

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

We're talking about disinformation today, which I guess means that I am bringing you a lot of information about a lot of disinformation. Confused yet? I'll clear it up, I promise.



The Big Takeaway

Even in (or outside of?) our partisan echo chambers, there are plenty of people debunking the rampant conspiracy theories, which matters in principle but less so in practice, given that most of the fact-checking fails to permeate [the bubble](#) surrounding [the people](#) who most need their facts checked. They're mostly right-wing voters who live and die by whatever distorted view makes headlines on Fox News, which usually either originates with or is repeated by a high-profile Republican. (Most often, that's Donald Trump.)



*That's Donald Trump.
(Photo by Alon Skuy/Getty Images)*

The cycle doesn't end there — it goes on and on, thanks to a cadre of lesser-known Republicans who use their platforms to disseminate disinformation into the public discourse. Among their successes: Trump's 2024 [presidential campaign](#), ongoing [impeachment hearings](#) for President Joe Biden, and the election of House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican who spent the past 18 months dismantling attempts to fight online disinformation, [our national bureau reported](#).

Or, as he prefers to call it, the “censorship industrial complex.” Components of said “complex” include a toothless Disinformation Governance Board that was [disbanded](#) after Republicans successfully framed it as an Orwellian surveillance group charged with policing political speech writ large. (The group's [actual goal](#): Identifying best practices to combat disinformation “that threatens the security of the American people” while also protecting “Americans’ freedom of speech, civil rights, civil liberties, and privacy.”) Johnson played a pivotal role in that campaign, which gathered momentum after he proposed a bill to defund the panel entirely.

“The Biden Administration’s decision to stand up a ‘Ministry of Truth,’ is dystopian in design, almost certainly unconstitutional, and clearly doomed from the start,” he said in a press release announcing the legislation. “The government has no role whatsoever in determining what constitutes truth or acceptable speech.”



*“That’s according to me, Mike Johnson, a member of the government.”
(Photo by Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)*

The unrelenting criticism led officials to dissolve the board just three weeks after it was announced, which would be the end of this story if things ever ended in the right-wing ecosystem. Instead, Johnson vowed in March — nearly a year after the board was scuttled — to subpoena Nina Jankowicz, a disinformation scholar who had been tapped to lead the panel but instead became the target of online abuse and death threats from right-wing trolls whipped into a frenzy over nothing. Obviously, she never began that job, because the job was eliminated, thanks to Johnson. But what is the point of serving on a [House subcommittee](#) created to crack down on the weaponization of the federal government if not to weaponize the federal government by issuing subpoenas, you know?

“We have a lot of questions about the foundation of [the disinformation board],” Johnson mused on Fox News 10 months after the board was eliminated. “How were they going to determine what is so-called disinformation? What were they going to do with this? It’s pretty scary. We have to make sure that this never ever happens again.”

Johnson deployed the same playbook multiple times throughout the next year, using his seat on the anti-weaponization committee to target the Biden administration and the FBI for pushing social media companies to remove false information about elections and vaccines. Over three separate hearings, Johnson

accused federal officials of conspiring to “censor the American people” and “silence conservatives online that they disagreed with.” Amid those proceedings, Johnson co-sponsored a bill to require “mandatory severe penalties” for executive branch employees who censor protected speech as part of what he deemed a “dystopian scheme” to “censor American citizens and silence conservative voices.”

It’s a lot of outrage over nothing, which is how you know that the outrage is the point. Republicans have spent years fomenting and then decrying this type of manufactured controversy to stoke doubt and discontent among voters, leaving them primed to distrust [mainstream media sources](#) and more inclined to consider [allegations of fraud](#) and corruption, even when there is no evidence to support either. The result is a weakened democracy and an electorate that’s ever more susceptible to outright lies, which is less than ideal generally and borderline dangerous ahead of a consequential election cycle.



