

U.S. Sen. Johnson: Sen. Johnson, Sen. Portman, colleagues: Defund Biden's Disinformation Governance Board

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WASHINGTON – On Wednesday, U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, joined U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio), Ranking Member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and 16 of their Republican colleagues in a letter to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security expressing opposition to the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Disinformation Governance Board and urging that any funding for such board be prohibited in the FY 2023 appropriations bill.

"[...] little remains known as to what the board will actually do, how it will determine what is disinformation, and the scope in which it will take to monitor disinformation from American citizens...Absent of these necessary guardrails to prevent mission creep, there is substantial risk of government overreach and First Amendment infringements. While DHS has promised the board will 'protect privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties,' we do not take solace in words alone. A fine line exists between tackling disinformation and government censorship. Exactly where the Disinformation Governance Board falls on this line remains unclear and the potential for abuse is so egregious that we urge any and all funding for the board be prohibited during the Homeland Security appropriations process," **said the senators.**

Sens. Johnson and Rob Portman were joined on the letter by Senators Steve Daines (R-Mont.), Roger Marshall (R-Kan.), Jim Risch (R-Idaho), Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), Todd Young (R-Ind.), Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Mike Lee (R-Utah), Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.), John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), Rick Scott (R-Fla.), Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), Cynthia

Lummis (R-Wyo.), James Lankford (R-Okla.), John Kennedy (R-La.), John Hoeven (R-N.D.), and Mitt Romney (R-Utah).

The full text of the letter can be found [here](#) and below.

Dear Chairman Murphy and Ranking Member Capito:

We write to express our strong opposition to the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Disinformation Governance Board and urge that any funding for such a board be prohibited in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Homeland Security appropriations bill, including but not limited to the prohibition of funds for detailed staff. Additionally, we urge that no funds allocated to any of DHS's offices or components be used to support the Board or any functions of the board. The federal government should never be in the business of regulating speech or being the arbiter of truth, and this latest attempt to engage in that slippery slope should be defunded.

The existence of the board was first brought to light during congressional hearings in April, but we now know it has been in existence for several months - without having one documented meeting. While DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas testified that the board will not be used for political purposes and did his best to explain away serious concerns raised, little remains known as to what the board will actually do, how it will determine what is disinformation, and the scope in which it will take to monitor disinformation from American citizens. It is known, however, that the board's executive director, Nina Jankowicz, is a hyper-partisan actor whose opinions of free speech and of those she disagrees with are well documented. It is also known that the board currently lacks any guiding policy, mission statement, or charter. Absent of these necessary guardrails to prevent mission creep, there is substantial risk of government overreach and First Amendment infringements. Although recent reports indicate that the board's operations have been "paused", Ms. Jankowicz has resigned, and its dissolution is being considered by DHS, its future remains as unclear as its mission.

The federal government already has authorities to counter foreign disinformation and propaganda through the Department of State's Global Engagement Center. Additionally, DHS's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) is responsible for informing Americans about disinformation related to elections and critical infrastructure. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is the lead agency in the Foreign Influence Task Force. There is no gap in our nation's ability to counter

disinformation threats that this board fills.

While DHS has promised the board will “protect privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties,” we do not take solace in words alone. A fine line exists between tackling disinformation and government censorship. Exactly where the Disinformation Governance Board falls on this line remains unclear and the potential for abuse is so egregious that we urge any and all funding for the board be prohibited during the Homeland Security appropriations process.

Sincerely,