operated_in_election_2020_with_a_dominant_focus_on_the_right_990725.html).

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2023/11/06/how\\_the\\_federal-private\\_speech\\_police\\_operated\\_in\\_election\\_2020\\_with\\_a\\_dominant\\_focus\\_on\\_the\\_right\\_990725.html](https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2023/11/06/how_the_federal-private_speech_police_operated_in_election_2020_with_a_dominant_focus_on_the_right_990725.html).

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/why-big-tech-censored-our-podcast-touching-2020-election-irregularities-opinion-1579647>.

<sup>19</sup> <https://thefederalist.com/2020/11/11/why-twitter-wont-let-people-share-sworn-court-documents-alleging-voter-fraud/>.

<sup>20</sup> I refer to “RealClear” generally to encompass *RealClearPolitics*, *RealClearInvestigations*, and the other brands comprising RealClear Media Group.

<sup>21</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20110415150723/https://spectator.org/archives/2010/07/16/americas-ruling-class-and-the>.

<sup>22</sup>

[https://cdn.mrc.org/static/pdfuploads/BidenCensorshipInitiatives\\_Report\\_FINAL\\_DIGITAL+%281%29.pdf-f-1741964285292.pdf](https://cdn.mrc.org/static/pdfuploads/BidenCensorshipInitiatives_Report_FINAL_DIGITAL+%281%29.pdf-f-1741964285292.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> <https://openthebooks.substack.com/p/taxpayer-funded-censorship-how-government>.

<sup>24</sup> We would later learn that authorities knew this story to be true.

<sup>25</sup> <https://counterhate.com/research/the-disinformation-dozen/>.

<sup>26</sup> <https://ago.mo.gov/wp-content/uploads/missouri-v-biden-ruling.pdf>.

attack against free speech in United States' history."<sup>27</sup> An appellate panel and several members of the Supreme Court largely affirmed this view.<sup>28,29</sup> The Supremes failed however to rule on the underlying merits of the case, in my view to our detriment.

It is impossible to quantify the collective damage these efforts have done to our body politic.

If allowed to persist, perpetuate, and to be perfected, those at the CIC's commands could secure a monopoly on narrative, and ultimately a monopoly on power – putting America on the road to potential one-party rule, that is, rule by elites who “know better.”

Suffice it to say, if we want to preserve our republic, let alone restore it to greatness, we must abolish this censorship regime.

This background brings us to the subject of today's hearing and underscores its importance.

Were the state to have transgressed alone in wielding its immense power to quash disfavored speech – clearing the public square of dissent in the name of national security, public health, or “defending democracy” – it would have been disturbing enough. And should the abolition of the censorship regime require merely depriving it of government dollars and direction, that project would be difficult enough.

But insidiously, in an almost inadvertent admission of guilt, our government has helped foster and drive the growth of a robust network of non-governmental accomplices, using them as cutouts to launder censorship activities in an apparent bid to skirt the First Amendment.

The effort to combat and ultimately topple the censorship regime therefore demands that we scrutinize the government's putatively private-sector auxiliaries. For the activities of these plainclothes speech police, pivotal players in the “whole-of-society”<sup>30,31</sup> censorship panopticon, may have legal implications,<sup>32</sup> or compel legislative action.

I humbly offer my testimony today in the hopes of contributing to this Committee's efforts in connection therewith.

## **II. Non-Governmental Partners in the Censorship-Industrial Complex**

---

<sup>27</sup> Minimally, Judge Terry A. Doughty of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Louisiana surmised, based on preliminary discovery, that the evidence “depict[ed] an almost dystopian scenario” in which the government “seem[ed] to have assumed a role similar to an Orwellian ‘Ministry of Truth,’” in imposing a “far-reaching and widespread censorship campaign.” See: <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.lawd.189520/gov.uscourts.lawd.189520.293.0.pdf#page=2>.

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/23pdf/23-411\\_3dq3.pdf#page=35](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/23pdf/23-411_3dq3.pdf#page=35).

<sup>29</sup> Justice Samuel Alito wrote in a dissent joined by Justices Clarence Thomas and Neil Gorsuch that what transpired in the case “was blatantly unconstitutional, and the country may come to regret the Court's failure to say so.” That warning indicates the imperative for executive and legislative action.

