

VANITY FAIR

Fox News: COVID Vaccine Passports Are Proof Biden Wants to Go Full 1984

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Conservatives are seizing on hypothetical vaccine passports as their next target in the culture wars, decrying efforts to allow people to safely rejoin society as “Orwellian” and “un-American.”

Fox News has hit on its latest target in the pandemic culture wars, blasting nascent efforts around so-called vaccination “passports” that would allow businesses to safely reintegrate customers by ensuring they’d received the jab. (As Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director **Rochelle Walensky** said Tuesday, data suggests fully vaccinated people do not carry COVID-19.) Fox Nation host **Tomi Lahren** appeared on *Fox & Friends* Tuesday to warn that “vaccine passports will be the new masks,” calling the credentials—which would be optional, just as vaccines are—“un-American and likely unconstitutional” in a monologue that also managed to rope in conservative talking points on immigration and voting rights. A night earlier, Fox’s *Next Revolution* host **Steve Hilton** said that with the return to normalcy on the horizon, the White House wants vaccine passports “to control who can go where, when,” calling them an “unprecedented, undemocratic power grab” and “nightmare Orwellian infrastructure of control.”

So far, the concern might be a tad overblown. The Biden administration is reportedly coordinating with private companies to create a unified way for people to show proof of vaccination against COVID-19—an initiative other countries are moving ahead with, too. It also smacks of hypocrisy. As Fox personalities decry a credential system, CNN’s **Brian Stelter** reports that other corners of the network are embracing pandemic protocol, requiring behavioral changes to limit the spread of COVID in much the same way that a vaccine passport would. According to Stelter, guests who want to attend a live taping of Fox News host **Greg Gutfeld**’s show must test negative for COVID-19 upon arrival and pass an online health screening to participate, in addition to following precautions such as wearing a face covering (provided upon check-in) throughout the show and social distancing.

The anti-passport remarks recall a broader conspiratorial narrative that many conservative outlets have latched onto, particularly since **Joe Biden** took office: that Democratic administrations seek to control every aspect of public life and are using COVID to help realize that goal. “Me and others warned about this over a year ago when we started giving up our rights,” Lahren said. “You think they’re just going to let you get back to normal life and live it all in freedom after

this?” Hilton asked. (The White House has repeatedly stressed that there will be no national passport mandate.)

Republican lawmakers have likewise politicized the issue, the *Washington Post* reports. “It’s completely unacceptable for either the government or the private sector to impose upon you the requirement that you show proof of vaccine to just simply be able to participate in normal society,” Florida Governor **Ron DeSantis** said Monday, as he pledged to take executive action to bar the use of “any vaccine passports in the state of Florida.” Rep. **Marjorie Taylor Greene** called the passport “Biden’s mark of the beast” and said any company deploying one is partaking in “corporate communism.” Like Lahren did on Fox, Rep. **Jim Jordan** used the issue to attack Biden on immigration, and House Minority Whip **Steve Scalise** claimed a passport would be inconsistent with Democrats’ position on voting rights. “Considering that Democrats want to require vaccine IDs for people to conduct their basic daily activities, they now have zero grounds to object to voter ID laws,” he told Fox News.

While opposition to a vaccine passport sounds similar to the “cancel culture” issues conservative media has recently latched onto, the *Post* notes that the topic taps into a few crucial ideas that could give it resonance—not only the right’s existing fear of an all-powerful government and Big Tech’s infringement on privacy, but also resistance to perceived limits on personal freedom that have become a defining feature of the right’s pandemic approach. “There’s been this pent-up opposition to lockdowns and mask mandates and so this is building on that,” **David Boaz** of the libertarian think tank Cato Institute told the paper. “Now there’s this suggestion that if you don’t get a vaccine, you might not be able to do—we’re not quite sure what. I can see how there’s a market for that concern.”