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POLITICS

Feds blew \$267M fighting 'misinformation' under Biden — as Trump vows to ban 'censorship cartel'

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Published Nov. 22, 2024

Updated Nov. 22, 2024, 5:16 p.m. ET

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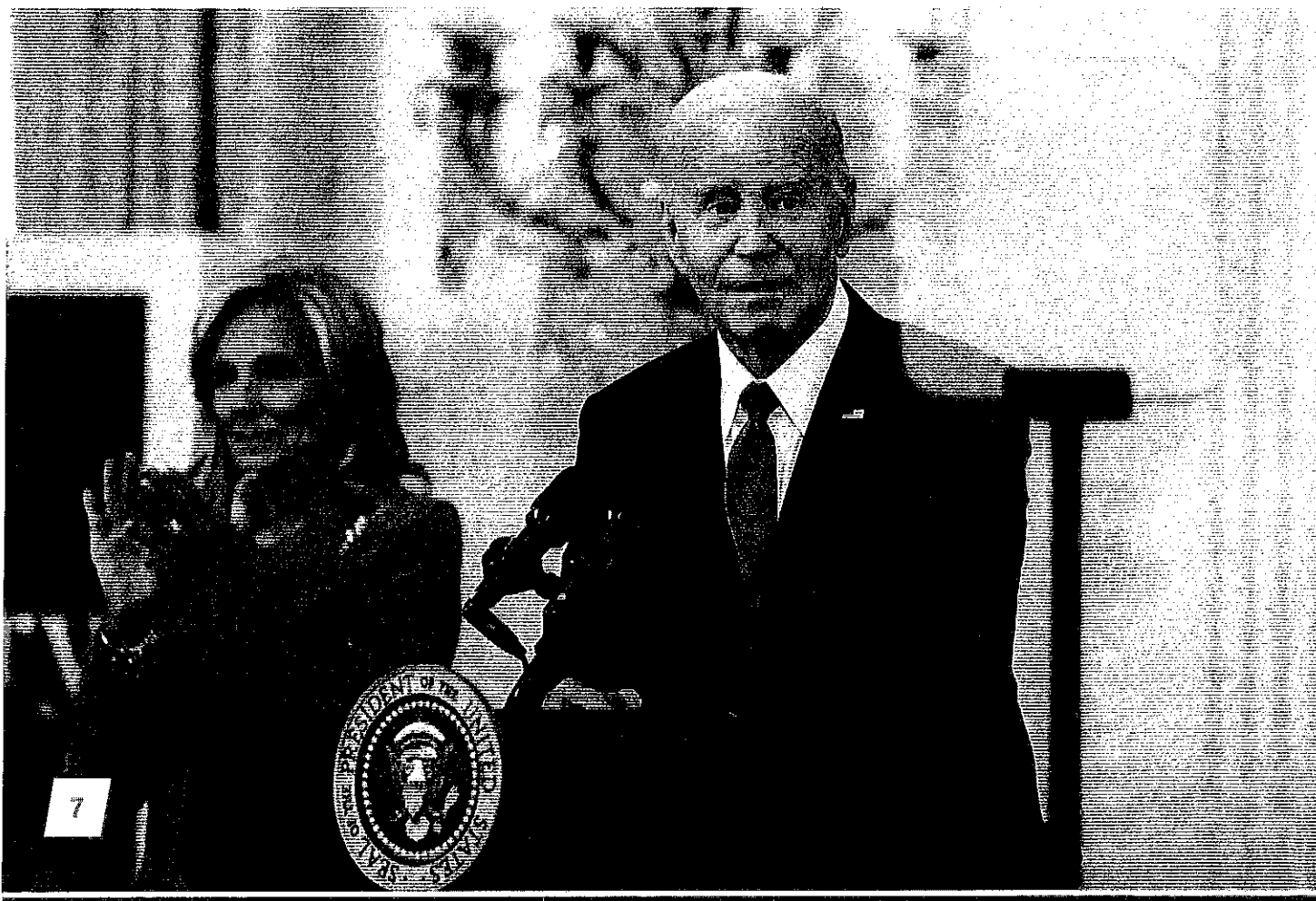
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WASHINGTON — President Biden's administration used \$267 million of your money to study "misinformation" since he took office, a new report reveals — as President-elect Donald Trump vows to purge the term from the federal lexicon and make sweeping spending cuts.

The cash doled out to universities, nonprofits and companies peaked at \$126 million in 2021 while US public health officials were imposing mandates they later admitted had no scientific basis, the taxpayer-transparency group OpenTheBooks said in its report Friday.



The federal government spent up to \$267 million to study and counteract so-called "misinformation" since President Biden took office in January 2021.

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The scope of the “misinformation” grant-making emerged as Trump’s advisory Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) looks for areas to trim wasteful spending.