We've been here before!
(Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

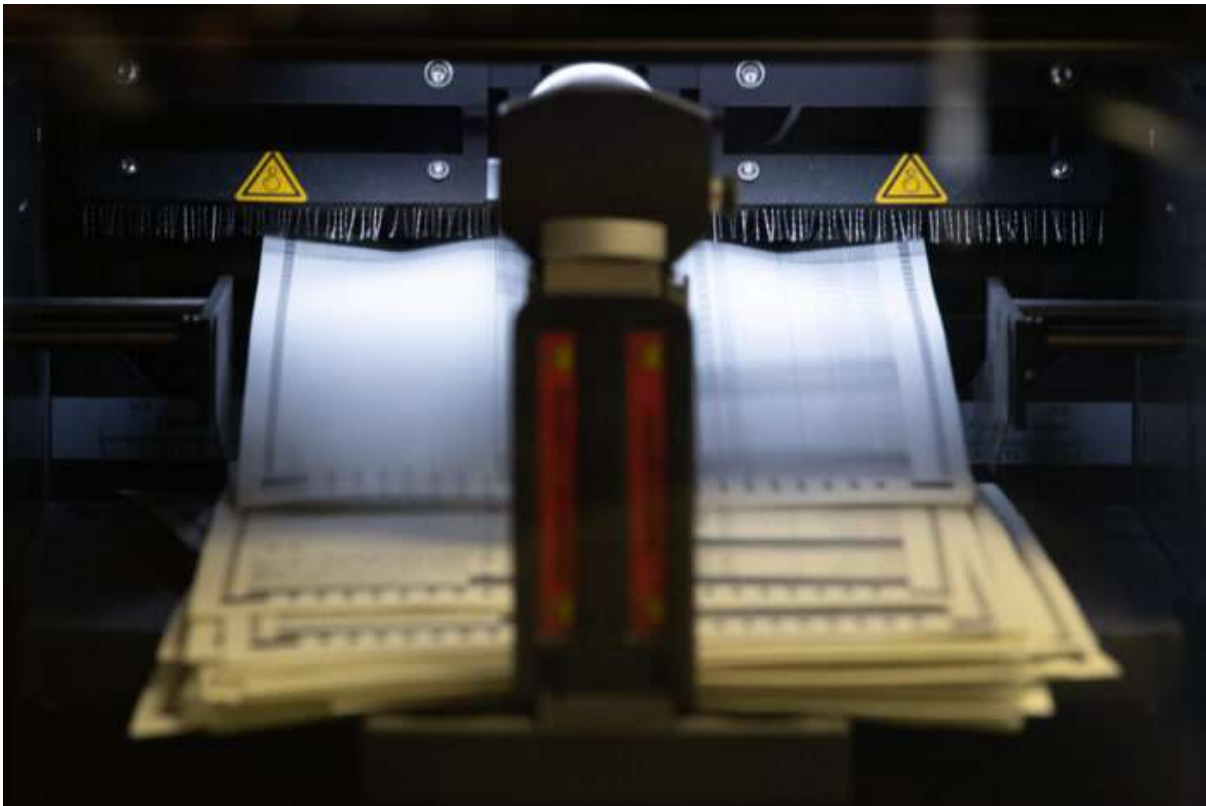
“There are people who are highly incentivized to harm our democracy by raising doubt about elections, and they have been actively organizing and raising money over the last three years,” said David Becker, founder and executive director of the Center on Election Innovation and Research. “In 2020, those that were trying to undermine that election were largely making it up as they went along with crazy

legal theories and chasing bizarre pieces of disinformation. They are going to be better prepared.”

The crazy has already started, if it ever abated at all. On Monday, officials in Arizona’s Mohave County rejected a proposal to hand count every ballot in the 2024 presidential election, something they can’t legally do anyway and had [already voted down once](#). The 3-2 vote came at the request of state Sen. Sonny Borelli, a Republican, devoted election denier and chairman of his own one-man campaign to convince counties to switch to hand counting, which he claims they totally have the authority to do even though [an appeals court said](#) they totally don’t, [the Arizona Mirror reported](#).

Pretty much everyone who is not an election denier and/or Borelli himself had advised Mohave County not to attempt a hand count, including its own deputy attorney and state Attorney General Kris Mayes, who reiterated [in a letter](#) that the move would be illegal.

“Those encouraging you to hand count elections results are encouraging you to violate the law,” Mayes wrote.



*A law-abiding ballot tabulator, abiding by the law.
(Photo by Courtney Pedroza/Getty Images)*

In addition to being literally illegal, hand counts are [notoriously inaccurate](#), because they rely on humans to do math, and humans are generally sort of

terrible at math. (For similar reasons, hand tabulating also [takes forever](#), which makes it more expensive.) Hand counts are also far easier to manipulate than electronic tabulation (because again: humans), which you'd think would be of some interest to the "election integrity" crowd, 11 of whom showed up Monday to speak in favor of the proposal.

Spoiler: It was not. A Republican candidate for county supervisor told the current supervisors that she would gladly go to jail for the hand-count cause, because "you cannot put a price on election confidence." Mohave County Republican Party District 1 Director Jeff Ryder concurred, telling the board that his "single biggest concern is election integrity," which is why he is so steamed that both Biden and Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs were "selected and installed" instead of fairly elected. Surely, a hand count could have prevented this! (Spoiler: [It could not have prevented this.](#))

"By voting to authorize a hand count, you can restore confidence in our voting systems," Ryder said.

