

When Oversight Fails – How Power Expands Through Crisis, Control, and Compliance

Analysis by [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Joe Rogan sat down with security expert Gavin de Becker to examine government secrecy, media influence, public health authority, and why skepticism remains essential when powerful institutions operate with limited transparency or meaningful oversight
- › Historical examples discussed by de Becker show how national security claims enable long-term covert operations that remain hidden for decades before evidence surfaces and accountability arrives too late to undo harm
- › Control rarely relies on force alone. Repetition, media alignment, and narrative enforcement shape perception, narrow acceptable debate, and create the appearance of voluntary consensus without overt coercion
- › They also discussed why vaccines should not be treated as a single category, emphasizing differences in disease risk and individual outcomes rather than blanket assurances
- › Practicing skepticism serves as your self-defense. This means slowing conclusions, examining incentives and evidence, and refusing to outsource judgment

Most people assume the systems meant to protect them are operating within reasonable limits and subject to meaningful oversight. That assumption tends to hold most strongly when reassurance comes from institutions with scientific credentials, government backing, or long-established authority. However, this default trust shapes how decisions are received and how rarely the processes behind them are examined over time.

That question of oversight sits at the center of Joe Rogan's interview with Gavin de Becker, who is a security expert and the founder of Gavin de Becker & Associates, a firm specializing in threat assessment and protective services. He has also written several books, including his most recent, "Forbidden Facts: Government Deceit & Suppression About Brain Damage from Childhood Vaccines."

In the discussion above, de Becker shared insights as a criminologist into declassified government operations and the documented patterns that emerge when powerful institutions operate without accountability. These patterns matter because they influence the policies, narratives, and public health decisions that continue to affect your life today.

The Hidden History of 'Good Governments'

De Becker begins by examining covert intelligence operations that remained hidden for decades, particularly Project Gladio, a post-World War II program initiated by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which later became the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Instead of fully withdrawing from Europe after the war, U.S. forces instructed select soldiers to remain behind, conceal weapons and explosives in underground caches, and await further orders.¹

- **Project Gladio was justified as a defense against communism** — The purpose of the forces that stayed behind was to counter communism and socialism in Europe and to prevent Soviet influence from expanding, operating without public

knowledge or oversight. But rather than serving as a dormant contingency, they became operational inside nations that were publicly considered U.S. allies.

- **These networks carried out acts of violence against civilian populations** – De Becker cites the 1980 bombing of the Bologna train station in Italy, which left 85 people dead and hundreds injured, describing it as an attack funded and carried out by the CIA. He also references additional bombings in Germany and Italy, including an attack associated with Oktoberfest that killed 17 people, noting that these were not isolated events but part of a pattern of coordinated actions.
- **The purpose of these attacks was to influence political outcomes** – By creating large-scale fear through highly visible acts of violence, public sentiment shifted toward more authoritarian or right-leaning governments.
- **Project Gladio even targeted allied political leaders** – De Becker also discusses the assassination of Aldo Moro, a former Italian prime minister. Moro was kidnapped, his five bodyguards were killed, and weeks later, he was found shot and placed in the trunk of a car. According to de Becker, this was carried out by Project Gladio, emphasizing that it was directed against an allied political leader rather than a foreign adversary.
- **For years, the existence of Project Gladio was denied** – U.S. leaders repeatedly dismissed claims about the program, including during the presidency of George H. W. Bush, who had previously served as CIA director. Formal acknowledgment only occurred after sustained pressure from European officials, particularly an Italian prime minister who forced the issue into public view.
- **Legal reversals followed once the program was exposed** – After Project Gladio was acknowledged, courts in Europe reopened terrorism cases tied to these incidents. De Becker notes that individuals previously imprisoned were released after evidence showed the violence had been funded and managed by intelligence agencies rather than independent extremist groups.

De Becker connects Project Gladio to a broader pattern in which secrecy expands whenever national security is invoked. The documentation for these events is publicly available in mainstream sources, and he urges readers to examine the historical record themselves.

The Machinery Behind Official Narratives

De Becker and Rogan next turn to how information itself becomes a tool of power once oversight weakens. De Becker explains that secrecy alone is rarely sufficient to maintain control. What matters more is shaping what you hear repeatedly and who is allowed to speak with authority.²

- **Changes to the Smith-Mundt Act removed formal barriers to domestic propaganda** — Rogan points to modifications made during the Obama administration that made it legal for U.S. government agencies to disseminate propaganda to American citizens. De Becker agrees this shift formalized practices that already existed, eliminating the legal distinction between foreign information campaigns and domestic influence in the name of national security.
- **Project Mockingbird showed how media influence operated long before digital platforms** — De Becker connects the Smith-Mundt changes to Project Mockingbird, a Cold War-era operation in which the CIA maintained direct and indirect relationships with American journalists.

