

5 Things to Know About Jay Bhattacharya, Trump's Choice for NIH Director

The physician holds multiple doctoral degrees, won a prominent award for intellectual freedom, and has been a vocal critic of COVID-19 lockdowns.

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Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, professor of medicine at Stanford University and one of the authors of the Great Barrington Declaration, in Hartford, Conn., on Feb. 17, 2023. Tal Atzmon/The Epoch Times



By Jacob Burg

11/27/2024

Updated: 11/27/2024

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President-elect Donald Trump on Nov. 26 chose Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, a Stanford University health policy professor, to lead the National Institutes of Health (NIH), putting a physician who was a vocal opponent of COVID-19 lockdowns in charge of the nation's leading medical research agency.



Dr. Bhattacharya will work in cooperation with Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to direct the nation's medical research and to make important



discoveries that will improve health and save lives," Trump said in a statement.



The Senate must approve both Bhattacharya and Kennedy, who has



been nominated to lead the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

"I am absolutely thrilled and humbled by the nomination. It's time to reform American science to make America healthy again," Bhattacharya told The Epoch Times.

The physician, who holds two doctoral degrees from Stanford, was an outspoken critic of COVID-19 lockdowns as well as the way former National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) director Dr. Anthony Fauci handled the pandemic.

Here are five things to know about Bhattacharya.

1. Co-Author of 'Great Barrington Declaration'

Bhattacharya, along with Harvard University's Martin Kulldorff and Oxford University's Sunetra Gupta, authored the [Great Barrington Declaration](#) in October 2020. The document explains their concerns

about the “damaging physical and mental health impacts” from extended public lockdowns in 2020, particularly on young students who were pulled out of classrooms and taught via webcams.

“Immediately, I thought, ‘What would happen when you close schools? What would happen to kids that are abused?’” Bhattacharya [told](#) Epoch TV. “That child abuse is picked up [on] in schools. You close the schools [and] now all of a sudden, child abuse still happens because there’s no one to intervene. What happens with school breakfasts and school lunches where a lot of poor kids get their meals, a very large fraction of American kids get their meals?”

The physicians called for low-risk Americans to resume normal life, build up antibodies to the virus, and develop “herd immunity.”

After then-NIH director Francis Collins called the declaration dangerous, Bhattacharya responded in a November [op-ed](#) in UnHerd, a British news and opinion site.

“The National Institutes of Health, whose annual budget is \$45 billion, orchestrated under the leadership of Francis Collins and Anthony Fauci a massive suppression of scientific debate and research,” Bhattacharya wrote.

The physician also said in a March 2020 Wall Street Journal [op-ed](#) that “projections of the death toll could plausibly be orders of magnitude too high.”

“A universal quarantine may not be worth the costs it imposes on the economy, community and individual mental and physical health.”

2. Frequent Fauci Critic

In addition to government COVID policies and Collins’s role at the NIH, Bhattacharya has been a frequent critic of Fauci, who was the director of the NIAID for 40 years until he retired in 2022. During a 2021 appearance on Fox News, Bhattacharya criticized Fauci for telling

Americans to continue COVID mitigation measures even if they were vaccinated.

“Dr. Fauci is probably the number one anti-vaxxer in the country in some sense because he has modeled behavior that has made people think the vaccine won’t give you back your life, but it will,” Bhattacharya said. “It’s an incredibly effective vaccine. You know, he was wearing a mask. He has been vaccinated; I don’t really understand what he’s trying to do here.”

A year later, Bhattacharya and Kulldorff co-wrote an [op-ed](#) in Newsweek criticizing Fauci’s work at the NIAID.

“Unfortunately, Dr. Fauci got major epidemiology and public health questions wrong,” wrote the physicians, who suggested lowering COVID mortality by advocating vaccines for people older than 60 who had neither recovered from the virus nor received a shot, as well as “hard-to-reach, less-affluent people in rural areas and inner cities.”

“Instead, Dr. Fauci has pushed vaccine mandates for children, students, and working-age adults who are already immune—all low-risk populations—causing tremendous disruption to labor markets and hampering the operation of many hospitals.”

3. Multiple Doctoral Degrees From Stanford

While best known as a professor of health policy at Stanford, Bhattacharya also studied economics at the university after earning his medical degree there in 1997. Three years later, he completed his PhD in Economics at Stanford, giving him two doctoral degrees from the school. Since 2002, he has been a research associate at Stanford’s National Bureau of Economic Research.

Bhattacharya is a senior fellow at the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, the Stanford Freeman Spogli Institute, and the Hoover Institution. Currently, he directs Stanford’s Center for Demography and Economics of Health and Aging.

Bhattacharya's research probes the economics of health care worldwide while focusing on the health and well-being of vulnerable populations. His peer-reviewed research has been published in journals related to health policy, public health, medicine, law, statistics, and economics.

4. Sued Biden Admin for Alleged COVID Censorship

After purchasing Twitter in 2022, Elon Musk obtained the social media platform's 2020 "Trends Blacklist," which featured accounts whose tweets were prevented from reaching trending status no matter how many likes or retweets the posts received. When Musk published the list later that year, Bhattacharya's name was among those suppressed or "shadow banned," which refers to restricting the visibility of an account without notifying its user.

Bhattacharya said he believed he was on the list because he was critical of COVID-19 lockdowns.

"Imagine there hadn't been an @NIH-led 'devastating takedown' of the @gbdeclaration in Oct 2020. Imagine no media/social media suppression," the physician wrote in a December 2022 [post](#) on X, previously Twitter.

Bhattacharya was one of several plaintiffs who sued the Biden administration, claiming that it influenced social media companies to censor certain content related to the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccines. The Supreme Court [decided](#) *Murthy v. Missouri* in June, ultimately ruling 6–3 in favor of the federal government.

While the federal government "played a role in at least some of the platforms' moderation choices, the evidence indicates that the platforms had independent incentives to moderate content and often exercised their own judgment," Justice Amy Coney Barrett wrote in the majority [opinion](#).

5. Won Medal for Intellectual Freedom

In October, the American Academy of Science and Letters awarded Bhattacharya the 2024 Robert J. Zimmer Medal for Intellectual Freedom, crediting the physician with “extraordinary courage” for expressing his views on the government’s policies related to the COVID-19 pandemic despite professional and public backlash.

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Bhattacharya, like so many others, pivoted his work to make his formidable expertise available to the public in its time of dire need,” the academy wrote in a [statement](#). “And, as happens so often in the practice of science, his findings did not immediately and completely confirm what many people were expecting him to find.”

The annual award was named for the late mathematician Robert J. Zimmer, a former president of the University of Chicago who pioneered academic intellectual freedom. In 2023, writer Salman Rushdie won the award.

“Obviously, it’s a great honor,” Bhattacharya [told](#) Epoch TV earlier this month.

“The award was given to me for sticking my neck out during the pandemic at a time when many, many other scientists and intellectuals didn’t. But it’s also true that there were many scientists and intellectuals that paid a huge price for it ... It was a really difficult time.”

Matthew Vadum contributed to this report.

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