

GOP lawmakers introduce bills to terminate DHS disinformation board

Republican lawmakers in both chambers have introduced legislation to block the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) from rolling out its new Disinformation Governance Board less than a week after it was unveiled.

The board was designed to coordinate DHS's disinformation efforts on topics as varied as migration, natural disasters and plots by foreign actors while offering oversight to ensure civil liberties and free speech are protected.

But in the days since it was rolled out, Republicans have seized on the board as a way to police speech, while numerous GOP lawmakers called it "dystopian," dubbing it the "ministry of truth" in a nod to George Orwell's novel "1984."

"The Department of Homeland Security should not be in the business of censoring free speech on Twitter and Facebook," Rep. [Lauren Boebert](#) (R-Colo.) said in a statement accompanying the bill, which she led on behalf of more than 60 of her GOP colleagues.

"Biden's unconstitutional, dystopian 'Department of Propaganda' is trampling on the First Amendment and trying to control what people can and can't say. Instead of treating Orwell's book 1984 as a warning, the Left appears to be using it as an outline for their agenda. These efforts are un-American and a direct attack on our freedoms. We the

People will not be silent," she added.

During an appearance on CNN on Sunday, Homeland Security Secretary [Alejandro Mayorkas](#) disputed the criticisms of the board while acknowledging the department "could have done a better job of communicating what it does and does not do."

Mayorkas said the board would not infringe on free speech and would not monitor U.S. citizens, noting that the board has no operational authority. He said that the board plans to communicate "best practices" to operators already addressing the threat of disinformation.

White House press secretary [Jen Psaki](#) also defended its work, telling reporters its mandate "is not to adjudicate what is true or false online or otherwise. It will operate in a nonpartisan and apolitical manner."

The legislation would terminate the Disinformation Governance Board and prohibit any funding from going to the board or anything substantially similar.

"This 'ministry of truth' is nothing more than a partisan ploy to silence dissent the Democratic party objects to," said Sen. [Marsha Blackburn](#) (R-Tenn.), who co-sponsored a similar bill in the Senate.

Even outside of GOP circles, the board has alarmed free speech advocates.

"Even in the hands of well-intentioned, good-faith actors, any government board ostensibly tasked with monitoring and "govern[ing]" disinformation is a frightening prospect; in the wrong hands, such a board would be a potent tool for government censorship and

retaliation," Protect Democracy, the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the Knight First Amendment Institute wrote in a letter to DHS.

Mayorkas made the rounds on several Sunday talk shows to defend the board.

"It's not about speech. It's about the connectivity to violence," Mayorkas said, noting that while Americans are free to make antisemitic speech, they are not allowed to take congregants hostage at a synagogue.

Some of the disinformation work the board would oversee dates back to the Trump administration, targeting information provided by human smugglers.

Mayorkas gave the example of airing ads in Haitian creole to combat migration stemming from false narratives that Haitians would not be subjected to Title 42, which allows for rapid expulsion of those who cross the border.

DHS last week hired Nina Jankowicz, a disinformation expert who has worked throughout Eastern Europe, to lead the working group.

"A HUGE focus of our work, and indeed, one of the key reasons the Board was established, is to maintain the Dept's commitment to protecting free speech, privacy, civil rights, & civil liberties," Jankowicz wrote on Twitter in announcing her new job.