According to de Becker, hundreds of journalists were involved, some on the CIA payroll and others cooperating informally by advancing narratives favorable to intelligence objectives. Although the Church Committee formally shut the program down, de Becker questions whether it ended or simply evolved, especially as information began moving across borders instantly.

- **Digital media erased the distinction between foreign and domestic messaging** — Disinformation no longer needs to be directly injected into domestic outlets to reach you. Information seeded overseas circulates globally within hours and reappears through social media, search engines, and secondary reporting.

Because digital platforms do not respect geographic boundaries, the distinction between foreign and domestic messaging collapses. What once required formal coordination with news organizations now occurs through algorithmic amplification and viral repetition.

- **De Becker used Saudi Arabia's manipulation of Twitter between 2018 and 2019 as an example** — He explains that thousands of automated bot accounts were used to push specific narratives until they trended.

"When I saw that happening with Twitter, I thought to myself, 'Well, every country should do that.' I don't mean I like it. I just mean it's kind of obvious that if you have an opportunity to communicate with your population ... If you can control their perceptions, of course, that's what every country in world history has done," de Becker noted.³

- **Every country has a narrative** — De Becker notes that every country maintains a foundational story that shapes how its population interprets hardship and authority. These narratives differ by culture, but they all reinforce compliance and limit scrutiny.

When dissenting voices emerge, they often become targets of suppression because they disrupt centralized messaging. De Becker and Rogan connect these information-control dynamics to the COVID pandemic.

How Crisis Is Used as a Catalyst for Control

When the discussion turns to COVID, de Becker separates the origin of the virus from the response that followed. He makes clear that his analysis does not hinge on whether the virus emerged naturally or through human action. Instead, he focuses on what governments did once the crisis began and what those actions reveal about how power expands during emergencies.⁴

- **The COVID response imposed population-wide restrictions** — Governments across nearly every Western nation placed their populations under forms of house arrest, businesses were shut down, and movement was restricted on an unprecedented scale.
- **The social and political impact of lockdowns exceeded the impact of the virus itself** — The lockdowns represented one of the largest exercises of government control in modern history. Their significance lies not only in the restrictions imposed but in the demonstration that ordinary freedoms could be rapidly suspended with widespread compliance.
- **Incentives, not conspiracy, drove rapid institutional compliance** — When COVID emerged, entire industries quickly reorganized to serve new mandates. Companies shifted production toward sanitizer, signage, and distancing materials without centralized coordination. These changes occurred because compliance aligned with enforcement and profit.
- **Pandemic simulations prioritized information control over medical response** — De Becker references Event 201, a publicly available video of a 2019 pandemic simulation organized by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which included participants from the CIA, the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, military leadership, and media outlets such as CBS.

"They gathered together, and they talked about what would happen in the event that there was a pandemic. And they named the pandemic, and they did tabletop exercises about the pandemic. Any discussion about

health? None. All of it was discussion about controlling the information. Why is this interesting? Because it was in 2019, before COVID came out. So late in 2019, these tabletop operations had already been going on for years," he explained.⁵

- **Restrictions were applied selectively in ways that favored centralized authority** – During the lockdown, liquor stores and large retail chains remained open while churches and small gatherings were restricted or shut down. De Becker interprets this as part of a broader pattern in which governments tolerate institutions that pose no challenge to centralized power while limiting those that foster independent social cohesion.

When people are prevented from gathering for shared experiences such as religious services, concerts, or public recreation, social bonds weaken. Without those spaces, individuals become more isolated and more dependent on mediated narratives.

- **Historical parallels with AIDS** – De Becker and Rogan pointed to the AIDS crisis as an earlier example where a single explanatory model quickly became entrenched, limiting open debate. For example, University of California, Berkeley professor Peter Duesberg, a respected cancer researcher, challenged the prevailing HIV-AIDS narrative and was met not with scientific discussion but with professional consequences.

Duesberg asserted that HIV was a weak virus showing up in systems already compromised by hardcore drug use, poor nutrition, and repeated antibiotic use. The gay community at the time was experiencing tremendous sexual freedom, often accompanied by heavy drug use, which Duesberg identified as causing the specific respiratory issues associated with AIDS.

- **The conventional treatment worsened patients' conditions** — The chemotherapy drug azidothymidine (AZT) was widely prescribed despite its known toxicity and prior abandonment as a cancer treatment. Rogan notes that it was the only chemotherapy drug ever prescribed for long-term, continuous use.

