



WATCHDOG CALLS FOR HOUSE COMMITTEE TO UNINVITE RFK JR. AFTER HIS COMMENTS ARE BLASTED AS ANTISEMITIC - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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A Democratic watchdog group has called for a U.S. House committee to rescind an invitation to Robert F. Kennedy Jr. after the Democratic presidential candidate was filmed falsely suggesting COVID-19 could have been "ethnically targeted" to spare Ashkenazi Jews and Chinese people.

Kyle Herrig, executive director of the Congressional Integrity Project, sent a letter to Ohio Republican Rep. Jim Jordan, chairman of the House Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government, asking him to disinvite Kennedy from a hearing scheduled for Thursday after the candidate's comments at a New York City dinner last week prompted widespread accusations of antisemitism and racism.

A spokesperson for Jordan said he plans to move forward with the hearing Thursday despite disagreeing with comments Kennedy made.

In the filmed remarks first published by The New York Post, Kennedy said "there is an argument" that COVID-19 "is ethnically targeted" and that it "attacks certain races disproportionately."

"COVID-19 is targeted to attack Caucasians and black people. The people who are most immune are Ashkenazi Jews and Chinese," he added. "We don't know whether it was deliberately targeted at that or not but there are papers out there that show the racial or ethnic differential of impact for that."

After the video was made public, Kennedy posted on Twitter that his words were twisted and denied ever suggesting that COVID-19 was deliberately engineered to spare Jewish people. He asserted without evidence that there are bioweapons being developed to target certain ethnicities, and called for the Post's article to be retracted.

Researchers and doctors pushed back on the assertion, including Michael Mina, a medical doctor and immunologist.

"Beyond the absurdity, biological know-how simply isn't there to make a virus that targets only certain ethnicities," Mina wrote on Twitter.

Democrats and anti-hate groups quickly condemned the comments from Kennedy, who comes from one of the country's most famous political families as the son of former Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and the nephew of former President John F. Kennedy.

"These are deeply troubling comments and I want to make clear that they do not represent the views of the Democratic Party," read a Saturday tweet from Jaime Harrison, chair of the Democratic National Committee.

"Last week, RFK Jr. made reprehensible anti-semitic and anti-Asian comments aimed at perpetuating harmful and debunked racist tropes," US Rep. Suzan DelBene, chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said in a statement on Sunday. "Such dangerous racism and hate have no place in America, demonstrate him to be unfit for public office, and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms."

Asked about the video on Monday, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Kennedy's claims were false and "vile" and that "they put our fellow Americans in danger."

The Anti-Defamation League also responded to the comments with a statement saying Kennedy's claim is "deeply offensive and feeds into sinophobic and antisemitic conspiracy theories about COVID-19 that we have seen evolve over the last three years."

And another anti-hate watchdog, Stop Antisemitism, tweeted, "We have no words for this man's lunacy."

On Monday, Kerry Kennedy issued a statement saying, "I strongly condemn my brother's deplorable and untruthful remarks last week about Covid being engineered for ethnic targeting," adding that the remarks don't represent "what I believe or what Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights stands for." She is president of the human rights organization.

Kennedy is set to address the GOP-led House subcommittee during a hearing Thursday to examine "the federal government's role in censoring Americans."

He has long railed against social media companies and the government, accusing them of colluding to censor his speech during the COVID-19 pandemic when he was suspended from multiple platforms for spreading vaccine misinformation.

Herrig's letter to Jordan called Kennedy "a total whack job whose views and conspiracy theories would be completely ignored but for his last name."

It asked the chairman to disinvite the candidate from Thursday's hearing because of "video evidence of his horrific antisemitic and xenophobic views which are simply beyond the pale."

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy threw cold water Monday on the idea of disinviting the presidential candidate from testifying before Congress.

"I disagree with everything he said," McCarthy said. "The hearing that we have this week is about censorship. I don't think censoring somebody is actually the answer here. I think if you're going to look at censorship in America, your first action to censor probably plays into some of the problems we have."

Kennedy has a history of comparing vaccines - widely credited with saving millions of lives - with the genocide of the Holocaust during Nazi Germany, comments for which he has sometimes apologized.

His first apology for such a comparison came in 2015, after he used the word "holocaust" to describe children whom he believes were hurt by vaccines.

But he continued to make such remarks, ramping up during the COVID-19 pandemic. An AP investigation detailed how Kennedy has

frequently invoked the specter of Nazis and the Holocaust in his work to sow doubts about vaccines and agitate against public health efforts to bring the COVID-19 pandemic under control, such as requiring masks or vaccine mandates.

In December 2021, he put out a video that showed infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci with a mustache reminiscent of Nazi leader Adolf Hitler. In an October 2021 speech to the Ron Paul Institute, he obliquely compared public health measures put in place by governments around the world to Nazi propaganda meant to scare people into abandoning critical thinking.

In January 2022, at a Washington rally organized by his anti-vaccine group Children's Health Defense, Kennedy complained that people's rights were being violated by public health measures that had been taken to reduce the number of people sickened and killed by COVID-19.

"Even in Hitler's Germany, you could cross the Alps to Switzerland. You could hide in an attic like Anne Frank did," he said.

The comment was condemned by the head of the Anti-Defamation League as "deeply inaccurate, deeply offensive and deeply troubling." Yad Vashem of the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem said it "denigrates the memory of its victims and survivors," as well as others.

After initially sticking by his remarks, Kennedy ultimately apologized, tweeting, "I apologize for my reference to Anne Frank, especially to families that suffered the Holocaust horrors."

Then, days after he launched his presidential campaign this April, he wrote on Twitter that "the onslaught of relentless media indignation finally compelled me to apologize for a statement I never made in order to protect my family."

Associated Press writers Farnoush Amiri and Chris Megerian in Washington, and Michelle R. Smith in Providence, Rhode Island, contributed to this report.

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