

Scientists expelled by police at the diabetes conference as Trump administration accelerates dismantling of biomedical research

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On the morning of June 5, 2026, attendees queued outside the main hall of the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans for the American Diabetes Association (ADA) Scientific Sessions. The keynote address had been scheduled for National Institutes of Health Director Jay Bhattacharya, who abruptly canceled to meet with President Trump, leaving his senior adviser Rick Woychik to take the stage and deliver a full-throated endorsement of the administration's pseudo-scientific Make America Healthy Again agenda.

While Woychik spoke inside, a scene of fascistic state repression was unfolding just outside the doors. Five preeminent diabetes and obesity scientists, including Dr. Steven Kahn, editor in chief of the ADA flagship journal *Diabetes Care*, stood quietly distributing printed copies of a peer-reviewed editorial. Co-authored by Kahn, Dr. Aaron Kelly, Dr. Justin Ryder, Dr. Desmond Schatz and Dr. Irl Hirsch, the document exposed the administration's proposed \$5 billion reduction to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) budget and the systematic destruction of the American biomedical research infrastructure.

ADA staff and event security, backed by Louisiana State Police, confronted the researchers. Video footage captured what followed: copies of the editorial were confiscated, and Dr. Kelly was shoved by a uniformed officer, who Kelly later described as having chest-bumped him several times.

The scientists were escorted from the building, stripped of their conference badges and warned that they would be arrested for criminal trespass if they attempted to return, though they later re-entered and continued distributing the document.

Hours afterward, the ADA sent Kahn a formal email informing him his conduct had violated the conference code of conduct and banned him from the remainder of the sessions. Standing outside after the initial expulsion, Dr. Kelly declared on camera, "Censorship is real. America needs to stand up. Scientists, stand up. Physicians, stand up."

The ADA leadership justified the police action by claiming the scientists had demonstrated behavior "not consistent" with the conference code of conduct. In reality, the ADA unleashed armed state forces to censor its own leading authors and editors, revealing the complete capitulation of corporate-aligned medical institutions to the far right. As Kahn later noted, professional organizations are terrified of political repercussions from the Trump administration and are primarily concerned with protecting their nonprofit status.

This unprecedented event crystallizes a fundamental shift. The capitalist state is no longer relying merely on funding cuts or administrative pressure to suppress inconvenient science. It is now deploying overt police violence directly within scientific spaces to silence researchers and enforce its political dictates.

As reported by *STAT*, Woychik opened his remarks by explicitly aligning NIH priorities with the Trump administration, telling the gathered ADA attendees, "I could have written the MAHA agenda." The Make America Healthy Again platform is the administration's official health policy framework. While publicly framed as an initiative to prevent chronic disease and toxic exposures, in practice MAHA couples deregulatory and austerity measures with anti-vaccine, anti-fluoridation and anti-diversity political objectives, serving as a vehicle for far-right culture war attacks on public health institutions.

Bhattacharya's calculated absence from the ADA stage, with Woychik delivering a proxy endorsement in his place, reflects a deliberate effort to insulate the administration's top health officials from open scientific debate, including exactly the kind of organized dissent the police were suppressing just outside the hall. Bhattacharya is infamous as a co-author of the Great Barrington Declaration, the pseudo-scientific manifesto that provided ideological cover for the homicidal "herd immunity" policy of deliberate mass infection during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Woychik, former director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, now serves as senior adviser for the NIH's Make America Healthy Again strategy, a reassignment that exemplifies the transformation of federal health agencies from scientific bodies into instruments of right-wing ideology. When pressed by the ADA chief scientific officer on the administration's systematic dismantling of biomedical research, Woychik dismissed the devastating funding cuts as mere "change," telling the audience that NIH Director Bhattacharya "has his own priorities" and that "we just have to acknowledge that things are changing." He then used the platform to cast doubt on water fluoridation, citing contested studies on fluoride's effects on children's mental health and declining to endorse existing safety standards, in keeping with the MAHA agenda's broader assault on public health orthodoxy.

The contradiction at the heart of the ADA conference was laid bare during the "fireside chat" that followed Woychik's remarks. When

ADA Chief Scientific Officer Rita Kalyani raised concerns about the “systematic dismantling of long-standing research programs” and noted that “this is a sentiment that is shared by some in this room,” the hundreds of researchers gathered in the hall broke into sustained applause. Inside the hall, rank-and-file scientists cheered the defense of scientific inquiry against a political operative. Yet just outside the doors, the ADA leadership had already deployed police to physically suppress their own colleagues for distributing a warning about that exact same agenda.

