

Stanford academic senate condemns Scott Atlas

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The Stanford faculty senate voted by over 85 percent to condemn the COVID-19-related actions of right-wing Trump administration adviser and Stanford-affiliated Hoover Institution senior fellow Scott Atlas. This principled stand against Atlas, a prominent ideological architect of the US government's murderous herd immunity policy, demonstrates the overwhelming support within the scientific establishment for a rational, science-based approach to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.

The resolution highlights six actions taken by Atlas that “promote a view of COVID-19 that contradicts medical science.” According to the *Stanford Daily*, these actions include, “discouraging the use of masks and other protective measures, misrepresenting knowledge and opinion regarding the management of pandemics, endangering citizens and public officials, showing disdain for established medical knowledge and damaging Stanford's reputation and academic standing.”

Atlas, a neuroradiologist with no background or expertise in public health or epidemiology, has risen to international prominence as an opponent of basic public health measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The same stances, which have rightfully earned the criticism of Stanford faculty, are precisely the reason he was elevated to the position of Trump's top COVID-19 adviser in August 2020. Director of the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Disease Dr. Anthony Fauci reported to the *Washington Post* that Atlas is “the only medical person who sees the president on a regular basis.”

Notably, an amendment to the resolution introduced by psychiatry professor David Spiegel calling for the University to consider sanctions against Atlas, including dismissal, passed by 59 percent. As Spiegel

noted, “there is clear evidence that Atlas has violated Stanford's code of conduct, as well as that of the AMA [American Medical Association].” However, a subsequent amendment removed language about disciplinary action, with its proponents citing concerns about curtailing academic freedom.

This reversal among faculty voters was no doubt due in part from pressure applied by the university administration, which continues to back the Hoover Institution. Although university officials have taken pains to distance themselves and the university from Atlas's views while shielding him, Stanford President Marc Tessier-Lavigne commented that he was “deeply troubled by the views by Dr. Atlas, including his call to ‘rise up’ in Michigan,” which “was widely interpreted as an undermining of local health authorities, and even a call to violence.” Noting the detrimental role of Atlas's views on public health, Tessier-Lavigne continued, “We're therefore compelled to distance the university from Dr. Atlas's views in the strongest possible terms.”

Even Bush administration national security adviser, unindicted war criminal Condoleezza Rice, the director of the Hoover Institution, was compelled to criticize Atlas's “rise up” tweet as “offensive and well beyond the boundaries of what is appropriate for someone in a position of authority, such as the one he holds.”

The resolution passed Thursday is the culmination of a campaign that began with a September 9 open letter from 98 Stanford medical faculty that first raised criticisms of Atlas. Atlas's lawyer responded by threatening to sue the signatories for defamation if they did not immediately retract their claims. The faculty bravely refused to give in to this bullying and continued their campaign. Stanford Provost Persis Drell, representing university administration, threatened these

faculty with disciplinary action for “inappropriately” sending their open letter to a faculty email list.

The Hoover Institution, founded in 1919 as an archive of World War I documents, formally became part of Stanford University in 1959. Unlike academic university departments, whose job is to advance humanity’s knowledge of truth, former President Herbert Hoover explained its role as follows: “The purpose of this institution must be, by its research and publications to demonstrate the evils of the doctrines of Karl Marx—whether communism, socialism, economic materialism or atheism—thus to protect the American way of life from such ideologies, their conspiracies, and to reaffirm the validity of the American system.” Hoover’s commitment to this mission was reaffirmed in 2019 by its director at the time, Thomas Gilligan.

Unlike Stanford professors, Hoover fellows do not go through the tenure process required of professors. Instead, they are given appointments by an institution answerable only to the president of the university. These fellows are then able to legitimize their views through their Stanford affiliation. Past and present Hoover fellows include Iraq War architects Donald Rumsfeld, Rice and Reagan-era Secretary of State George Shultz.

Hoover has played a central role in fabricating pseudoscientific arguments supportive of herd immunity policies. As early as March 16, Hoover senior fellow Richard Epstein claimed that only about 500 Americans would die from COVID-19. In April, Hoover research fellow Jay Bhattacharya coauthored a now thoroughly debunked study of COVID-19 antibody prevalence whose statistical analysis bordered on fraud to suggest that the virus was much less deadly than previously understood. Bhattacharya was also a signatory of the Great Barrington Declaration, an open call for governments to pursue mass infections of COVID-19 in hopes of achieving “herd immunity.”

That Hoover fellows were openly denying the dangers of the pandemic as early as March is all the more sinister given that high-level Hoover officials were notified directly by the Trump administration in February of the dangers of the pandemic. This memo was then distributed to financial institutions, who were able to sell assets in advance of the impending stock market dive.

Stanford faculty have occasionally challenged the

anticommunist institution’s presence on campus, with campaigns from the 1960s to the 1980s calling on the university to reevaluate Hoover’s affiliation with Stanford. However, the university administration clearly values the ties Hoover brings to powerful sections of the ruling class.

Stanford Provost Persis Drell rebutted such calls this October questioning Hoover’s role as part of Stanford, stating that “they are, in fact, us.”

The vote by 85 percent of Stanford faculty to condemn Atlas’s positions and by 59 percent for disciplinary action of this high-level figure in the fascistic Trump administration was a significant act. This illustrates that there is a powerful constituency among scientists and researchers for public health policy based on science. That the primary opposition to these humane sentiments comes from an institution founded on anticommunism only illustrates in the negative that a world in which policy is based on science is a socialist world.



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