

National Review spearheads ultra-right smear campaign against COVID-19 whistleblower Rebekah Jones

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13 August 2021

Over the past several weeks vicious slanders have been published in the ultra-right press against Florida COVID-19 whistleblower Rebekah Jones. An openly McCarthyite denunciation appeared in magazine *National Review*, libeling her as a “Propaganda tool of the Chinese Communist Party.”

Jones was fired in May of 2020 from her position as a COVID monitor manager in the Florida Department of Health. Her termination was a result of her refusal to distort data that would support the back-to-work and back-to-school campaigns led by Republican Governor Ron DeSantis.

The media attacks are aimed at discrediting Jones’s year-long effort to expose the state government’s manipulation of COVID case data and her scientific findings revealing the health dangers resulting from the campaign to reopen schools. They are triggered by the explosive rise in infections and hospitalizations throughout Florida, which has vindicated her concerns that the state government has been responsible for suppressing even the most limited safety precautions, including within schools, meant to curb the spread of the virus.

The *National Review*, whose ties to semi-fascist tendencies in American politics go back 70 years, released a defamatory story August 7 headlined, “Rebekah Jones, Propaganda tool of the Chinese Communist Party.” Author Charles Cooke blames Jones for an article published in China’s state-run *Global Times* newspaper, which reports her charges that Florida officials hid or deleted information related to 171 hospital patients suspected to have contracted the virus before March 2020.

A similar article in the ultra-right *Washington*

Examiner was headlined “China uses Rebekah Jones’ conspiracies to criticize DeSantis and spread COVID-19 lies.” This article echoes the *National Review* by denouncing Jones for the mere fact that her exposure of the Florida governor has been reported in the Chinese press. Jones is cast as an instrument being wielded by China to “push their own narrative, and to undermine and discredit DeSantis.”

Cooke’s commentary combines smears of Rebekah Jones with promotion of the conspiracy theory that COVID-19 originated in a leak from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the prestigious research institution that was one of the first to analyze the genetic structure of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes the deadly illness.

He refers to a previous *National Review* article, written by Matt Shapiro in June, which attempted to debunk findings by the *Miami Herald*, analyzing health data in the early months of the pandemic, that pointed to evidence of possible community spread in Florida in the months leading up to March of 2020.

However, Shapiro’s article is dubious at best, with barely, if any, credible evidence to substantiate the insufficient answers provided by DOH officials on the 171 suspicious patients that had been discovered in the *Herald* article.

The *Herald* article pointed to data that it had downloaded and searched in the early days of the pandemic. This data was presented under the “event date” field of a computer program designed by epidemiologists to track the timetable of COVID cases. Shapiro claims that “some” of these early “event date” variables reflected “data-entry mistakes,” without elaborating on what these mistakes were or, more

importantly, how many possible patients were affected.

Neither the *National Review* nor DOH officials have been able to provide a convincing explanation for the flat-out dismissal of possibly hundreds of patients that demonstrated COVID-19 symptoms in January and February of 2020. Shapiro gives no legitimacy to the very likely scenario that the state's rejection of findings in the media and the audit itself represented a politically motivated attempt to cover up the massive spread of COVID-19 infections and subsequently manipulate, i.e., "hide or delete" data that would have been a roadblock for the homicidal reopening strategy that was concocted by the DeSantis administration in the summer of 2020.

In an interview with National Public Radio in June of 2020, Jones alleges that in the week before Phase One of the state's reopening plan, there was "a lot of manipulating things" and "a lot of back and forth with the epidemiologists," who remained "extremely uncomfortable" with the department's policies.

She said in less than an hour after the data was taken down, she was asked to place it back up and was removed from the dashboard's operation the next day. She confirmed her belief that she was dismissed from the project because of her refusal to manipulate the data and asserted that officials wanted her "out of the way" so that "they could do whatever they wanted, show whatever they wanted" and create an inaccurate image of the state's infection numbers improving.

The ferocious attacks being levied against Jones are in response to widespread condemnations of DeSantis's criminal handling of the catastrophic resurgence of the pandemic. Florida has set several new daily records for current hospitalizations over the past week. The number of in-patient beds used for COVID-19 rose by 1,192 in a single day. More worrisome is the health risks facing children and the prospect of schools being major vectors of community transmission for the disease.

Most Florida children are returning to schools this week or next week in areas where COVID-19 outbreaks are far more intense than they were in the semester of fall 2020. In most Florida counties, cases are at least four times higher than a year ago, a *USA Today* analysis of Johns Hopkins University data revealed. There are at least five counties reporting a more than tenfold increase in infections.

Demonstrating his contempt for both science and human life, Governor DeSantis issued an executive order last month banning Florida counties from mandating mask requirements in schools. On Monday, DeSantis went even further, with his office threatening to withhold the pay of superintendents and school board members who choose to ignore the governor's order against masks.

It is under these conditions that the reactionary character of the assault on Jones from both the media and DeSantis himself becomes ever clearer. After Jones constructed a new COVID monitor in opposition to the corrupt state-run tracker and revealed the true scope of sickness throughout the US, Florida state police bulldozed into Jones's home last December and conducted a Gestapo-like raid aimed at intimidating and suppressing her work. The officers seized her technology, and she was later handed an arrest warrant, preventing her from continuing to publish data on COVID-19 outbreaks.

With the pandemic crisis deepening every day, the science-based approach that has been offered by Jones in opposing the unsafe reopening of schools and workplaces is being absolutely vindicated. The purpose behind the efforts to silence her is bound up not only with the sociopathy of DeSantis but is geared above all towards serving the profit interests of the capitalist class at the expense of the health of the population.



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