De Becker recounts the story of a Romanian girl adopted by an American couple. The child tested HIV-negative in Romania and HIV-positive after arriving in the United States, after which she was placed on AZT and experienced a rapid and severe decline in health. When the parents contacted Peter Duesberg, he advised them to stop the medication immediately.

According to de Becker, the child's condition improved steadily after AZT was discontinued. She later reached adulthood, became pregnant, and had a healthy child, despite earlier predictions that she would not live past the age of 11. Over time, deaths attributed to AIDS declined as AZT use declined, a sequence that raised questions about treatment outcomes that were not openly examined during the height of the crisis.

In my previous interview with de Becker, we took a deeper dive into how fear is used to shape public behavior and how perceived threats are leveraged to guide compliance during crises. Check out our conversation in "[Security Expert Gavin de Becker Describes the Gift of Fear](#)."

Why Vaccines Shouldn't Be Treated as a Single Product

On the topic of vaccines, de Becker and Rogan focus on a basic problem, which is treating vaccines as a single, unified category rather than as individual medical interventions, even though each vaccine differs in formulation, mechanism, target disease, and risk profile. Lumping them together encourages people to think in terms of allegiance to a concept instead of evaluating specific products and outcomes.⁶

- **Disease prevalence is often confused with individual risk** – The presence of a disease in a population does not automatically translate into equal risk for every individual. Before considering any intervention, you have to understand how likely it is that you or your child will encounter the disease in question, how severe outcomes typically are, and whether the vaccine meaningfully alters those outcomes.

De Becker states that public messaging often does not follow this sequence. Instead, it often relies on fear-based framing that assumes worst-case scenarios without grounding them in actual incidence rates.

- **De Becker used tetanus as an example** – He explains that tetanus is caused by bacteria and is not contagious, meaning it cannot spread from person to person. In the United States, he states that deaths from tetanus are extremely rare, citing 13 deaths over 10 years, primarily among elderly individuals.

Tetanus vaccination can also be administered after an injury occurs rather than given repeatedly to infants. This raises legitimate questions about why very young children receive multiple doses for a disease they are unlikely to encounter.

- **Polio provides another example** – De Becker cites CDC data showing that approximately 99% of people infected with polio experience no symptoms at all. He explains that paralysis, the outcome most people fear, occurs in a small fraction of cases and that many affected individuals recover.

He also points out that in recent years, most reported polio cases worldwide involved vaccine-derived poliomyelitis rather than wild poliovirus. Rogan confirms that this information is publicly available through the CDC, even though it remains unfamiliar to most people.

- **Measles and mumps are discussed in similar terms** – De Becker explains that measles deaths in the U.S. declined dramatically long before widespread vaccination due to improvements in sanitation and nutrition. There were more than 20 years with no measles deaths in the U.S., and when deaths later occurred, they were exceedingly rare. In fact, reported mumps outbreaks largely involved vaccinated individuals.
- **The discussion also touches on vaccine-derived disease and adverse events** – Harms associated with vaccines are typically framed as rare and minimized in population-level discussions. When outcomes are summarized through averages, individual injuries become difficult to see, even when those injuries are severe or permanent. From a risk perspective, the frequency of an outcome does not erase its significance for the person experiencing it.
- **This leads to a broader point about how individual harm is weighed against population-level benefit** – De Becker explains that risk assessment requires identifying who bears the cost of an intervention. When harm is concentrated in individuals while benefits are distributed across populations, those individual outcomes tend to disappear from public accounting.
- **Aviation safety exposes the flaw in this reasoning** – Rogan offers an analogy that de Becker agrees captures the problem. If airline safety were evaluated the way vaccine safety often is, crashes would be averaged across millions of successful flights, and fatalities dismissed as statistically insignificant. De Becker notes that aviation treats every crash as unacceptable, regardless of rarity, a standard rarely applied in medicine.

These perspectives parallel an earlier interview Rogan had with Dr. Suzanne Humphries, co-author of "Dissolving Illusions: Disease, Vaccines, and the Forgotten History," one of my favorite books on vaccines. In their discussion, she laid out the

history, science, and real impact of vaccines. You can learn more about their insightful conversation in "[What's the Real Story Behind Vaccines?](#)"

Pharma Incentives, Liability Shields, and the Medicalization of Policy

As the discussion turns to pharmaceutical manufacturers, de Becker and Rogan focus on legal outcomes documented in public records and what those outcomes reveal about incentives. They examine resolved cases to show how enforcement functions when it exists without changing underlying behavior.⁷

- **Criminal settlements reveal a pattern of enforcement after harm has already occurred** – Multiple major pharmaceutical companies have paid large criminal fines and settlements tied to illegal marketing, false claims, and other misconduct acknowledged through court action.