<sup>30</sup> See for example the Biden administration's “National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism” at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/National-Strategy-for-Countering-Domestic-Terrorism.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> <https://foundationforfreedomonline.com/whole-of-society-white-house-information-integrity/>.

<sup>32</sup> I am not a lawyer, but as related litigation and enforcement efforts suggest, there are plausible cases to be made that non-governmental entities' activities may run up against the First Amendment and antitrust laws, for example.

Overwhelming evidence<sup>33,34,35,36,37</sup> indicates that the federal government has deputized like-minded academic institutions, think-tanks, NGOs, “fact-checkers,”<sup>38</sup> and for-profits<sup>39</sup> – often receiving government funding, direction, and/or promotion, and helmed by ex-government officials – as its speech police.

Federal authorities *and* their force multipliers have cajoled, coerced, and colluded, most notably with social media companies, to surveil and suppress unauthorized opinions and inconvenient facts at mass scale.

These efforts have grown beyond mere social media censorship to encompass campaigns not only to reputationally harm media outlets by emblazoning them with digital scarlet letters reading “M-D-M,” but to threaten those outlets and allegedly even entire social media platforms with financial pain if not bankruptcy<sup>40</sup> should they refuse to comply with the CIC’s demands.

And these efforts have extended overseas.

Before delving into such efforts in more detail, it is worth putting a finer point on who the non-governmental constituents of the CIC consist of, and how they operate.

One might understand this “vast censorship enterprise,”<sup>41</sup> as the Chairman has referred to it, to be a vertically integrated monopoly. Its business is to police the public square by controlling the content and flow of information – which means exerting influence over traditional media and social media.

The federal government leads the business, serving as its “C-Suite.” But its non-governmental subordinates – again many of them directly or indirectly backed by government, and whose leadership is often comprised of prominent ex-government officials<sup>42</sup> – have been incubated and coordinated to execute its pivotal functions under a “whole-of-society” framework. To extend the analogy, the vast censorship enterprise’s operators include, among others:

---

<sup>33</sup> [https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.lawd.189520/gov.uscourts.lawd.189520.214.1\\_1.pdf](https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.lawd.189520/gov.uscourts.lawd.189520.214.1_1.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> <https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/Biden-WH-Censorship-Report-final.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/HM/HM09/20230511/115901/HHRG-118-HM09-Wstate-WeingartenB-20230511.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> <https://twitterfiles.substack.com/archive>.

<sup>37</sup>

[https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2023/11/06/documents\\_shed\\_new\\_light\\_on\\_feds\\_collusion\\_with\\_private\\_actors\\_to\\_police\\_speech\\_on\\_social\\_media\\_990672.html](https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2023/11/06/documents_shed_new_light_on_feds_collusion_with_private_actors_to_police_speech_on_social_media_990672.html).

<sup>38</sup> See: <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/invasion-fact-checkers> and <https://www.piratewires.com/p/how-tech-created-the-online-fact-checking-industry>.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.racket.news/p/report-on-the-censorship-industrial-74b>.

<sup>40</sup> <https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2024-07-10%20GARMs%20Harm%20-%20How%20the%20Worlds%20Biggest%20Brands%20Seek%20to%20Control%20Online%20Speech.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> [https://x.com/Eric\\_Schmitt/status/1899826920419664131](https://x.com/Eric_Schmitt/status/1899826920419664131).

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.racket.news/p/report-on-the-censorship-industrial-74b>.

- Academic institutions from Stanford and Harvard<sup>43</sup> to the University of Washington and Arizona State, dozens of which<sup>44</sup> have developed “disinfo labs” and related centers with names like the “Center on Narrative, Disinformation, and Strategic Influence.”<sup>45</sup> These entities produce research on the nature of alleged MDM, its spread and consequences, make recommendations to technology companies and governments on how to combat it, and build tools to assist in such efforts. They have served to formalize and legitimize speech policing as a serious discipline and credential its cops.<sup>46</sup>
- Think-tanks such as the Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensics Research Lab,<sup>47</sup> the Aspen Institute, and the German Marshall Fund’s Alliance for Securing Democracy, which, like the academic institutions, develop research on and tools for combatting MDM, as well as coordinating and training private and public sector censorship regime players.
- NGOs like the Center for Countering Digital Hate, Media Matters for America,<sup>48</sup> and the Public Good Projects, which undertake activities ranging from developing dossiers on individuals and media entities aimed at discrediting them – often times as part of campaigns to deplatform and/or demonetize their targets – to broader social media monitoring and running of related communications and marketing campaigns.
- Fact-checkers including the Poynter Institute’s International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN)<sup>49</sup> and *PolitiFact*, the former of which Facebook previously<sup>50</sup> used to assess the validity of news content and algorithmically downgrade disfavored items. These “information regulators,” as *Tablet*’s Jacob Siegel has referred to them, allow social media companies to wash their hands of content moderation decisions by outsourcing de facto censorship to authorities.