Opposite day: [Three presidential debates, one VP debate scheduled ahead of 2024 election](#) ... [Far-right Patriot Party fails to become an official party in Arizona](#) ... [Federal appeals court dismisses Arkansas redistricting lawsuit](#) ... [Case seeking to bar Trump from 2024 ballot appealed to Colorado Supreme Court](#) ... [Twelve counties selected for routine audit of Kentucky's general election results](#) ... [Louisiana Gov.-elect Jeff Landry spent at least \\$3.7 million with Trump political consultants](#) ... [Missouri voter ID trial digs into purpose, results of strict 2022 law](#) ... [New Mexico's highest court hears appeal on redrawn Congressional map](#) ... [Candidates in just five New Mexico school districts required to file campaign finance reports](#) ... [Black North Carolina residents sue over Senate redistricting plan](#) ... [Deberry: North Carolina needs an attorney general who 'believes in democracy'](#) ... [Signature collection can begin anew after Ohio redistricting amendment passes next step](#) ... [Beaverton, Ore. city councilor questions whether Hamas attack happened as tensions run high](#) ... [Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro touts his administration's 'GSD' attitude at Press Club luncheon](#) ... [Texas Gov. Greg Abbott endorses reelection bids of 58 House members who voted for school vouchers](#)



Also Trending

It is a sad week for turkeys, both nationally, where they will be devoured en masse, and in Georgia, where populations of wild turkeys have dwindled,

reversing what was once considered a shining example of successful conservation efforts, [the Georgia Recorder reported](#).



Gobbler.

(Photo by Joe McDonald/Getty Images)

The state's turkey count jumped from 17,000 in 1973 to 113,000 in 1984. By 2012, the numbers had decreased to 33,000. Last year, hunters bagged just 9,809. These days, turkey hens produce an average of 1.5 poults, or baby turkeys – roughly a third of peak levels and below the breakeven point of two poults per hen.

It's not a Georgia-specific problem, even if the problem is pronounced in Georgia, according to Michael Chamberlain, a wild turkey expert and professor at the University of Georgia's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources.

"We've documented ongoing declines actually for about the last 20 years in turkeys across the southeast, Georgia included," he said. "Those same declines are being documented now in a number of other areas including areas of the mid-Atlantic, areas in the Midwest as well."

The biggest threat to the species is loss of habitat, though biologists suspect that Georgia's decline may be partly an inevitable decline from record-high population numbers.

“When we restored turkeys into these areas, they were reproducing so well that it sort of inflated the population to levels beyond what naturally should be there, and so part of it is sort of like a leveling off of the population,” said Emily Rushton, a wildlife biologist and turkey expert with the Georgia DNR. “There’s also some unknowns too. A lot of states are doing disease research to see if there’s something that’s causing these lower reproductive levels.”



Not turkeys.

(Photo by Josh Kurtz/Maryland Matters)

The news is better for chickens in Maryland, where Democrats plan to introduce legislation that would require chicken eggs farmed and sold in the state to come from cage-free hens rather than birds that spend their lives crammed in tiny cages at factory farms. If approved in the upcoming legislative session, the bill would cover roughly 2 million Maryland chickens and up to 6 million out-of-state chickens whose eggs are sold there. Ten other states have similar laws on the books, [Maryland Matters reported](#).

“This is the most consequential piece of legislation in Maryland for animals, in terms of the number of animals impacted,” said Jennifer Bevan-Dangel, director of the Humane Society’s Maryland office.

State Sen. Karen Lewis Young, a Frederick Democrat and longtime animal rights activist, introduced [the bill](#) in this year’s legislative session, but it died in committee. The proposal would be a win for animal rights, but it would also lessen the risk of salmonella, which is more prominent in eggs from caged birds, Young said.

Opponents of the bill included the Maryland Farm Bureau, which said the proposal would increase the cost of both production and labor. Young said she and her cosponsor, state Del. Jen Terrasa, have tweaked the language to address those concerns. The original bill, she said, would not have outlawed cages altogether or prevented farmers from housing chickens indoors.

Also on the menu: [Las Vegas culinary workers get 10% wage increase in 1st year, 32% increase over 5 years under new contracts](#)



From The Newsrooms

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One Last Thing

Mashed potatoes, the star of Thanksgiving, originated as a staple in the Inca Empire, made their way to Europe via Spain, were banned by law in France and made a comeback at the hands of Antoine-Augustin Parmentier, a pharmacist who discovered the deliciousness of the spud after being force fed a potato diet in jail.

“Following his release from prison, Parmentier returned to France and began to tell his countrymen about the wonders of the potato,” according to this [comprehensive and delightful history](#). “He demonstrated different ways to cook them, including mashing them, and began to call on the French government to lift the ban.”

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