

**“Protecting Speech from Government Interference and Social Media Bias, Part 1:
Twitter’s Role in Suppressing the Biden Laptop Story”
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
Wednesday, February 8, 2023
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)**

Last Congress, the Democratic majority focused on addressing kitchen table issues with a historic inflation reduction measure, a once-in-a-generation infrastructure bill, comprehensive Postal Service reform, unprecedented climate and science investments, and brought unemployment down to the lowest level in more than 50 years after the most precipitous drop in employment and gross domestic product in our nation’s history. Today, the new Republican majority’s opening argument to the American people on how they are going to improve on that record is a hearing on how, for roughly 24 hours, a social media platform did not allow people to adequately “tweet” about salacious videos and personal information contained on the laptop of a private citizen who was struggling with a substance abuse disorder. Bravo.

One stated purpose of this inquisition, based entirely on conjecture, is to find out if this private individual was making money on his family name. Which means this is yet another instance in which Republicans are seeking to invent a controversy when a nearly identical Trump scandal is staring them right in the face, except with incontrovertible facts and exponentially worse consequences. In September 2020, Forbes reported that the “Chinese government granted a total of 41 trademarks to companies linked to Ivanka Trump” during her time on the official staff of the President of the United States.¹ Additionally, “the trademarks she applied for after her father became president got approved about 40% faster than those she requested before Donald Trump’s victory in the 2016 election.”² This past April, the New York Times reported, “Six months after leaving the White House, Jared Kushner secured a \$2 billion investment from a fund led by the Saudi crown prince,” Mohammed bin Salman, a man he buddied up to during his time working in the White House and who is widely known to have ordered the ruthless assassination of my constituent, Jamal Khashoggi.³ Finally, topping off the list of documented or legally substantiated efforts to profit off of nepotism, Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump were recorded engaging in numerous investments and deals with foreign countries during their father’s presidency despite promises not to do so.⁴ It should be noted, as inconvenient as it might be for my Republican colleagues, that the Trump Organization was recently convicted of “carrying out a 15-year-long criminal scheme to defraud tax authorities,” which resulted in a \$1.6 million fine.⁵ To put it plainly, two of Donald Trump’s sons were working for a criminal organization to actively ink foreign deals while their father was in the White House. This is wildly unacceptable.

Another stated purpose of today’s hearing is to fight so-called censorship which in this case amounted to, again, people not being able to “tweet” sufficiently regarding the salacious

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tommybeer/2020/09/22/ivankas-trademark-requests-were-fast-tracked-in-china-after-trump-was-elected/?sh=4a95fc291d60>

² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tommybeer/2020/09/22/ivankas-trademark-requests-were-fast-tracked-in-china-after-trump-was-elected/?sh=4a95fc291d60>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/10/us/jared-kushner-saudi-investment-fund.html>

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/11/01/trump-brothers-claims-that-they-no-longer-profit-foreign-deals/>

⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/legal/jury-resumes-deliberating-trump-organization-criminal-tax-fraud-trial-2022-12-06/>

videos and personal information contained on the laptop of a private citizen who was struggling with a substance abuse disorder. This is a case study in projection and obfuscation. It was Donald Trump who said, “Republicans feel that social-media platforms totally silence conservatives (sic) voices” and “We will strongly regulate, or close them down, before we can ever allow this to happen.” Mr. Trump might be a prime candidate for Chairman Comer’s bill, the Protecting Speech from Government Interference Act (H.R. 140), which would punish, and fine federal employees engaged in censorship. What I find more concerning than the contents of a private laptop, is the active and virulent movement in this country to censor our nation’s history and the erasure of race, discrimination, and slavery from our educational systems. Bigotry, violence, and actual censorship silenced millions of voices of Black Americans. It has required a concerted effort to revive their memory and experience as part of school curriculums, so we learn and evolve from our past. Republican designs on how we teach race in public schools would silence the victims of race-based oppression all over again. That is censorship and it is shameful and dangerous.

I am a fierce advocate for free speech and have won elections campaigning against book banning. What we are here today to discuss is not censorship. It is sensationalism. And it is not what we were sent here to do with the awesome powers of the United States Congress. It is beneath this Committee and this institution, and I hope we can return to more serious business.