---

<sup>43</sup> <https://x.com/MikeBenzCyber/status/1663535596042584064>.

<sup>44</sup> <https://foundationforfreedomonline.com/bidens-national-science-foundation-has-pumped-nearly-40-million-into-social-media-censorship-grants-and-contracts/>.

<sup>45</sup> <https://newsroom.asu.edu/college-unit/center-narrative-disinformation-and-strategic-influence>.

<sup>46</sup> A September 2022 article from the Harvard Kennedy School’s *HKS Misinformation Review* illustrated the broadness of the “field of mis- and disinformation studies,” which it defined as “as a multi-disciplinary and developing field of study that focuses on studying multimodal forms of communication, which unintentionally (misinformation) or intentionally (disinformation) misinform audiences. This includes the study of motivations (e.g., political, ideological, or financial), actors, and the mechanisms by which false or misleading information is created, distributed, and received, and the ways it may affect audiences in their beliefs and behaviors.” See: <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/mis-and-disinformation-studies-are-too-big-to-fail-six-suggestions-for-the-fields-future/>.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/programs/digital-forensic-research-lab/>.

<sup>48</sup> <https://nypost.com/2023/11/22/opinion/elon-musk-exposes-media-matters-as-an-ideological-shakedown-operation/>.

<sup>49</sup> Writing in *Tablet*, Siegel noted the significance of these efforts: “With no formal membership, the IFCN acts as the high body for the dozens of fact-checking organizations grouped under its umbrella that have endorsed its code of principles... The IFCN’s fact-checking operation offers something different to all of the various players who directly and indirectly shape its mission. For government officials, it provides a means to outsource both political messaging and the responsibilities of censorship. For technology companies, it’s a method of exercising control over their own regulators by putting them on the payroll. And for journalists, watching their industry collapse and their status erode as the public turns on them, its steady work in one of the media’s only remaining growth fields, as information regulators.”

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/business/help/2593586717571940?id=673052479947730>.

- “Risk-rating” entities like NewsGuard and the Global Disinformation Index, which likewise assess the veracity and credibility of journalism. They do so however not through rating specific articles but rendering judgment on the disinformation “risk” of entire outlets.
- For-profits such as Graphika and Park Advisors, which provide analytical support for censorship efforts, and develop counter-disinformation tools.

This is to say nothing of the philanthropic entities funding these efforts, the legacy media members – many themselves who have served as some of the most prolific and powerful spreaders of MDM – championing them, or the media literacy promoters ensuring that future generations only consume an authority-approved diet of news and opinions.

The ideological alignment among these players is staggering. A cynic might suggest they are talking their book given how the worldview they promote through suppressing disfavored ideas entrenches their power and privilege.

Underlying these efforts again is a belief that these are society’s arbiters of truth. And if you, as an individual, or media entity, fail to adhere to the standards of this influential and powerful bloc, as its efforts suggest, it will seek to delegitimize, discredit, and destroy you. Call it a protection racket. The price is your freedom.

To that end, the following constitute what I believe to be some of the most critical of the CIC’s activities involving such non-governmental players, and impacting Americans’ speech, to have come to light in recent years.

It reflects the overlapping and mutually reinforcing ways the various constituents of the CIC impact the modern public square.