For example, Pfizer paid what was described at the time as the largest criminal fine in U.S. history, tied to promoting drugs for unapproved uses and making false claims. Johnson & Johnson also faced major penalties related to baby powder litigation and multistate opioid settlements involving deceptive marketing.

He also mentions Merck's Vioxx, noting that estimates of associated deaths varied widely, including figures in the hundreds of thousands, while the company retained substantial revenue even after settlements. Eli Lilly's Zyprexa is raised as another example, generating tens of billions of dollars alongside comparatively smaller financial penalties tied to off-label promotion and serious adverse outcomes.

- **Fines lose deterrent power when they cost less than profits** – From these examples, de Becker draws a broader conclusion that when penalties remain smaller than profits, enforcement stops acting as a corrective force. Rogan

agrees, observing that similar patterns across companies point to systemic incentives rather than isolated failures.

- **Vaccine manufacturers operate under a different liability framework** – De Becker explains that vaccine manufacturers face no direct civil liability for injury, removing a standard form of accountability applied to most other products. Rogan emphasizes that this absence of liability alters how risk is evaluated and how consequences are absorbed.
- **Fertility control was reframed as health care** – Population goals have become increasingly medicalized, shifting from explicit political debate into health care, family planning, and public health programs. De Becker notes that there are documented cases of forced or coerced sterilization later acknowledged by governments, often justified at the time as health initiatives.
- **Some vaccination campaigns were later linked to undisclosed reproductive effects** – De Becker cites programs in which human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG), a hormone produced during pregnancy, appeared alongside tetanus vaccination without disclosure.

"It was preventing them from getting pregnant. And they had the World Health Organization, which basically has this as a mission, which is population reduction. From the beginning, they had worked on that HCG," de Becker revealed.⁸

- **Population policy became embedded within medical and public health systems** – One of the central examples de Becker raised is National Security Study Memorandum 200, commonly referred to as the Kissinger Report, which framed population growth in developing nations as a threat to U.S. strategic and economic interests.

He explains that the report focused on countries rich in natural resources and emphasized the need to reduce population growth to maintain access to those resources. It explicitly recommended the use of food aid, economic leverage, and public health programs as tools to influence fertility rates in these areas.

Why Skepticism Is a Form of Self-Protection

De Becker urges Americans to practice skepticism because it determines who ultimately holds power. As he puts it, "If you don't have skepticism, the government runs us. We don't run the government."⁹ Skepticism is not cynicism or reflexive distrust. It is a discipline — the practice of slowing conclusions long enough to examine incentives, evidence, and consequences before compliance becomes automatic.

When you're told a product is safe, a policy is necessary, or a restriction is temporary, ask who profits from your compliance, what evidence supports the claim, and whether that evidence has been independently verified. That means seeking out your own information, looking at track records, checking court records, and reading the declassified files that are publicly available. The information exists if you are willing to look for it.

Across national security, public health, and corporate regulation, accountability begins when no institution is treated as beyond question. Skepticism does not reject expertise, but it refuses to surrender judgment. Systems meant to protect the public remain accountable when scrutiny is ongoing. Without it, you only find out what actually happened years later, after the consequences are permanent and the people responsible have moved on.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Power and Oversight

Q: Why do I need to question institutions that are supposed to protect public health and safety?

A: You question institutions because history shows that authority does not automatically produce accountability. Policies and products are often shaped by incentives, legal protections, and information control rather than outcomes alone. Asking questions helps you understand how decisions were made, what evidence was considered, and who bears the consequences when those decisions cause harm.

Q: Does being skeptical mean rejecting science or expertise?

A: No. Skepticism means you evaluate claims based on evidence, incentives, and outcomes instead of outsourcing judgment entirely. You can respect expertise without treating it as infallible or beyond question.

Q: How does media control factor into government power?

A: Information shapes perception. When narratives are repeated through trusted channels and dissent is marginalized, consent is manufactured without force. You may believe you are freely choosing, while the range of acceptable views has already been narrowed.

Q: Why is digital media different from past propaganda efforts?

A: Digital platforms eliminate geographic boundaries. Messaging seeded anywhere circulates everywhere, amplified by algorithms rather than editors. This makes perception management faster, less visible, and harder to trace back to its source.

Q: What does using skepticism actually look like in practice?

A: It means slowing down decisions that demand immediate compliance. You look at primary sources, track records, court rulings, and declassified documents when available. You distinguish reassurance from evidence and avoid treating any institution as beyond question. Skepticism keeps you engaged, informed, and capable of making decisions based on what you can verify rather than what you are told to accept.

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