

**TESTIMONY OF ANDREW SLAVITT**  
**Before the United States House Judiciary Committee**  
**Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government**

**May 1, 2024**

Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member Plaskett, members of the Select Subcommittee, I am here today voluntarily to discuss my work on the COVID response team at the peak of the pandemic. Let me introduce myself and provide a brief statement.

I'm Andy Slavitt. Between January 21 and June 9, 2021, I served in the Biden Administration as Senior Advisor to the COVID Response Team. I have worked in the health care industry since the early 1990s as an entrepreneur, a business leader, a regulator and administrator, a CEO, and as an investor.

I was asked by the Biden Administration to assist in the difficult operational work needed to end the pandemic as quickly and as safely as possible. Those first days on the job are cemented in my mind. When President Biden was inaugurated, over four thousand Americans were dying each day.<sup>1</sup> By January 2021, the number of deaths from COVID-19 was increasing so rapidly it had become the number one cause of death in the U.S., nearly 50% higher than heart disease, the next leading cause.

Thanks to the work of successive Administrations, vaccines had recently become available. In those early months, we procured and assisted in the production of vaccines, sent military troops into the field to help Americans get vaccinated, and coordinated the many moving pieces of a response, while providing the public with straightforward and clear information so they could keep themselves safe. As we did, we could see hospitalizations and the death toll begin to meaningfully decline.

By June 2021 when I left the Administration, more than 300 million doses of the vaccines had been administered and two-thirds of the public had been vaccinated.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, the number of COVID deaths were reduced over the 139 days of my tenure by 90%, from over 4000 on day 1 to 400—the lowest since the pandemic began. By June 2021, COVID-19 had dropped from the top cause of deaths to the seventh.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Hopkins University, CORONAVIRUS RESEARCH CENTER (Mar. 10, 2023), <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/united-states>.

<sup>2</sup> L. Hamel et. al, KFF COVID-19 VACCINE MONITOR: JUNE 2021, KFF (June 30, 2021), <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-june-2021/>; University of Oxford, Our World in Data (*last visited* Apr. 26, 2024), <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/cumulative-covid-vaccinations>;

S. Baker & A. Witherspoon, *COVID-19 cases hit lowest point in U.S. since pandemic began*, AXIOS (June 3, 2021), <https://www.axios.com/2021/06/03/coronavirus-cases-infections-vaccines-success>.

<sup>3</sup> John Hopkins University, CORONAVIRUS RESEARCH CENTER (Mar. 10, 2023), <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/united-states>.

I understand that the Select Subcommittee is interested in the Biden Administration's interactions with social media companies regarding their policies on content moderation and how such conversations comport with the vital American ideals enshrined in the First Amendment. They were entirely consistent.

My communications with social media companies consisted of a limited number of conversations mainly concentrated over the course of about a few weeks in the middle of my four-month tenure.

I was guided by two principles in my interactions with social media companies.

First, any content decisions and judgments about their enforcement are strictly the domain of social media companies. While policies varied, most social media companies during the pandemic adopted standards designed to prevent what they considered to be the most harmful false content from spreading on their sites.

Second, where public safety is concerned, having policies was not enough. As you will see today, I questioned social media companies on how those policies were implemented.

We are all aware of the parade of issues that social media companies must contend with—from hate speech, to sex trafficking, to the sale of illegal drugs like fentanyl, to foreign adversaries attempting to sow terrorism or violence. It is useful for Congress and the executive branch to have an open dialogue on these challenges with social media companies.

It was not our job to set or enforce the policies of social media companies. It was our job to understand how the policies were implemented and how their decisions affected the safety of the public.

Despite any concerns I had about the impacts of COVID misinformation, to my knowledge no one within the Administration ever sought to make decisions for Facebook, or any other social media company, over their content moderation. Further, we had no intention of coercing social media companies into taking any action. And I never received any indication that our dialogue was ever interpreted that way.

Facebook and other social media companies heard our concerns and occasional complaints, and I would like to think they considered them. But I want to be clear that they made their own decisions.

Starting even before this Administration came into office, Facebook reported publicly and would tell us frequently that they had already removed 20 million pieces of COVID content that violated their policies.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, I want to add that these conversations were not held in secret. We have spoken publicly about our interactions with Facebook and they were the subject of a long interview I sat for with

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<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

*The New York Times*. The emails we are likely to discuss today were part of the effort we discussed publicly.

In closing, I want to thank the Congress for providing the resources to successive Administrations to fund vaccine development and to help Americans through these dark times. By some estimates, these actions, in the vaccination program alone, saved 3 million American lives.<sup>5</sup>

Thank you for your time and your consideration of these perspectives. I would be happy to answer your questions to the best of my ability.

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<sup>5</sup> M. Fitzpatrick et. al, *Two Years of U.S. COVID-19 Vaccines Have Prevented Millions of Hospitalizations and Deaths*, THE COMMONWEALTH FUND (Dec. 13, 2022), <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2022/two-years-covid-vaccines-prevented-millions-deaths-hospitalizations>.