“When it comes to government spending, the truth is often stranger than fiction,” entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, who is leading the DOGE with billionaire Elon Musk, told The Post regarding the findings.



NEW YORK POST

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OpenTheBooks, which was founded by Republican budget hawks, does not account for the cost of in-house efforts by the Biden White House and various executive branch agencies to fight purportedly incorrect speech, including by pressuring social media companies to censor content.

Proponents of fighting alleged “misinformation” argue that it’s in the public’s interest to weed out false claims — with Biden personally accusing social media companies of “killing people” by platforming posts critiquing the COVID-19 vaccine in 2021, as anti-“misinformation” spending surged.

Opponents of speech-policing argue it both violates the First Amendment and prevents vigorous debate and competing narratives that allow for a more full understanding of issues of public concern.

Critics also note that much of what is initially deemed “misinformation” later turns out to gain

evidentiary support, such as the theory that COVID-19 leaked from a Chinese lab that was doing risky US-funded “gain of function” research.

Another example is the fact that mandated masks, vaccination, social distancing and economic shutdowns were largely ineffective due to evolving COVID-19 variants or had significant side-effects and unintended social consequences.



Former
federal
infectious
disease
chief Dr.
Anthony
Fauci
admitted
some
government
diktats
actually
had no
specific
evidentiary
justification.

Getty Images

At the same time, the Biden administration was colluding with big tech platforms to police Americans' free speech online — leaning on Facebook, Twitter and other sites to yank even light-hearted or satirical posts about the pandemic.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg issued a belated mea culpa in August 2024, telling House Judiciary Committee Chairman Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) in a letter that “senior Biden administration officials, including the White House, repeatedly pressured” his company to wrongly “censor” COVID content.

Some government guidance, such as the rule that people remain six feet apart, had no specific evidentiary justification, former federal infectious disease chief Dr. Anthony Fauci later admitted.

More than two-thirds of the “misinformation” research grants flowed from the Department of Health and Human Service and focused primarily on COVID-19, but also touched on other areas such as climate change.

Other big spenders included the National Science Foundation (\$65 million), the State Department (\$12 million), the Pentagon (\$2.9 million) and the Justice Department (\$1.7 million).

Universities reaped COVID windfall

The OpenTheBooks report includes links to federal grant award documents that includes the term “misinformation” and found that major universities raked in millions, particularly by focusing on COVID-19-related issues such as vaccine hesitancy.

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“Federal spending records show at least \$127 million tax dollars funding anti-misinformation efforts directly related to COVID-19 for a variety of activities,” the report read, “from on-the-ground advocacy working to dispel vaccine misinformation, to scientific studies on how supposed “misinformation” is spread online.”

The top identified recipient was the City University of New York, which received more than \$3.6 million, including nearly \$3.3 million from the Department of Health and Human Services for research beginning in September 2022 on how people with mental health disorders can be steeled against “misinformation” with “online attitudinal inoculation.”

“Informed by inoculation theory, attitudinal inoculation leverages the power of narrative, values and emotion to strengthen resistance to misinformation and reduce hesitancy and is well-suited for low-information audiences and ideologically polarized or conspiratorial groups,” read's CUNY's description of the project, due to end in August 2025.

“The proposed research project will leverage the infrastructure of ... a large and geographically diverse community-based US cohort, to tailor and test the effectiveness of a brief digital attitudinal inoculation intervention to increase vaccination among adults with anxiety or depression symptoms.”

An additional \$328,000 went to CUNY in August 2022 from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to study how alleged “misinformation,” including about climate change and COVID-19, spreads on social media.

“Understanding how information flows and its impact on human behavior is important for determining how to protect society from the effects of misinformation, propaganda and fake news,” reads the description of the research, due to end in July 2025.

“The research has two main goals: First, it will spot and predict opinion trends and identify users’ polarization on topics of broad interest to society (eg, climate change or the COVID-19 pandemic). Second, it will track information propagation to understand its role in shaping opinion trends and identify the factors that are important for its spread and adoption.”

Critics note that much of what is initially deemed “misinformation” later turns out to either gain broad evidentiary support, such as the theory that COVID-19 leaked from a Chinese lab.

EcoHealth Alliance

The NSF also handed over \$5 million to George Washington University to focus on “misinformation” aimed “at members of expert communities” including “misinformation-driven harassment campaigns [that] have particularly large impacts on those at the forefront of efforts to accurately inform the public, including journalists, scientists, and public health officials.”

Another NSF grant, of \$14 million, went to the University of Michigan for an “American National Elections Study” that homed in on “the spread of misinformation, support for political violence, affective polarization, racial conflict, and threats to the legitimacy of our electoral institutions.”

The University of Pennsylvania was awarded more than \$2.3 million in September 2022 for “investigating and identifying the heterogeneity in COVID-19 misinformation exposure on social media among black and rural communities to inform precision public health messaging.”

