

Twitter censors account of COVID-19 whistleblower Rebekah Jones

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Twitter has suspended the account of COVID-19 whistleblower Rebekah Jones, an act of open censorship against the Florida data scientist who first came to prominence in May 2020 when she refused to alter coronavirus case and death counts on the state's coronavirus dashboard at the behest of the administration of Republican Governor Ron DeSantis.

Jones is one of the most forthright and well-known opponents of the homicidal policy of herd immunity—dubbed “social murder” by the British Medical Journal (*BMJ*)—promoted by DeSantis and former President Donald Trump. She has consistently spoken out against school reopenings and the immense dangers posed by doing so amid a pandemic that has killed more than 610,000 in the US alone and more than 3.7 million internationally.

DeSantis' office has gloated over Twitter's decision, calling Jones the “Typhoid Mary of COVID-19 disinformation ... with her defamatory conspiracy theories.” Matt Dixon, one of the governor's aides, called the decision “long overdue.”

DeSantis was joined by other publications such as Yahoo! News, which called Jones a “Fraudulent COVID Whistleblower,” as well as ostensibly left-wing figures such as Glenn Greenwald, who declared Jones had the “stench of fraud” and promoted a story from the right-wing *National Review* claiming that Jones used her Twitter account to scam money from her followers.

Twitter's pretense for the suspension, according to Jones, is that she reportedly posted a recent article in the *Miami Herald* entitled “What Rebekah Jones saw behind the scenes at the Florida Department of Health” about 50 times. Whatever the immediate technical reason, the underlying cause is that DeSantis, Twitter and the entire political and media establishment are

opposed to sharing information that show a fair and accurate record of DeSantis' right-wing attacks against the whistleblower.

In particular, the *Herald* article in question has a host of new information about the ongoing legal battle involving Jones and the state of Florida regarding her whistleblower complaint she filed last July. At the time, DeSantis claimed she was fired for “insubordination” and not, as Jones put it in her complaint, being part of a “misleading and politically driven narrative that ignored the data and science.”

According to the *Herald*, however, “[s]worn affidavits from DOH leaders acknowledge Jones' often-denied claim that she was told to remove data from public access.” Moreover, while Florida Department of Health public health officials, including Jones and a team of epidemiologists, were tasked “to develop new data for a reopening plan,” their data were “never incorporated into the recommendations to DeSantis. Deputy Secretary of Health Shamari Roberson denied the department made any recommendations on the reopening plan at all.”

Moreover, noted the *Herald*, “Secrecy was a policy. Staffers were told not to put anything about the pandemic response into writing.” Crucial information was purposefully withheld, including “data on deaths and infections at nursing homes, state prisons and schools,” and “Important information that had previously been made public was redacted from medical examiner accounts of COVID-19 fatalities.”

The *Herald* continued that, “DOH staffers interviewed by the *Herald* described a “hyper-politicized” communications department that often seemed to be trying to match the narrative coming from Washington.”

In other words, DeSantis' claim that his strategy to

reopen Florida in a “very measured, thoughtful and data-driven way” was completely false. He either knew it was unsafe to reopen schools and workplaces or wasn’t told the actual data by his advisers to give the governor a measure of plausible deniability. Either way, the DeSantis administration moved forward with policies that are the major reason there are now an estimated 37,000 deaths in Florida alone.

In contrast, Rebekah Jones has been one of the few voices of genuine science-based approaches to the dangers of the pandemic. She has consistently opposed the unsafe reopening of schools and workplaces, and used her training as a geographer and data science specialist to make Florida coronavirus data more accessible to the general public through her Florida COVID Action dashboard.

Jones and two colleagues also published an article in *US News & World Report* last December that was critical of school reopenings, noting at the time that at least than 1 million children had been infected with the coronavirus. “Our data demonstrates that schools are not the safe havens or silos some believed they would be, and that they in fact contribute to the spread of COVID-19 in a number of ways,” they wrote. “In our opinion, the data suggests schools are NOT safe and DO contribute to the spread of the virus—both within schools and within their surrounding communities,” the article concluded.

For her efforts, she faced a series of increasingly punitive actions by the state. Last December, the Florida Department of Health alleged that Jones hacked their messaging system and sent out a memo urging health officials to “speak up before another 17,000 people are dead. You know this is wrong. You don’t have to be a part of this. Be a hero. Speak out before it’s too late.”

In response, Jones’ house was raided and all her electronics seized by the state. Jones recorded the home invasion and tweeted after the raid, “This was Desantis. He sent the gestapo.” In her recording, she can be heard crying, “My husband and children are upstairs. What are you doing? They just pointed a gun at my children!”

Jones has joined whistleblowers Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, who are being persecuted for the crime of telling the working class the truth about the criminal actions of the ruling elite.



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