The editorial Kahn and his colleagues attempted to distribute constitutes a devastating exposure of the Trump administration’s ongoing sabotage of the NIH and the broader biomedical research infrastructure. It is highly unusual for a leading clinical journal to publish such explicitly political language, a fact that reflects the extreme gravity of the threat they perceive

The document details concrete, systematic attacks on NIH funding and structure. While Congress rejected the administration’s proposed \$18 billion NIH cut for fiscal year 2026, Trump immediately renewed the assault with a requested \$5 billion reduction for fiscal year 2027. This proposed budget targets specific institutions for elimination, including the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, dismissed by the administration as “replete with DEI expenditures.” Also slated for elimination are the Fogarty International Center and the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, alongside severe cuts to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the National Library of Medicine.

Beyond the budget, the editorial exposes the bureaucratic mechanisms being weaponized to quietly kill the agency: sudden reductions in force targeting scientific and policy staff, and the deliberate hollowing out of medical advisory councils, where the traditional independent peer review process has been replaced by political appointees and direct HHS oversight to ensure new research aligns strictly with the administration’s political agenda.

The scale of this destruction is captured in the data on Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs). Over the first 13 months of Trump’s return to the White House, the NIH issued only 84 NOFOs compared with 787 in the prior year, an 89 percent reduction. Grant awards from October 2025 through the end of February 2026 plummeted by roughly 66 percent, dropping from nearly 3,000 to fewer than 1,000. Total research dollars awarded fell 54 percent, from just over \$1.3 billion to approximately \$600 million.

This collapse is compounded by a new Office of Management and Budget policy mandating “multiyear forward funding,” which requires the NIH to pay for multiyear grants entirely upfront. The authors calculated this will reduce the number of grants institutes can support by roughly 40 percent annually, rapidly depleting appropriations while preserving the false appearance of budget compliance.

For diabetes research specifically, the consequences are disastrous. The editorial identifies a host of field-defining long-term studies. These multicenter networks and long-term initiatives depend entirely on the stable NIH commitments now facing elimination. The downstream effects will include fewer prevention trials, curtailed translational centers and a mass exodus of early-career investigators being starved of funding and forced out of science entirely. The editorial concludes with a desperate appeal: “A few brushes of a pen... are rapidly destroying what generations have built. We can no longer afford complacency and fear. We must all act now!”

The expulsion of scientists from the ADA conference did not occur

in isolation. It is the latest episode in a political trajectory connecting the homicidal COVID-19 denialism of the past six years to the current resurgence of eliminated pathogens like measles and the active suppression of the research infrastructure needed to confront them. The Trump administration’s dismantling of the NIH runs parallel to a broader siege on the entire public health apparatus, including aggressive attempts to slash CDC budgets, muzzle public health communication and roll back pandemic preparedness and vaccination infrastructure. The authors of the *Diabetes Care* editorial pointed to this reality directly, noting that the recent measles outbreaks and avoidable deaths are the direct result of government officials promoting disproven theories of vaccine harm rather than scientifically grounded arguments for vaccine efficacy. By invoking these deaths alongside the conspiracy theories emanating from HHS leadership, the editorial makes plain that this is not an isolated budget dispute but a fascist health and political regime intent on normalizing mass death and disease.

The disgraceful conduct of the American Diabetes Association exemplifies the broader erosion of scientific norms. Professional medical associations, deeply reliant on corporate industry sponsorship and federal funding, are being transformed into instruments for enforcing political conformism rather than defending scientific freedom. In choosing to act as an arm of the state, utilizing armed police to suppress their own preeminent researchers, the ADA leadership has set a dangerous precedent for every other specialty society now facing mounting right-wing pressure on vaccines, reproductive health and climate-related disease.

While the *Diabetes Care* editorial is a courageous act of scientific defiance, its concluding appeal for citizens and professional organizations to lobby Congress is a dead end. The Democratic Party is not an ally of science. Over the past four years, the Biden administration systematically dismantled emergency measures, embraced a “live with COVID” policy and prioritized corporate profits over human life, laying much of the groundwork for the current fascist assault on public health.

The significance of Friday’s events lies precisely in the contradiction they exposed. On one side of the convention doors, the ADA leadership deployed police against its own scientists to satisfy political patrons. On the other hand, rank-and-file researchers broke into sustained applause defending scientific inquiry against a political operative. That applause, and the courage of the five scientists who stood outside distributing a document the institution feared, points toward the only social force capable of defending science: an independent, politically conscious mobilization of the working class, joining with scientists who refuse to subordinate human health to the demands of the capitalist state and the financial interests that direct it.



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