- **Non-governmental consortia including elite academic institutions, prominent think-tanks, and analytics firms have lobbied social media companies to change their content moderation policies to suppress disfavored content; surveilled social media at the level of hundreds of millions of posts for alleged violations of those policies; and flagged offending items to social media companies that they often suppressed at significant rates – disproportionately targeting conservatives and other critics of the political establishment.** The federal government helped originate, coordinate, and collude with some such counter-disinformation coalitions. Namely, they included the election process and outcome-focused Election Integrity Partnership (EIP) – established in the run-up to the 2020 contest in conjunction with the Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency – and the partnership’s COVID-19-focused successor organization, the Virality Project (VP). The quartet forming the EIP included the Stanford Internet Observatory, University of Washington’s Center for an Informed Public, the Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensics Research Lab, and social media analytics firm Graphika – self-described “leading institutions focused on understanding misinformation and disinformation in the social media landscape.” Each had ties to the U.S. government, some highly extensive.<sup>51</sup> EIP’s stated purpose was to fill the “critical gap” created by the fact no federal agency “has a focus on, or authority regarding, election

---

<sup>51</sup> <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/HM/HM09/20230511/115901/HHRG-118-HM09-Wstate-WeingartenB-20230511.pdf>.

misinformation originating from domestic sources within the United States.”<sup>52</sup> In practice, this meant targeting for suppression skepticism about an unprecedented election cycle in which authorities enacted sweeping, pandemic-driven changes to the voting system, and in which razor-thin final results in pivotal states failed to materialize for days.<sup>53</sup> The VP’s partners included the EIP quartet minus the Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensics Research Lab, but added New York University’s Tandon School of Engineering and the National Conference on Citizenship. The successor project focused on “narratives that questioned the safety, distribution, and effectiveness of the vaccines.” The VP’s stakeholders included federal health agencies, working alongside social media platforms to combat, for example, vaccine-related “misinformation.” Much of what the VP cast as misinformation included true facts to the extent they formed narratives with which the project’s leaders – and certainly its government partners – disapproved of, from reports of vaccine injuries to discussion of “breakthrough” cases and “natural immunity,” to discussion of potential then-hypothetical vaccine mandates.<sup>54</sup> This scheme was largely revealed only due to the discovery in *Missouri v. Biden*.

- **Leading academic institutions and non-profits have researched and developed AI censorship tools to suppress Wrongthink at scale.** They have done so with federal funding, including via The National Science Foundation’s Convergence Accelerator Track F program. Launched in 2021, the initiative would allocate some \$39 million across non-governmental entities focused on “Trust & Authenticity in Communication Systems.” As the House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Weaponization revealed in a 2024 report,<sup>55</sup> at least four of the 12 awardees, receiving a total of \$13 million in taxpayer dollars, engaged in the development of sophisticated and wide-reaching censorship tools. These included the University of Michigan via its WiseDex tool, which the House Committee noted aimed to “help Big Tech handle and outsource the ‘responsibility of censorship’ on social media;”<sup>56</sup> Non-profit Meedan and its Co-Insights tool for using “‘data and machine learning’ to ‘identify, preempt, and respond to misinformation in minoritized [sic] communities.’”<sup>57</sup> the University of Wisconsin’s CourseCorrect tool to “‘empower efforts by journalists, developers, and citizens to fact-check’ ‘delegitimizing information’ about ‘election integrity and vaccine efficacy’ on

---

<sup>52</sup> <https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:tr171zs0069/EIP-Final-Report.pdf#page=9>.

<sup>53</sup> Former Trump State Department Cyber official Mike Benz would observe that CISA, “tasked with election security,” via EIP “also gained the power to censor any questions about election security.” See: <https://foundationforfreedomonline.com/dhs-censorship-agency-had-strange-first-mission-banning-speech-that-casts-doubt-on-red-mirage-blue-shift-election-events/>.

<sup>54</sup> For more on the size, scope, impact, and political nature of these efforts, I would refer the Committee to my May 2023 testimony before the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Accountability regarding “Censorship Laundering: How the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Enables the Silencing of Dissent,” and subsequent reporting at *RealClearInvestigations* here: [https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2023/11/06/documents\\_shed\\_new\\_light\\_on\\_feds\\_collusion\\_with\\_private\\_actors\\_to\\_police\\_speech\\_on\\_social\\_media\\_990672.html](https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2023/11/06/documents_shed_new_light_on_feds_collusion_with_private_actors_to_police_speech_on_social_media_990672.html) and here: [https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2024/05/30/stanford\\_silicon\\_valley\\_and\\_the\\_rise\\_of\\_the\\_censorship\\_industrial\\_complex\\_1034440.html](https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2024/05/30/stanford_silicon_valley_and_the_rise_of_the_censorship_industrial_complex_1034440.html).

