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Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee. I am a Professor of Health Policy at Stanford University School of Medicine and a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research. I hold an M.D. and Ph.D. from Stanford University. Because of my views on COVID-19 restrictions, I have been specifically targeted for censorship by federal government officials.

On October 4, 2020, I and two colleagues—Dr. Martin Kulldorff, a professor of medicine at Harvard University, and Dr. Sunetra Gupta, an epidemiologist at the University of Oxford—published the "Great Barrington Declaration."

The declaration called for an end to economic lockdowns, school shutdowns, and similar restrictive policies on the ground that they disproportionately harm the young and economically disadvantaged while conferring limited benefits.

We know that vulnerability to death from COVID-19 is more than a thousand-fold higher in the old and infirm than the young. The declaration endorsed a "Focused Protection" approach that called for strong measures to protect high-risk populations while allowing lower-risk individuals to return to normal life with reasonable precautions. Tens of thousands of doctors and public health scientists signed on to the declaration.

Because it contradicted the government's preferred response to COVID-19, the Great Barrington Declaration was immediately targeted for suppression by federal officials. Four days after the declaration's publication, the then-Director of NIH, Dr. Francis Collins, emailed Dr. Anthony Fauci and Cliff Lane at NIH/NIAID about the Great Barrington Declaration.

This email stated: "Hi Tony and Cliff, See: <https://gbdeclaration.org/>. This proposal from the three fringe epidemiologists who met with the Secretary seems to be getting a lot of attention – and even a co-signature from Nobel Prize winner Mike Leavitt at Stanford. There needs to be a quick and devastating published take down of its premises. I don't see anything like that online yet – is it underway? Francis." This email was produced over a year later in response to FOIA requests.

It is possible to surmise from this email that Collins viewed the Great Barrington Declaration as a threat to the illusion that there was a consensus of scientists who agreed with him about the necessity of lockdown.

In the following days, I was subjected to what I can only describe as a propaganda attack. Though the GBD called public health authorities to think more creatively about how to protect vulnerable elderly people from covid, reporters accused me of wanting to let the virus rip. Another FOIAed email shows Tony Fauci forwarding a Wired Magazine article saying something along those lines to Francis Collins only a couple of days after Collins' call for a devastating takedown.

A key part of the government's propaganda campaign supporting lockdowns and other pandemic strategies has been the censorship of discourse by scientists and regular people on social media. I am party to a case brought by the Missouri and Louisiana Attorney Generals against the Biden Administration. Through this case, lawyers have had the opportunity to depose under oath representatives from many federal agencies involved in the censorship efforts, including representatives of the Biden administration and Tony Fauci himself.

What this case has revealed is that a dozen federal agencies, including the CDC, the Office of the Surgeon General, and the White House pressured social media companies like Google, Facebook, and Twitter to censor and deboost even true speech that contradicted federal pandemic priorities, including especially inconvenient facts about the covid vaccines such as its inefficacy against covid disease transmission.

After the publication of the Great Barrington Declaration, we were repeatedly censored on social media. Immediately after publication, Google deboosted search results, pointing users to media hit pieces critical of it and placing the link to the actual declaration lower on this list of results.¹ A prominent online discussion site, Reddit, removed links to the Declaration from COVID-19 policy discussion fora.² In February 2021, Facebook removed the Great Barrington Declaration page without explanation before restoring it a week later.³

¹ Fraser Myers (2020) "Why Has Google Censored the Great Barrington Declaration?" *Spiked Online*. October 12, 2020. <https://www.spiked-online.com/2020/10/12/why-has-google-censored-the-great-barrington-declaration/>

² Ethan Yang (2020) "Reddit's Censorship of The Great Barrington Declaration" *American Institute for Economic Policy Research*. Oct. 8, 2020. <https://www.aier.org/article/reddits-censorship-of-the-great-barrington-declaration/>

³ Daniel Payne (2021) "Facebook removes page of international disease experts critical of COVID lockdowns" *Just the News*. February 5, 2021. https://justthenews.com/nation/technology/facebook-removes-page-international-disease-experts-who-have-been-critical-covid?utm_source=breaking-newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter

On March 18, 2021, Dr. Scott Atlas of Stanford University, Dr. Kulldorff, Dr. Gupta, and I participated in a two-hour roundtable discussion with Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida. During the discussion, the participants (including me) questioned the efficacy and appropriateness of requiring children to wear face masks. I pointed out an incontrovertible fact -- that no randomized studies demonstrate that masking children slows or stops the spread of covid.

The March 18, 2021 roundtable discussion video was promptly censored on social media.⁴ YouTube removed the video, claiming that it "contradicts the consensus of local and global health authorities regarding the efficacy of masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19." Notably, the opposite is now true—doubting the efficacy of masks, especially cloth masks, is (if anything) the new consensus.

This suppression of scientific discussion online clearly violates the U.S. first amendment. But perhaps even more importantly, the censorship of scientific discussion permitted a policy environment where clear scientific truths were muddled, and as a result, destructive and ineffective policies persisted much longer than they would have otherwise.

In May 2022, the U.S. Office of the Surgeon General released a public call to identify misinformation about covid. Along with Martin Kulldorff and the Indiana Attorney General, we sent a response in which we identified nine specific areas where the primary source of misinformation was the government itself. The topics included ignoring many facts: that the risk of covid is steeply age-stratified; that recovery from covid provides substantial immunity; that the covid vaccines do not stop disease transmission; that school closures were not warranted; that there was no alternative to lockdowns; or that masks block disease transmission; and several other topics.

Government censorship permitted all these ideas –many of which are not particularly controversial in the scientific community -- from gaining traction, and as a result, many people suffered from destructive policies like school closures and vaccine passports.

If we learn anything from the pandemic, it should be that the First Amendment is more important during a pandemic, not less.

⁴ Wall Street Journal Editorial Board. (2021) "YouTube's Assault on Covid Accountability" *Wall Street Journal*. April 8, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/youtubes-assault-on-covid-accountability-11617921149>