

US state legislatures seek to destroy the public health apparatus

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A recent Associated Press (AP) investigation examining more than 1,000 state bills introduced across the United States in 2024 found that over 420 of them were explicitly anti-science in character, targeting longstanding public health protections. Of these, roughly 350 were directed against vaccination programs, seeking to “bar discrimination against unvaccinated people, create the criminal offense of vaccine harm, require blood banks to test for evidence of vaccinations, and institute a 48-hour vaccine waiting period,” according to the AP’s findings.

In Minnesota, two of these bills have gone so far as to designate the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines—scientifically proven to have saved millions of lives—as “weapons of mass destruction.” Such language lends legal legitimacy to the far-right disinformation campaigns that falsely claim vaccines have caused widespread injury and death, despite exhaustive global reviews confirming their safety and efficacy. These legislative efforts would also impose new regulatory obstacles and bureaucratic red tape, further restricting access to vaccination for working-class and poor populations already struggling to navigate an increasingly fragmented and costly health system. Another 70 bills nationwide target basic public health measures such as water fluoridation and the regulation of raw milk sales, both of which have been critical in preventing disease for decades.

While many of these bills have been introduced for the sole purpose of promoting the fascist credentials of individual legislators, a significant number, at least 30, have already been enacted or adopted in Republican-controlled states in the Midwest, South, and rural West. States such as Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas, and have passed legislation weakening or abolishing vaccine mandates for schoolchildren, ending requirements for water fluoridation, and rolling back regulations on the sale of raw, unpasteurized milk. In sum, these measures constitute a sweeping assault on public health and the scientific gains achieved over more than a century of social struggle, threatening to deepen the crises of preventable disease, mass suffering, and premature death for generations to come.

This legislative assault has been spearheaded by a network of well-financed organizations—including MAHA Action, Stand for Health Freedom (SHF), the National Vaccine Information Center, and the Weston A. Price Foundation (WAPF)—that have coalesced around Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and his anti-public-health campaign which goes by the label “Make America Healthy Again,” a name chosen to curry favor with Trump. These groups function as political instruments for an affluent social layer that seeks to advance its ideological agenda while securing its own material interests within the expanding “wellness” and alternative

health industries. As U.S. News has reported, the global wellness market is valued at approximately \$1.5 trillion, encompassing \$160 billion in dietary supplements and vitamins and \$250 billion in so-called natural and organic products—sectors driven largely by influencer-based marketing and social media promotion.

MAHA Action maintains particularly close ties to Kennedy through his longtime publisher, Tony Lyons, who has played a central role in the organization’s political strategy and in disseminating its anti-science propaganda. Kennedy’s former campaign operative, Del Bigtree—head of the notorious anti-vaccine group Informed Consent Action Network (ICAN)—now directs the MAHA Alliance, which serves as the movement’s principal fundraising and electoral arm, channelling money toward Kennedy’s initiatives and allied candidates. Another key figure, Sayer Ji, co-founder and adviser to Stand for Health Freedom (SHF)—a “health freedom” advocacy center established in 2019—has functioned as a primary legislative mobilizer for MAHA, coordinating state-level lobbying and providing model bills that form the basis of the current wave of anti-science legislation.

These organizations represent only the visible layer of a far broader network of loose alliances and ideological affiliates. What unites this milieu is its social position—a layer of aspiring capitalists and petty-bourgeois self-promoters, economically squeezed between big capital and the working class—that channels its frustrations into “anti-monopoly” rhetoric against “Big Pharma” and federal public health institutions while leaving the capitalist system itself untouched.

The movement’s ideological core is an exaggerated individualism and hostility toward any conception of collective responsibility for public health or the social right to medical care. Within MAHA-aligned circles, basic public health measures—vaccination, masking, or disease surveillance—are recast as forms of “medical tyranny” that infringe on the sovereignty of the individual. MAHA’s program is not a popular revolt against “bureaucracy,” as it claims, but a reactionary project that weaponizes anti-science rhetoric to subordinate social needs to private profit.

Their deeply ingrained anti-communism finds direct expression in their hostility to universal health programs such as mass vaccination, which has provided humanity with levels of well-being previously unknown in history. What began as a fringe current has rapidly evolved into a highly organized and politically sophisticated movement. As Dr. Richard L. Albin of the University of Michigan’s Department of Neurology observed in *The Lancet*, “The anti-vaccine movement is, in part, a cynical effort to use fear to defend the interests of the wealthy ... [it] is part of a major effort to shield the privileged position and power of the wealthy from democratic interventions.”