<sup>55</sup> [https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/NSF-Staff-Report\\_Appendix.pdf](https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/NSF-Staff-Report_Appendix.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> [https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/NSF-Staff-Report\\_Appendix.pdf#page=14](https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/NSF-Staff-Report_Appendix.pdf#page=14)

<sup>57</sup> [https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/NSF-Staff-Report\\_Appendix.pdf#page=17](https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/NSF-Staff-Report_Appendix.pdf#page=17)

social media;” and MIT’s Search Lit program to “educate Americans—specifically, those that the MIT researchers alleged ‘may be more vulnerable to misinformation campaigns’ [including conservatives, minorities, and veterans]—on how to discern fact from fiction online.”<sup>58</sup>

- **So-called “risk-rating” entities such as the U.S.-based for-profit NewsGuard, and the UK-based non-profit, the Global Disinformation Index (GDI), have developed de facto blacklists consisting largely of conservative and independent publications, and supplied them to advertising agencies and ad-tech partners to starve such publications of ad revenue – imperiling their businesses.** NewsGuard and GDI have both been recipients of federal largesse, marketing, and/or promotion. NewsGuard rates and reviews the “reliability” of the thousands of sources foreign *and domestic* responsible for generating “95+% of online engagement with news.”<sup>59</sup> The company’s purpose is to “empower...brands, advertising agencies” and other clients to “systematically defund sources of harmful misinformation,” in the words of its co-CEO Gordon Crovitz.<sup>60</sup> The company does so by providing licensees with “exclusion lists” – that is, blacklists – of “unreliable” sites for use in directing their ad agencies and ad-tech partners as to where *not* to place ads, thereby starving shunned sites of ad revenue.<sup>61</sup> NewsGuard operates with substantial reach and political clout – and with an apparent bias. On a scale of zero to 100, with 100 being the most reliable, the rater gives left or left-leaning outlets an average score of 91, in contrast with right or right-leaning outlets which grade out at 65, per one study.<sup>62,63,64</sup> GDI likewise seeks to “reduce disinformation” by “remov[ing] the financial incentive to create it” – namely, ad revenue – through providing a “dynamic exclusion list” to ad tech companies and others.<sup>65</sup> Its blacklist consists of at least 2,000 “risky” global news publications, similarly including American ones. In a December 2022 report, the not-for-profit, which serves advertisers, search engines, and social media

---

<sup>58</sup> [https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/NSF-Staff-Report\\_Appendix.pdf#page=22](https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/NSF-Staff-Report_Appendix.pdf#page=22)

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.newsguardtech.com/solutions/newsguard/>.

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.newsguardtech.com/press/newsguard-expands-service-to-australia-new-zealand/>.

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.newsguardtech.com/special-reports/brands-send-billions-to-misinformation-websites-newsguard-comscore-report/>.

<sup>62</sup> Bias ratings provided by AllSides.

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.newsbusters.org/blogs/free-speech/joseph-vazquez/2023/12/12/mrc-exposes-newsguard-leftist-bias-third-year-row>.

<sup>64</sup> NewsGuard has pointed to instances of right-leaning publications outscoring left-leaning publications to blunt claims of ideological bias, and more broadly defended the integrity of its practices. See for example: <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/house-gop-launches-investigation-federally-funded-news-ratings-groups-impact-free-speech> and <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/1777030/only-transparent-apolitical-ratings-for-news-publishers-can-be-trusted/>. Its co-founders have been affiliated with outlets and organizations that span the ideological spectrum, and its advisors include those who have served in Democrat and Republican administrations. One might argue however that there is bipartisan opposition to dissident viewpoints across the political establishment from which many of NewsGuard’s advisors hail – and especially among those in the national security space, which has been a key driving force behind the rise of the Censorship-Industrial Complex. Perhaps even more salient, a cursory glance at the listed biographies of NewsGuard’s editorial staffers, including those responsible for reviewing and rating media outlets, suggests few if any have worked for publications that might be characterized as “right” or “right-leaning” – with a significant number coming from prominent “mainstream” publications and educated at elite journalism schools. Considering the seeming ideological monoculture prevailing in such institutions, as revealed on several occasions in tell-alls published by departing executives, one wonders if this impacts NewsGuard’s ratings.

