

# What 20th century misinformation tells us today| POLITICO

By Darius Tahir

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GETTING YOUR GOAT: Connoisseurs of medical-misinformation tales have probably heard of Kansas doctor John Brinkley. His claim to fame can be summed up very simply: He became rich and famous — able to win 30 percent of the vote for Kansas governor as a write-in candidate — due to his avid promotion of the transplantation of goat testicular glands as a medical treatment in the early 20th century.

Seemingly a funny story, but a deeper inspection reveals Brinkley's life is more serious and has close parallels with our current time. Some doctors today are also promoting unlikely cures as established treatments — specifically for Covid-19. But there's a twist: Brinkley's message, carried on radio waves, traveled a shorter distance than today's internet warriors' postings do.

Brinkley, a North Carolina native who gained his degree from a diploma mill, rose to local prominence in Milford, Kansas, owing to his diligent care for patients in the 1918 flu epidemic — a pandemic even more devastating than today's. He had "an uncanny knack with the flu," an associate recalled.

From there, Brinkley built an interlocking empire: a radio station, a pharmaceutical firm; and a hospital. Brinkley allied himself with rural patients against big-city profiteers.

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