

Thank you, Chairman Jordan. I'm pleased to be able to join you today to testify on the importance of free expression.

I'd like all of you to think of me as a time traveler from the not too distant future coming back to the present to offer you a glimpse of what could lie ahead for America.

I live in a time in which, in the name of fairness, you can't share the stories you write for my news publication on social media.

I live in a time in which, in the name of the common good, you can be kicked out of your bank and online payments system—unable to buy even a cup of coffee—for expressing the wrong political views.

I live in a time in which, in the name of social justice, you can commit a serious crime but get a more lenient sentence if you happen to be the right skin color.

I live in a time in which, in the name of safety, you can be arrested for exercising your right to peaceful protest if you happen to be protesting the wrong thing.

Of course, I'm not a real time-traveler. I just live in Canada.

Americans—and perhaps those in this chamber—surely think Canadians are too nice, too polite, to embrace this sort of proto-authoritarianism.

But it's more accurate to say that our niceness made us susceptible to the new authoritarianism undermining the foundations of our liberal democracy.

If it sounds like I am overstating things, allow me to share three stories that illustrate this creeping authoritarianism.

First story.

A few months ago, I reported a story for my publication, *The Free Press*, about a high school principal in Toronto who had been humiliated in front of his colleagues by a diversity, equity and inclusivity consultant. The principal's crime, besides being white and male, was that he objected to the consultant's assertion that Canada is a less just society than America. The humiliation he experienced ultimately led him to commit suicide.

I was proud of the story, so I went to share it on Facebook.

When I did, I was barred from posting it. I received a message that stated: "In response to Canadian government legislation, news content can't be shared."

I was confused. This was Facebook. The point of it was to share personal and news content. Then I remembered the recently adopted Online News Act, otherwise known as Bill C-18.

The law forces social-media companies to pay online media companies to link to their content. Facebook, instead of paying for that content, barred its users from posting it.

Government officials insisted this was only a matter of fairness—a way of making sure that media companies are compensated for the news they report. But really, C-18 props up legacy media dinosaurs like the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Bell Media and other companies all of which are subsidized by the federal government and all of which can be counted on to echo Justin Trudeau's worldview and toe the party line.

Not being able to post was irritating, but it wasn't the end of the world. I don't depend on Facebook likes or shares for my income.

The same cannot be said of Christopher Curtis.

Which brings me to my second story.

Chris is a 38-year-old renegade journalist-entrepreneur in Montreal who runs a digital newsletter called The Rover. Chris calls himself woke. He likes to brandish his pronouns.

Now, you might think that Chris is exactly the kind of journalist the Trudeau government would elevate. He is on the political left. He publishes stories about the plight of the homeless and police brutality.

The problem is that, unlike government-funded news companies, independent media companies are truly *independent*. Which means they report stories that don't comport with whatever the government wants them to report.

For example, in September 2020, The Rover reported a story on federal mistreatment of Mohawk Indians. This month, it published another story about migrant workers who had been abused and trafficked—with the unwitting help of the government.

But under C-18, The Rover can't build its audience. Unable to post content on Facebook or Instagram—which is owned by Facebook's parent company, Meta—the newsletter can't reach new eyeballs. It can't grow its subscriber base.

“This is a slow death,” as Chris put it.

For now, he's unsure how he's going to support his partner and their three-year-old daughter. He's thinking of going back into construction.

Which takes me to my third story.

Danny Bulford, now 41, used to be an officer in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police—the equivalent of the FBI. For years, he was a sniper in the prime minister's protective detail.

Then, in 2021, Danny quit because he didn't want to get his Covid vaccination.

In early 2022, when truckers descended on Ottawa to protest new Covid vaccination requirements, Danny joined them. The government declared a state of emergency. Danny, like many demonstrators, was arrested—and later released without charge.

Then, something chilling happened.

On February 17, 2022, Danny logged onto his bank accounts—starting with his checking and savings accounts at the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. But instead of seeing his balance—he had \$160,000 in there—the only thing he saw was a dash. Then, he logged onto Scotia Bank, to see about an additional checking account; once again, there was no sign of any money in his account. Finally he logged onto Royal Bank of Canada, which handles his Mastercard account, and was told he had no access to any credit.

Danny's wife was also unable to access any of these accounts.

Suddenly, they were worrying about how to cover their next mortgage payment and feed their three kids.

That is what it means to be “debanked.” Debanking has been one of the Trudeau government's weapons of choice. Since 2018, it has frozen the accounts of more than 800 Canadians who did things it didn't approve of—including those of 280 who took part in the trucker protests, which the government regarded as illegitimate.

Soon after, Danny moved his money out of the big banks and into local credit unions, hoping it would be safer there. “The worst part of this,” Danny told me, “is not believing in the country I spent my career serving. It's this feeling that we are being watched, torn apart, made to feel like the much hated other in our own country.”

Canada was once a bastion of free expression? Now—not so much. Consider that at the same time the government and its corporate allies are curbing the free expression of truckers and journalists, Trudeau is defending the rights of pro-Palestinian demonstrators—many of whom traffic in what can only be called antisemitism.

Think about that: Vaccine skepticism—not okay. Peddling medieval blood-libel legends about Jews—okay. I'm all for protecting free expression—I'm from *The Free Press*. I just want that protection applied fairly.

I also want to be clear: These are just a handful of hundreds of stories I could have picked. What is happening in Canada is a gradual suffocation of free expression. It is draped in a cloak of niceness, inclusivity and justice—but it is regressive, authoritarian and illiberal.

I came here today not simply to warn you about what lies ahead, but to plead with you to do something about it. Now is not the time to be polite. Now is not the time to defend—loudly—the liberties and rights that have given us the greatest freedoms in human history.

Across the world right now, governments, in the name of the good, are considering or adopting measures like we have in Canada.

In Dublin, they're about to enact a draconian hate-crime bill that poses a dire threat to free speech.

In Paris, President Emanuel Macron has called for censoring online speech.

In Brussels, the EU's Internal Market Commissioner is calling for a crackdown on "illegal content."

In Brasilia, they're fighting "fake news" and "disinformation" by clamping down on legitimate online speech.

To say nothing of Russia and China and Iran.

America is so exceptional—indispensable really. Please do not succumb to the same illiberal, the same authoritarianism. Please keep fighting for what you know is right.

Canada is watching. The *whole world* is watching.

Thank you.