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.disinformationindex.org/product/>.

companies, publicly listed what it perceived to be America’s “ten riskiest online sites” pursuant to its subjective “disinformation risk assessment.” The list was almost uniformly populated with right- and libertarian-leaning sites, in contrast with its purportedly “least risky” sites, whose sole constituent with any sort of right-leaning component was the *Wall Street Journal*. The purported “risk” GDI aims to help ad companies mitigate is that their clients’ brands might surface on sites that traffic in “disinformation,” subjecting them to boycotts and other harms.<sup>66</sup> Evidence suggests that the efforts of these entities have led media outlets to lose critical partners, traffic, and revenue – on top of facing reputational harm.<sup>67,68,69,70,71,72</sup> Both entities have dinged *RealClear* despite – or again perhaps because of – our fierce independence and commitment to viewpoint diversity.

- **Relatedly, major brands, relying on such risk-rating agencies, have allegedly colluded to deprive disfavored media outlets generally on the right of advertising revenue.** A July 2024 report<sup>73</sup> from the House Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government indicated that the World Federation of Advertisers, representing approximately 90% of global advertising spend, had, through its Global Alliance for Responsible Media initiative, helped organize “large corporations, advertising agencies, and industry associations” to engage in “boycotts and other coordinated action to demonetize platforms, podcasts, news outlets, and other content deemed disfavored by GARM and its members.” Targets included, among others, X and Elon Musk, Spotify with respect to its hosting of “The Joe Rogan Experience,” and outlets including *Fox News*, *The Daily Wire*, and *Breitbart News*. GARM encouraged its members to rely on NewsGuard and the Global Disinformation Index for combatting disinformation. Notably too, several of the globe’s largest advertising agencies – including the seed funder of NewsGuard – have collectively received billions of dollars in federal contracts.<sup>74</sup>
- **Non-governmental entities, some federally funded, are collaborating with foreign regulatory regimes that have threatened to impose devastating fines on American**

---

<sup>66</sup> For more on the “brand safety” industry, of which NewsGuard and GDI can be seen as a part, see for example: [https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2021/05/13/the\\_high-pressure\\_business\\_of\\_selling\\_woke\\_corporate\\_armor\\_776879.html](https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2021/05/13/the_high-pressure_business_of_selling_woke_corporate_armor_776879.html) and <https://nypost.com/2023/11/22/opinion/elon-musk-exposes-media-matters-as-an-ideological-shakedown-operation/>.

<sup>67</sup> <https://x.com/prageru/status/1623138777937088512>.

<sup>68</sup>

<https://assets.ctfassets.net/qnesrjodfi80/6rZLRClQfrc5howFowqIA/bd64f8a6cbb55946496c39d4da0f802b/PragerU-NewsGuard-Emails.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/nov/18/big-pharma-financing-newswards-for-profit-busines/>.

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/2749593/disinformation-inc-meet-the-groups-hauling-in-cash-to-secretly-blacklist-conservative-news/>.

<sup>71</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/live/FmcbVhx99yg?si=456aBwfNyxF\\_6Zv&t=4225](https://www.youtube.com/live/FmcbVhx99yg?si=456aBwfNyxF_6Zv&t=4225).

<sup>72</sup> For a comprehensive accounting of NewsGuard’s and GDI’s efforts, see:

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/SM/SM00/20240626/117376/HHRG-118-SM00-Wstate-WeingartenB-20240626.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> <https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2024-07-10%20GARMs%20Harm%20-%20How%20the%20Worlds%20Biggest%20Brands%20Seek%20to%20Control%20Online%20Speech.pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> <https://foundationforfreedomonline.com/censorship-industry-garm-members-receive-billions-in-federal-contracts/>.

