

Opening Statement
Hearing on “The Weaponization of the Federal Government on the Twitter Files”
Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government
10:00 AM, Thursday, March 9, 2023
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

The totally unfounded and disproven premise of this hearing is that Twitter’s content moderation and enforcement actions are biased against conservatives and that Democrats in government, including within the liberal bastion of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), are using Twitter to silent conservative voices. Let’s break this conspiracy theory down into its components and watch the house of cards Republicans have built their new majority on crumble into a heap of lies and outright projection.

First, Republicans claim that Twitter is silencing conservative voices. Twitter is owned by Elon Musk. Mr. Musk is the second-richest person in the world and has stated he will support Republican Governor and right-wing culture warrior Ron DeSantis if he runs for President in 2024. Ahead of the 2022 midterms, Mr. Musk claimed that the Democratic Party has become the party of division and hate, and he encouraged voters to vote for Republicans across the board. Republicans concerned about conservative censorship can take solace in the fact that Elon Musk, even as the CEO of the company, is now intimately involved in the operations of Twitter. In fact, he is so involved that he is making individual personnel decisions for mid-level employees. Just this week he took to Twitter to disparage and possibly terminate a disabled employee before having to apologize for his abhorrent and potentially illegal actions. Silencing conservative voices is not the problem at Twitter.

As part of their Twitter grievances, Republicans complain that nude pictures of Hunter Biden, the President’s son, were removed from Twitter because they violated the terms of service. Content moderation by a private company is not intrinsically an attack on free speech. It can be an appropriate tool to rid a social media platform of nudity and child pornography, incitement to violence, and other activities not protected by the right to free speech. For example, in June 2020, the unlawfully appointed Acting-DHS Secretary Chad Wolf called on social media platforms to take “appropriate action, consistent with your terms of service, against content that promotes, incites, or assists the commission of imminent illegal activities and violence.”

Secretary Wolf’s vigilance was of course selective and politically motivated. There were unfortunately no such similar communications from the Trump Administration asking that tweets inciting violence in the lead up to the January 6th attack be removed from the platform. Because in unlawfully appointed Secretary Wolf’s case, he was selectively targeting a political movement he didn’t like while he left our country’s democracy open to attack from right-wing extremists who shared the same political end goals as the Administration.

Second, Republicans claim that Democrats are using government to remove content from Twitter. This accusation is a case of clinical projection. At a recent Oversight Committee hearing an ex-Twitter employee testified it was the Trump White House that contacted Twitter demanding the company remove a tweet from celebrity Chrissy Teigen that called the former President a “p***** a** b*****.” It is important that we enter into the record of this hearing that

testimony, which is covered well in the *New York Post* article, “Trump White House asked Twitter to censor Chrissy Teigen tweet.”

At our hearing today, we are hearing from witnesses who were hand-selected by Elon Musk to launder internal records at Twitter and spin them into a yarn on censorship of tweets. The whole operation is an echo of the collusion between Speaker Kevin McCarthy and Tucker Carlson to cherry-pick Capitol video surveillance and whitewash the January 6 attack.

The Select Subcommittee is off to a roaring start with its focus on Twitter and tweets. This is what House Republicans think deserves more resources than the January 6 Committee, which was a truly bipartisan investigation into a violent and deadly attack on the United States Capitol led by the former President of the United States to overturn the results of a free and fair democratic election. The Democratic majority gives the American people accountability and transparency for a violent insurrection seen by the entire world for what it was. The new Republican Party gives us more tweets.