



DHS to pause work of disinformation board

Description

USA: The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will pause the work of a controversial board to coordinate efforts to battle disinformation, saying that while its work was “grossly and intentionally mischaracterized,” the “false attacks have become a significant distraction.”

Its leader, disinformation expert Nina Jankowicz, will also resign from the department.

Designed as a way to coordinate efforts across the department with disparate missions, the Disinformation Governance Board prompted attacks from Republicans and civil rights groups alike.

While free speech and civil rights groups largely argued the DHS was not transparent enough in outlining the board’s mission to adequately evaluate it, the GOP was quick to borrow a phrase from George Orwell’s dystopian novel “1984” in labeling it the “Ministry of Truth.”

Many also directly targeted Jankowicz, who was brought in to oversee the board, which was designed to ensure the DHS protected civil liberties and free speech rights in disinformation efforts that have already been underway for the better part of a decade and deal with topics as varied as immigration and natural disasters.

“The great irony here is that the board was designed to protect against the very thing that the board is accused of engaging in,” one senior DHS official said on a call with reporters.

The board, created just three weeks ago, never formally met.

The Washington Post [first reported](#) the board would be paused.

While the board is on hiatus, its mission will be reviewed by the DHS’s Homeland Security Advisory Council, which is led by former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, a George W. Bush appointee, and former U.S. Deputy Attorney General Jamie Gorelick, a Clinton administration official.

They have already been tasked with providing recommendations on how the department can garner

public trust surrounding its disinformation efforts.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas on Wednesday also asked the council for a broader review of the board within 75 days, after which next steps will be determined.

A statement from Jankowicz nodded to the board's unclear future.

"With the Board's work paused and its future uncertain, and I have decided to leave DHS to return to my work in the public sphere. It is deeply disappointing that mischaracterizations of the Board became a distraction from the Department's vital work, and indeed, along with recent events globally and nationally, embodies why it is necessary," she wrote in a statement.

"I maintain my commitment to building awareness of disinformation's threats and trust the Department will do the same."

The clunky rollout of the board — announced in a short blurb in Politico Playbook — led to an immediate misfire for the DHS. Few outside the agency were comfortable defending the board without more information, while Republicans sounded a civil liberties alarm and pored over Jankowicz's earlier comments on a story involving a laptop owned by President Biden's son Hunter Biden that echoed the opinion of national security experts at the time that the laptop was part of a Russian influence operation.

"The reaction to the creation of the board has been extreme in some quarters," another DHS official said Wednesday.

"There have been gross mischaracterizations of what the board's work would be. And there have been grotesque personal attacks and the reaction has candidly become a distraction to the department's important work in addressing disinformation that threatens homeland security."

Republicans celebrated the news of the board's pause.

"When we put pressure on this administration, they fold like a house of cards," Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-Colo.), who led a bill to block creation of the board, wrote on Twitter.

"The so-called Disinformation Governance Board is done. Hopefully Nina figures out another way to get famous. Watch out for that!"

"Our @HouseGOP bill to defund the board + rightful outrage from Republicans has succeeded," Rep. August Pfluger (R-Texas) tweeted.

While DHS officials repeatedly noted "false attacks" against the board, they did not directly answer whether the board itself was a victim of disinformation.

"There have been a range of unfair characterizations about the board, inaccurate statements, and in particular, Nina has been the subject of some particularly vicious and unfair attacks," a senior DHS official said.

[The Hill's Morning Report — Recount looms in Pennsylvania](#)

[Biden's moves on Cuba, Venezuela could hurt Dems with Hispanics](#)

The pause of the board comes after a concerted effort by Mayorkas to address concerns over its work in numerous appearances before lawmakers.

"It was quite disconcerting, frankly, that the disinformation work that was well underway for many years across different independent administrations was not guided by guardrails," Mayorkas told Senators earlier this month.

Updated 3:08 p.m.

BY REBECCA BEITSCH

Category

1. Main
2. Politics-Geopolitics-Gov.-Events

Date Created

05/19/2022