**social media companies should they fail to comport with alien speech codes that could lead to the quashing of Americans’ protected speech.** According to the Foundation for Freedom Online, 23 U.S.-funded organizations receiving \$15.5 million in taxpayer dollars were involved in developing or helping implement the European Union’s Digital Services Act, for example.<sup>75</sup> The regulatory regime imposes crippling fines of up to 6% of revenue annually and even suspension of large social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram should they not comply with the far stricter speech codes of the European Union or its 27 member states. The act is set to incorporate a “Code of Conduct on Disinformation” backed by “advertising industry” players, “fact-checkers,” “civil society/research organizations,” and providers of “technological solutions” – many U.S.-funded CIC participants – that looks like the formalized version of what the Biden administration hoped to impose on America.<sup>76</sup> Some too have suggested that U.S. NGOs, in conjunction with the Biden administration, helped contribute to Brazil’s social media censorship efforts.<sup>77</sup> Its Supreme Court has targeted several American platforms, including X. Evidence suggests the relationship has flowed in the other direction as well, with foreign purported counter-disinformation entities like the UK’s Center for Countering Digital Hate contributing to U.S. government censorship policies. Notably, former Secretary of State Antony Blinken declared in a March 2024 speech, “disinformation transcends borders. It crosses platforms. No single country, no single entity can meet this challenge alone.” To create “a healthier information environment,” he added, the administration was using “diplomacy, advancing a shared understanding of the problem as well as creative solutions to address it.” These diplomatic efforts included “aligning partners and allies around a framework to counter information manipulation by foreign adversaries,” “training partners to analyze disinformation,” sharing best practices, and “co-chairing the OECD’s new Misinformation and Disinformation Hub, helping governments shift from ad hoc tactics to more holistic policies that enable reliable information to thrive.”<sup>78</sup> Last but not least, in the wake of the Trump administration’s restructuring of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), reports have emerged suggesting that many NGOs funded by that organization have fueled the counter-disinformation ecosystem abroad, with implications for speech here at home.<sup>79</sup> USAID’s “Disinformation Primer” may serve as a helpful roadmap for examining whether, how, and to what extent the foreign

---

<sup>75</sup> <https://foundationforfreedomonline.com/us-funded-censorship-hubs-drive-eus-war-on-tech-companies/>.

<sup>76</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/redirection/document/112678>.

<sup>77</sup> [https://chris-smith.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2024-05-07-](https://chris-smith.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2024-05-07-written_testimony_of_paulo_figueiredo.pdf#page=9)

[\\_written\\_testimony\\_of\\_paulo\\_figueiredo.pdf#page=9](https://chris-smith.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2024-05-07-written_testimony_of_paulo_figueiredo.pdf#page=9).

<sup>78</sup>

[https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2024/10/08/global\\_crackdown\\_how\\_foreign\\_censorship\\_threatens\\_american\\_free\\_speech\\_1063521.html](https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2024/10/08/global_crackdown_how_foreign_censorship_threatens_american_free_speech_1063521.html).

<sup>79</sup> See for example: <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/Testimony-Shellenberger-2025-02-13.pdf>. Too, on the eve of this hearing, America First Legal reported it had obtained documents revealing “a disturbing alliance between the GEC, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the British Foreign, Commonwealth, Development Office (FCDO), and media censorship organizations, all working in lock-step to manipulate public discourse, control media narratives, and suppress free speech.” See: <https://aflegal.org/america-first-legal-exposes-censorship-scheme-by-usaid-and-global-engagement-center-working-with-uk-government-and-media-firms-to-use-ai-censorship-tools/>. The emergence of continuing revelations years after many such activities occurred only underscores the imperative for the Committee to use the tools at its disposal to engage in vigorous oversight of the CIC with respect to non-governmental entities, and more broadly.

aid organization interfered in Americans' speech via conduits.<sup>80</sup> This Congress ought to fully expose such efforts.

That the foregoing is by no means a comprehensive account of the activities of the non-governmental cohorts involved in targeting Americans' speech, and their links, ties, and coordination with the U.S. and foreign governments, illustrates the alarming breadth, depth, and sophistication of these efforts.

It also points to their surreptitious nature.

One last disturbing point also emerges. The U.S. has long exerted "soft power" abroad through the use of civil society institutions. It has historically done so with the stated purpose of spreading democracy, in pursuit of America's national interest. Sometimes this has bled into so-called "color revolutions" and other methods of regime change.

Should we understand the federal government's domestic censorship efforts, by way of its putatively private accomplices, to have been aimed at ensuring regime continuity here at home? On what authority? And if so, have not these efforts in "democracy defense" represented a frontal attack on our republic?

### **III. On the Imperative to Dismantle and Destroy the Censorship-Industrial Complex**

Though many may not have realized it at the time, on November 5, 2024, the Censorship-Industrial Complex was very much on the ballot. Two years prior, President Trump, whose first election had sparked the creation of the CIC, and who would become arguably its greatest victim, released a plan to "dismantle and destroy" the regime with vigorous executive action should he be re-elected.<sup>81</sup>

When America sent the president back to the White House, the existential crisis over speech – and ultimately who rules – came full circle. Americans rendered their verdict on the censorship regime. They rejected it resoundingly, choosing liberty in speech over death.

