

As Kennedy's HHS claims "the pandemic is over" and guts COVID research grants

Senate confirms Jay Bhattacharya and Marty Makary to escalate war on science and public health

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In a development that will be recorded as a dark turning point in the destruction of public health in the United States, the Senate has now confirmed two of the most reactionary and anti-scientific figures to helm the core institutions of the American biomedical establishment. In a party-line vote Tuesday, Jay Bhattacharya was confirmed as director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Dr. Marty Makary to lead the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Both Bhattacharya and Makary are aligned not merely with the Trump administration's agenda, but with a sweeping assault on public health infrastructure, biomedical research, and scientific truth. Their nominations are not isolated appointments but components of a broader political project: the reconstitution of federally funded scientific research under the heel of the far right, led by a government that is openly contemptuous of life-saving knowledge and hostile to any measure that might impede the flow of corporate profits.

The rise of anti-science reactionaries

Jay Bhattacharya, a Stanford economist and co-author of the notorious Great Barrington Declaration, made his name during the COVID-19 pandemic as a leading advocate of the fascistic policy of "herd immunity"—a pseudoscientific euphemism for mass infection, death and disability. The Great Barrington Declaration was drafted at the headquarters of the libertarian American Institute for Economic Research (AIER), itself a product of the reactionary right's war against any role of the state in regulating industry or

protecting the public good.

Bhattacharya and his collaborators claimed that young, "low-risk" people should return to work and school, while the elderly and vulnerable would be "protected"—though no feasible method of protecting the vulnerable in a society with widespread mass infection was ever offered. This "strategy," advanced with full knowledge of its lethal implications, amounted to a policy of social murder. It was quickly adopted by the Trump administration as the ideological scaffolding for its criminal dismantling of public health protections in 2020, and ultimately morphed into the Biden administration's "forever COVID" policy still in place today.

The bipartisan support for normalizing mass infection and debilitation with COVID-19 was on full display during Bhattacharya's Senate confirmation hearing two weeks ago, when not a single Democrat challenged his record on the pandemic as he was openly praised for his strategy of mass infection and death by right-wing Republicans. This reaffirmed the basic reality that the Democrats are not only acquiescing to Trump's fascistic program, but fully enabling it, including his attacks on science and public health.

Now, Bhattacharya will oversee the largest public funder of medical research in the world. He has pledged to end what he calls the "monopoly" of scientists at elite institutions and to decentralize the grant-making process—rhetoric that conceals a scorched-earth policy to defund areas of science deemed incompatible with right-wing ideology. This includes research on infectious diseases, climate-linked illness, racial and gender disparities, and sexual health services—all of which have already seen grant terminations, hiring freezes, and retaliatory firings under the direction of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Martin Makary, meanwhile, has gained notoriety for his anti-vaccine grandstanding and COVID minimization, falsely claiming in 2021 that “the pandemic is over” and that 90 percent of the population was immune to the virus at that point, an absurd lie. His nomination to lead the FDA—an agency responsible for ensuring the safety of vaccines, medications and food—marks a deliberate move to undermine trust in these institutions and facilitate a deregulated pharmaceutical and food industry.

A coordinated attack on scientific infrastructure

The Bhattacharya-Makary appointments must be viewed within the broader framework of Project 2025, the sweeping right-wing initiative to gut the federal bureaucracy and consolidate executive power, which is being carried out under the auspices of fascist billionaire Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

Already, the Trump administration has fired thousands of scientists across the NIH, FDA and CDC, including experts in virology, vaccine development and epidemiology.

In the name of “reproducibility,” Bhattacharya has endorsed a new regime in which grants for exploratory or high-risk research will be curbed in favor of “replication studies.” But behind this language is a purge of ideologically disfavored science. This includes work on Long COVID—an illness Bhattacharya has consistently downplayed despite admitting it affects “millions”—and on infectious disease writ large, which the administration has now declared a low priority.

As Bhattacharya testified during his confirmation hearing, he will carry out “President Trump and Secretary Kennedy’s agenda of Making America Healthy Again”—code for turning the NIH into an arm of corporate medicine and reactionary politics.

The long-term consequences of these appointments and their policies are incalculable. As the *Science* journal reported Tuesday, 29 COVID-era grants—including those researching antiviral drugs, pancoronavirus and other next-generation vaccines, and Long COVID—were suddenly terminated by the NIH on Monday, with more expected in the days ahead. CDC funds for state and local pandemic preparedness have been slashed by \$11.4 billion. This, in a time when new variants of SARS-CoV-2 are still emerging, and when H5N1 bird flu threatens to spark a new pandemic.

Justifying the sudden cutoff of research funds related to COVID-19, the HHS bluntly told *Science*, “The COVID-19

pandemic is over, and HHS will no longer waste billions of taxpayer dollars responding to a non-existent pandemic that Americans moved on from years ago.”

In Orwellian fashion, while cutting funds to research treatments for Long COVID—now one of the most prevalent chronic disease globally, with over 20 million patients in the US alone—the statement added, “HHS is prioritizing funding projects that will deliver on President Trump’s mandate to address our chronic disease epidemic and Make America Healthy Again.”

Bhattacharya and Makary now preside over institutions that are being dismantled in real time. Labs are closing. PhD students are being turned away. Scientists are fleeing to Europe and Asia. And millions of Americans—particularly the elderly, disabled and immunocompromised—are left to navigate a world where the government has declared the pandemic “over” while quietly cutting the lifelines that might protect them in the next crisis.

As the scientific community reels, what is being put in place is a regime of faith-based medicine, conspiracy-driven policy, and corporate subservience. The consequences will be measured not only in lives lost but in generations of delayed discovery, unmet need, and suffering. The Biden administration’s normalization of mass death and abandonment of the fight against COVID-19 paved the way for the fascistic agenda now taking shape.

What is unfolding is not a debate over science but a conflict between two social systems: one based on the advancement of human knowledge and well-being, and the other—the capitalist system—based on profit, exploitation and increasingly barbaric reaction.

The working class must draw the necessary conclusions. Defending science requires breaking from both capitalist parties and building an independent political movement, rooted in socialist principles, that fights for a public health system based not on profit, but on social needs.

The appointments of Bhattacharya and Makary mark the next stage in the ruling elites’ war on science. It must be met by the resistance of the working class—organized, informed and uncompromising in its defense of scientific truth.



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