

Hearing Statement
Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government
Thursday, July 20, 2023
9:00 AM
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

We are having this hearing for two reasons.

One, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. holds beliefs that are vile, disgusting, racist, bigoted, antisemitic, anti-gay, anti-science and riddled with conspiracy theories. In other words, he is the perfect Jim Jordan witness and has been welcomed with open arms by the Republican majority. By promoting Mr. Kennedy, Republicans are deliberately providing a platform to amplify hate speech.

Two, Mr. Kennedy's views are just outrageous enough for him to serve as a welcome medium for the Republican projection campaign. They accuse others of weaponizing the federal government to distract from the widely reported and well-documented actions former President Donald Trump took to weaponize government. Mr. Kennedy gives the Republican majority cover to continue to stick their heads in the sand.

Mr. Kennedy is totally sympatico with Republicans.

During a recent press event, Mr. Kennedy claimed that "COVID-19 is targeted to attack Caucasians and Black people. The people who are most immune are Ashkenazi Jews and Chinese". Race-based judgements about COVID transmission are often the subject of Republican innuendo. During a hearing in the Ohio statehouse, Republican State Senator Steve Huffman asked if "the colored population" is more affected by COVID because "they do not wash their hands as well as other groups."

This is not the first time Mr. Kennedy has used antisemitic rhetoric in reference to the COVID-19 pandemic. In January of 2022, at a rally organized by his anti-vaccine organization, Children's Health Defense, Mr. Kennedy compared public health measures to the Holocaust, stating, "Even in Hitler's Germany, you could cross the Alps to Switzerland. You could hide in an attic like Anne Frank did." Similarly, Marjorie Taylor Greene, in reference to the enforcement of the Congressional mask mandate during the pandemic, called the Capitol Police the "Gestapo police." Rep. Warren Davidson also compared vaccine passports to the documentation Jewish people were required to carry in Nazi Germany.

The Children's Health Defense has a long history of spreading misinformation. At an event seeking to encourage people to donate to the organization, Kennedy declared, "It is criminal medical malpractice to give a child one of these vaccines." This intense fear-mongering that frames vaccinations as criminal activity is not unique to Mr. Kennedy. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis previously petitioned the Florida Supreme Court for a grand jury investigation into "the crimes and wrongdoing committed against Floridians related to the COVID-19 vaccine."

Mr. Kennedy further spreads scientific misinformation through his beliefs towards LGBTQ+ youth. He has claimed that endocrine disruptors in drinking water are having "impacts

that people suspect are very different than in ages past about sexual identification among children and sexual confusion, gender confusion.” Mr. Kennedy did not invent this narrative. Multiple conspiracy theorists have claimed that contaminants in water makes children gay and transgender, including Alex Jones and an appointee of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis.

Mr. Kennedy has also claimed that 5G “damages human DNA” and is a part of a government ploy to “harvest our data.” This type of outlandish, blatant misinformation to cause fear in the American public is characteristic of the far-right. In a 2018 social media post, Marjorie Taylor Greene wrote that the California wildfires were caused by Jewish space lasers rather than climate change.

One can see why Mr. Kennedy’s beliefs are like catnip to the right and why Chairman Jordan and the Republican majority would give him a platform to spread his brand of disinformation. Private sector companies are not compelled by the same cynical political incentives, neither are they bound by the First Amendment to publish his dangerous musings.

Unfortunately, this hearing and much of the majority’s oversight agenda in the 118th Congress is merely a projection of the actual crimes and abuses of power seen repeatedly throughout the Trump Administration and comprehensively dismissed by Congressional Republicans.

President Trump’s own former Chief of Staff, John Kelly, has confirmed that while in office Trump exerted political pressure on the justice system in multiple documented instances. For example, in June 2020, Assistant U.S. Attorney Aaron Zelinsky testified that Trump political operative Roger Stone received special treatment because of his relationship to the President. Mr. Zelinsky was even told he would be fired if he did not recommend a lower sentence for Mr. Stone. Similarly, reporting indicates that former Attorney General Barr was angry that prosecutors had asked the judge during the trial of former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn to consider sentencing him to prison instead of probation.

According to a Trump administration official, former President Trump wanted to tap the phones of White House aides he thought were leaking information. He was barred from doing this by Mr. Kelly.

While former special counsel Robert Mueller’s “Report On The Investigation Into Russian Interference In The 2016 Presidential Election,” respected the Department of Justice policy not to indict a sitting President, it explicitly stated its findings did not “exonerate” the President.

Mueller outlined at least ten obstruction of justice concerns including: The pressure on Comey to end the probe of Michael Flynn; The President’s reaction to the continuing Russia investigation; The firing of Comey and the aftermath; The appointment of Special Counsel and efforts to remove him; The further efforts to curtail the Special Counsel’s investigation; The efforts to prevent public disclosure of evidence; The additional efforts to have Sessions take control of the investigation; Trumps order to the White House Counsel to deny that the President

tried to fire Mueller; Trump's actions toward, Flynn, Manafort and other possible witnesses; and Trump actions toward Michael Cohen.

Predictably, Trump's hand-picked Attorney General, Bill Barr, took it upon himself to absolve the President, even going as far to say in a letter to Congress, "Our determination was made without regard to, and is not based on, the constitutional considerations that surround the indictment and criminal prosecution of a sitting president." Barr unjustly absolved Trump of his crimes in a manner that even Robert Mueller later objected to in writing.

Most recently, John Kelly, Donald Trump's former Chief of Staff, revealed President Trump discussed having the IRS and other federal agencies investigate individuals who he perceived as his political enemies. This hit list includes former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton; former FBI director James Comey; Mr. Comey's deputy, Andrew McCabe; two FBI officials who had been involved in the investigation into the connection between Russia and the Trump campaign, Peter Strzok and Lisa Page; as well as Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon and the owner of The Washington Post, whose coverage often angered Mr. Trump.

To bring the federal workforce further under his total control, former President Trump signed an executive order in 2020 to establish Schedule F, a new classification for federal workers that would strip employees of most of their civil service protections and allow the Trump Administration to replace 50,000 dedicated civil servants with political cronies.

There is no doubt Republicans would enjoy several hours of Congressional testimony from RFK, Jr. It is like watching their own personalized YouTube algorithm, and they get some plausible deniability because RFK, Jr. claims to be a Democrat. But make no mistake, this is who Republicans have become – purveyors of dangerous disinformation, operators of a side show meant to distract from the deadly serious threat posed by Donald Trump.