

## THE CANDOR PROJECT

# The Missing Standard

## A Professional Accountability Framework for Politicians and the Press

A surgeon who falsifies a medical record loses their license. A lawyer who presents a verifiable falsehood to a judge is disbarred. An accountant who certifies a fraudulent audit is stripped of the right to practice. In almost every profession where stakes are high, we accept a basic principle: the privilege of public trust is contingent on a baseline of documented accuracy. Yet the officials with the greatest power to cause systemic harm face no equivalent standard. This isn't a radical new demand for a different kind of government; it is the overdue application of a principle we already universally live by.

The trouble isn't that we have the wrong people in power; it's that we have a gap in our institutional architecture. In American democracy, there is simply no office or agency whose job is to ensure that a public official pays a professional price for a documented falsehood. We used to rely on a free press and competitive elections to supply that accountability, but those mechanisms are no longer sufficient on their own. In a world of fragmented news and algorithms that reward outrage over accuracy, the professional cost of being caught in a lie has effectively vanished. This is not a failure of character but a failure of design — and because the system itself no longer creates a consequence for falsehood, simply electing "better" people cannot fix it. No amount of personnel turnover repairs a structural deficiency.

The solution is as straightforward as the problem: we apply the same professional standards to institutions of self-government that we already apply to our hospitals and courtrooms. We propose two tracks, covering the two groups that shape our shared reality: politicians and the media. For federal officials—from the President and Congress to the Cabinet and federal judges—the rule is simple: a documented pattern of verifiable falsehoods in their official capacity results in professional disqualification. They aren't fined or jailed; they simply lose the privilege of holding office, just as a doctor loses their license for falsifying a chart. On the media track, we focus on transparency rather than content. Broadcasters using public funds or airwaves must follow clear editorial standards and distinguish news from opinion, while all outlets must disclose exactly who owns and funds them. To keep this fair, an independent body acts as a neutral scorekeeper, documenting verified false statements without the power to punish. It

merely provides the public record that our existing institutions use to restore accountability.

The most common objection to a framework like this is simple: who gets to decide what is "true"? That skepticism is actually a healthy democratic instinct. But this framework isn't a Ministry of Truth; it is a professional licensing standard. It applies only to claims where the factual record is unambiguous—not to contested opinions, policy debates, or scientific questions where experts genuinely disagree. Just as a doctor isn't being "censored" when they are held accountable for falsifying a medical chart, a public official isn't being silenced when they are held to a baseline of documented accuracy. The process is defined by transparent methodology and the right to appeal, ensuring the focus remains strictly on verifiable facts rather than political opinion or judgment. By attaching professional consequences to official conduct, we aren't restricting speech—we are simply restoring the value of the public's trust.

Building an institution like this requires more than just good intentions; it requires a design whose constraints don't depend on the goodwill of the people inside it. Trust shouldn't be a leap of faith in the people chosen to serve, but a result of the constraints placed upon them. That is why the oversight body is built to be structurally resistant to partisan capture, with a leadership confirmed only by a genuine cross-partisan consensus that excludes active politicians and media executives. Its power is intentionally narrow: it cannot fine, jail, or remove anyone. By limiting its output to a transparent public record, we ensure the body remains a neutral scorekeeper rather than a political weapon. We also know that credibility isn't granted—it's earned. That is why this project begins with a published methodology and a public accountability tracker, proving the process works in the open before any formal authority is ever sought. We aren't asking for your trust up front; we are building a system designed to deserve it.

In the end, the question isn't whether we are proposing something radical, but why we have waited so long to apply a principle we already accept. We don't permit a surgeon to operate without a commitment to the facts of their patient's condition, and we shouldn't permit the architects of our laws to operate without a commitment to a documented record. This project is a serious, long-term effort to build an institution that finally matches the scale of the problem—a neutral scorekeeper for a democracy that has gone too long without one. We are simply asking that the most powerful positions in our society be held to the same standard of professional honesty as the person who filed your taxes or filled your last prescription.

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