In essence, the assault on public health serves a dual purpose—to

dismantle collective protections while defending the prerogatives of private enterprise, “entrepreneurialism,” and the market. This orientation was made explicit by Del Bigtree during his remarks at the 2025 Expo West natural products trade show in California—one of the world’s largest gatherings of supplement and “wellness” industry representatives—when he declared, “It blows my mind that I’m going to watch the Republicans carry the supplement industry and the holistic health industry and chiropractors and the acupuncturists into the promised land.” His statement encapsulates the social essence of the movement, the fusion of reactionary politics with the profit interests of business layers tied to the lucrative wellness and alternative health markets.

This anti-science crusade has provoked warnings from leading scientists who see in it not an isolated aberration, but part of a broader reactionary offensive against the Enlightenment foundations of modern society.

Prominent American scientists Dr. Peter J. Hotez, a world-renowned physician-scientist, pediatrician, and global health leader who serves as dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, and Dr. Michael E. Mann, an elected member of the National Academy of Sciences and a leading authority on climate science, have jointly warned of the growing, organized assault on scientific expertise. Both have identified the “Make America Healthy Again” (MAHA) movement as an existential threat to public welfare, viewing its attacks on epidemiology and climate research as interconnected expressions of the same reactionary, anti-enlightenment campaign against objective knowledge itself.

In their recent book *Science Under Siege*, Hotez and Mann observe, “[Robert] Kennedy [Jr.] insists he’s not ‘anti-vaccine,’ but many of his debunked arguments are straight from the anti-vaccine playbook, which he and his nonprofit have helped write.... He conveniently ignores the scientific literature—often vast, and of higher quality—that runs counter to his beliefs.” This passage sums up Kennedy’s methods, which advance demonstrably false claims while rejecting the overwhelming body of established scientific evidence. It illustrates the broader character of the anti-science offensive and its deliberate effort to disguise ideological hostility to public health as legitimate skepticism, thereby sowing confusion and mistrust among wide layers of the population.

These developments—the proliferation of anti-science bills and the broader assault on public health—form one component of a systematic attack on the democratic and social rights of the working class. As fascist Trump ally Steve Bannon openly declared in his October 2025 interview with *The Economist*, the strategic objective is to “seize the institutions and then purge them,” pursuing what he called a “maximalist strategy with a sense of urgency.” The purge of public institutions is inseparable from the purge of scientific rationality itself, a prerequisite for the authoritarian reorganization of the state along corporate lines. The more than 420 anti-science bills introduced into state legislatures demonstrate the ideological thrust of this purge. They accompany the dismantling of federal health agencies and the imposition of sweeping austerity measures, including nearly \$990 billion in proposed Medicaid and other public health reductions contained in the reactionary “One Big Beautiful Bill.”

The fallout from these policies is visible in the accelerating breakdown of the U.S. health system. A recent *Lancet* analysis concluded that “money, not health, has become the mission,” the inevitable result of decades of market-driven reforms. Although the United States spends roughly 50 percent more

on health care than peer nations—about \$17,000 per person annually—life expectancy is 4.1 years lower, and retirees in the lowest wealth quintile die nine years earlier than the richest. Meanwhile, the profits of health conglomerates have soared: United Health Group alone reported \$32.3 billion in earnings in 2024, largely extracted from publicly funded Medicare Advantage and Medicaid Managed Care programs. According to *Stat News*, between 2001 and 2022, health-care corporations diverted \$2.6 trillion from patient care to shareholder payouts. Nearly one-third of all U.S. health expenditures now go to administration—marketing, billing, denial management—twice the share in Canada’s single-payer system. The result is a health infrastructure organized not around human need but around profit accumulation.

The convergence of the MAHA movement’s anti-science campaign, the financialization of health care, and the Trump administration’s policies constitutes a grave menace to the working class and the social gains won in public health over the past century. This crisis is not accidental but deliberately manufactured through political action. With Kennedy integrating the MAHA agenda into the state apparatus, the administration is systematically dismantling the foundations of public health while pursuing an austerity program that threatens the elderly, the sick, and the poor.

As Dr. Marc Cohen, professor of health policy at George Washington University, recently warned, “The attacks on public health mirror a broader dismantling of the social safety net. What concerns me most is that the people who depend on these programs have no private alternatives—the elderly, the disabled, the working poor. They’re being left behind by design.” His observation captures the human cost of a system that subordinates health and life itself to the imperatives of private profit.

The assault on science and public health is a fascistic attack on the democratic and social conquests of the working class. Neither of the capitalist parties—the Republicans nor the Democrats—offers any opposition to this onslaught. The defense of science, of health, and of life itself requires the independent political mobilization of the working class. Only through a socialist program, guided by a scientific understanding of society and nature and directed toward human need rather than private profit, can the gains of civilization be preserved and extended.



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