

April 28, 2022

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, S.W.
Washington D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Mayorkas:

I write with deep concern about the Department of Homeland Security's decision to create a new Disinformation Governance Board. I confess, I at first thought this announcement was satire. Surely no American Administration would ever use the power of Government to sit in judgment on the First Amendment speech of its own citizens. Sadly, I was mistaken. Rather than protecting our border or the American homeland, you have chosen to make policing Americans' speech your priority. This new board is almost certainly unconstitutional and should be dissolved immediately.

For well over a year, your Department has consistently treated competing policy views as disinformation to be monitored or investigated. However, political debates on issues such as immigration, pandemic lockdowns, and foreign policy clearly constitute "core political speech" protected by the First Amendment.¹ The Supreme Court has even gone so far as to say that "Under the First Amendment there is no such thing as a false idea."² The apparent broad mandate of this new government entity to "coordinate countering misinformation" in America undermines the argument that it can even exist consistent with the Constitution.³

Particularly troubling is your choice to lead the new board, Nina Jankowicz, a supposed "expert" with a long history of partisan attacks. Consider:

- In 2020, she described President Trump's use of the national guard as "a sentence I expect to hear from leaders of authoritarian countries, not the President of the United States."⁴
- In 2021, she quoted with praise an article that said "homegrown fascism predated President Donald Trump."⁵
- She has said America is systemically racist.⁶
- In response to revelations about Hunter Biden's laptop, she tweeted that "50 former natsec officials and 5 former CIA heads that believe the laptop is a Russian influence op. Trump says 'Russia, Russia, Russia.'"⁷

¹ *Meyer v. Grant*, 486 U.S. 414, 422 (1988).

² *Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc.*, 418 U.S. 323, 339 (1974).

³ <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/playbook/2022/04/27/fauci-pulls-out-of-whcd-is-biden-next-00028131>

⁴ <https://twitter.com/wiczipedia/status/1267589264440729600>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/wiczipedia/status/1321123630403694593>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/wiczipedia/status/1311123042387529734>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/wiczipedia/status/1319463138107031553?s=20&t=EZYZWppGDhzWKhE5ensHnQ>

Jankowicz has said the new DHS Board will “maintain the Dept’s committment [sic] to protecting free speech.”⁸ This is particularly ironic given Jankowicz’s extensive criticism of free speech and the First Amendment. Jankowicz has claimed that “the ‘free speech vs censorship’ framing is a false dichotomy.”⁹ And when Elon Musk announced his acquisition of Twitter, she said “I shudder to think about if free speech absolutists were taking over more platforms, what that would look like for the marginalized communities ... which are already shouldering ... disproportionate amounts of this abuse.”¹⁰ Jankowicz has even described opponents of social media speech codes as “first amendment zealots.”¹¹ These statements that question the value of free speech are obviously disqualifying for such a role.

While Democrats have for years controlled the public square through their Big Tech allies, Mr. Musk’s acquisition of Twitter has shown just how tenuous that control is. It can only be assumed that the sole purpose of this new Disinformation Governance Board will be to marshal the power of the federal government to censor conservative and dissenting speech. This is dangerous and un-American. The board should be immediately dissolved.

So that Congress can consider remedial legislation, please provide the following responses prior to your expected testimony before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on May 4, 2022:

1. How will this Disinformation Board function? And who exactly will it be monitoring?
2. What analysis did DHS conduct, if any, to ensure that the Disinformation Board and its activities comport with the First Amendment?
3. Why did DHS time its announcement of this governance board directly after Mr. Musk’s acquisition of Twitter?
4. Who appointed Ms. Jankowicz to head the board as executive director? Were you aware of her history of partisan conduct prior to her appointment?
5. Has DHS conferred with any private social media company in the creation or operation of this board?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Hawley". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long, horizontal stroke at the end.

Josh Hawley
United States Senator

⁸ <https://twitter.com/wiczipedia/status/1519282822158110721>

⁹ <https://twitter.com/JackPosobiec/status/1519397817260904454?s=20&t=ukuMjyeX1tNiuHKa1DmtGw>

¹⁰ <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/16/1093212502/women-face-disproportionate-attacks-online-one-expert-shares-some-of-the-details>

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/wiczipedia/status/1192897252328714240>