That research, running through 2027 seeks to “develop strategies to detect trusted and accurate ‘signals’ amidst dynamic misinformation ‘noise.’”

The cash windfall for “misinfo” experts came as leading US public health officials were spreading false narratives of their own.

Fauci, now retired, admitted to a House committee earlier this year that COVID-era restrictions like maintaining six feet of distance and masking young children lacked any scientific basis.



“It sort of just appeared. I don’t recall,” Fauci said in a January transcribed interview with the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic about the social distancing mandate imposed on federal agencies, businesses and schools.

“Just an empiric decision that wasn’t based on data or even data that could be accomplished.”

“At the time, 4,000, 5,000 people a day were dying,” Fauci said in a June hearing before the same committee about masking mandates, before admitting: “There was no study that did masks on kids.”

Librarian escape room, ‘slandering’ Trump



Biden
meets
with
President-
elect
Donald
Trump in
the Oval
Office of
the White
House on
Nov. 1.

AFP via
Getty
Images

One way the government fought “misinformation” was through funding an online “escape room” run by librarians, according to the federal records.

The University of Washington was awarded a \$249,691 grant from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services in September 2021 to “deploy a tested escape room prototype in 10 public libraries” and to “co-design camps around Black Lives Matter and fandom to demonstrate use of the design kit for creating interest-driven escape rooms.”

“By building and deploying an online escape room hosted by librarians, the grant will improve libraries’ capabilities to address misinformation through innovative educational programming,” the description says.

At least one of the grants focused specifically on how Trump — who controversially promoted use of the drug hydroxychloroquine during the pandemic and rarely wore a mask, while saying others were free to do so — allegedly fueled distrust “thus making [people] more vulnerable to misinformation generally.”

George Washington University received a \$199,516 NSF grant in May 2022 for a two-year project “to study how populist politicians distorted COVID-19 pandemic health communication to encourage polarized attitudes and distrust among citizens, thus making them more vulnerable to misinformation generally.”

The proposal says “focus is on four countries — Brazil, Poland, Serbia and the US — all led by

populist leaders during the pandemic.”

OpenTheBooks derided that expenditure as a “brazen instance” of spending being used for “slandering” Trump.

Other major university recipients of funds included Wake Forest University, which received more than \$2.8 million, and the University of Texas, which got nearly \$2.2 million.

Defense and tech industry also among recipients



An array of companies also received federal grants for “misinformation” projects.

REUTERS

An array of companies also received federal grants for “misinformation” projects.

The Department of Health and Human Services awarded \$300,000 to Melax Technologies for “real-time surveillance of vaccine misinformation from social media platforms using ontology and natural language processing technologies.”

HHS granted \$299,964 to Gryphon Scientific for “systematic understanding and elimination of misinformation online.”



Trump announced shortly after his victory that Musk would lead an extra-governmental effort to

identify cost
savings.

The
Washington
Post via Getty
Images

And the Department of Homeland Security awarded \$1,205,826 via the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to defense contractor Guidehouse from 2023 to 2024 for “misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation analysis.”

Guidehouse had previously produced a report that touched upon “the public’s perception of [FEMA’s role in the COVID-19 crisis.]”

The technology not-for-profit Meedan received an award for \$5.7 million from the National Science Foundation in September 2021 for a three-year project titled, “Fact champ fact-checker, academic and community collaboration tools, combating hate, abuse and misinformation with minority-led partnerships.”

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Trump team looks to trim

Trump announced shortly after his Nov. 5 election victory that Musk, the billionaire owner of X and chief executive of Tesla and SpaceX, and Ramaswamy would lead an extra-governmental effort to identify cost savings — after the president-elect himself vowed to dismantle federal efforts to police alleged “misinformation” in his second term.

It’s unclear how much of the pending grant money could be clawed back — and grants already were tapering downward after peaking in 2021, with just \$18.4 million in new “misinformation”-related awards identified in 2024.

Under Trump’s first term a relative pittance was spending on research touching on misinformation — roughly \$2.2 million in 2020, the report said.

In a policy video released shortly after launching his campaign in November 2022, Trump said, "The censorship cartel must be dismantled and destroyed — and it must happen immediately."

"Within hours of my inauguration, I will sign an executive order banning any federal department or agency from colluding with any organization, business, or person, to censor, limit, categorize, or impede the lawful speech of American citizens," Trump said.

"I will then ban federal money from being used to label domestic speech as 'mis-' or 'dis-information'. And I will begin the process of identifying and firing every federal bureaucrat who has engaged in domestic censorship — directly or indirectly — whether they are the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Health and Human Services, the FBI, the DOJ, no matter who they are."

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DONALD TRUMP, GRANTS, JOE BIDEN, WHITE HOUSE, 11/22/24