Trump began to fulfill his promise to restore free speech from the very opening hours of his presidency.

On January 20<sup>th</sup> he signed an executive order prohibiting the federal government from engaging in, facilitating, or funding "any conduct that would unconstitutionally abridge the free speech of any American citizen."<sup>82</sup>

He has nominated personnel doggedly devoted to fulfilling that policy, including some of the most prominent victims of the censorship regime.

---

<sup>80</sup> <https://foundationforfreedomonline.com/usaid-internal-documents-reveal-government-plot-to-promote-censorship-initiatives/>.

<sup>81</sup> [https://www.realeclearinvestigations.com/articles/2025/01/09/how\\_trump\\_plans\\_to\\_take\\_on\\_censors\\_-and\\_they\\_plan\\_to\\_take\\_on\\_trump\\_1083366.html](https://www.realeclearinvestigations.com/articles/2025/01/09/how_trump_plans_to_take_on_censors_-and_they_plan_to_take_on_trump_1083366.html).

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/restoring-freedom-of-speech-and-ending-federal-censorship/>.

His administration has cut funding to at least one key non-profit partner in past government-driven censorship.<sup>83</sup>

Too, President Trump and Vice President JD Vance have delivered powerful public statements indicating they are committed to robustly defending Americans' speech not only at home but from those who would threaten it from abroad, while garnering buy-in from the Big Tech platforms.

Under congressional scrutiny in recent years, and during the transition period as well, some key domestic CIC players, governmental and non-governmental, dissolved, restructured, or retrenched.

Yet it would be the height of folly to assume the censorship regime is going away any time soon. The motives and means to control the digital public square, and the illiberal ethos animating the ruling elites that would deign to so command it, are simply too strong to believe anything close to decisive victory is afoot. On its face this may be a fight about speech, but again, for those who would muzzle us, it is a fight about power.

Most of the players in the Censorship-Industrial Complex persist, albeit perhaps operating on smaller budgets.

The "counter-disinformation" ecosystem has not disarmed. Its personnel have not resigned, nor have they recanted regarding their censorious efforts.

The courts have neither held any official or private sector auxiliary liable for violating Americans' First Amendment rights, nor flouting antitrust laws in connection with the censorship regime.

Legislation that might hold government officials to account for malfeasance, and deter future such attacks on our rights, has languished.

Media outlets anti-establishment, right, and center – including the likes of *RealClear* – have been paid no restitution for lost traffic, damaged reputations, and depleted ad revenue streams.

Meanwhile, the global censorship regime is only growing stronger and more pervasive – with the help of its non-governmental U.S. partners.

In May 2023 I came before the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Accountability with a simple message: Not a single penny of taxpayer dollars should be used to silence ourselves.

In June 2024 I came before the House Small Business Committee with a corollary: Nor should a single penny of taxpayer dollars be used to fund those who would silence others by targeting their business models.

Today I come before this august committee with one more plea: Dismantle the Censorship-Industrial Complex now or risk the dismantling of our republic later.

---

<sup>83</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/election-security-cisa-trump-kristi-noem-6c437543f5d26d890704e5f2a8400502>.

At a bare minimum this requires fully exposing the CIC in its every dimension with oversight in hearings like these, and using the full panoply of tools available to congressional investigators – which may drive critical legal and regulatory actions; codifying the president’s first-day executive order in law to prohibit government funding, direction, coordination, or outsourcing of such activities in any way; imposing crippling penalties on those in government who would violate such laws; curtailing any government privileges or benefits for those “independently participating” in the CIC; defending Americans from foreign censors; and taking other measures to ensure there is a strict firewall to prevent the U.S. government from interfering in domestic politics.

There may be but only a small window to act decisively.

The Chairman and others in both chambers have proposed many such legislative actions whose time has come.

The CIC poses an existential threat to our republic. It can be seen as a harbinger of a budding social credit system with American characteristics, already emerging in recent years, that is anathema to this country. We owe our forebears and our children nothing less than to do everything within our power to prevent such a cataclysm.

Thank you for the honor of appearing before you to contribute to your efforts to address these existential issues, and I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.