

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Fanning the Flames: Disinformation and Extremism in the Media”
February 24, 2020**

As Prepared for Delivery

Chairman Pallone and Chairman Doyle, in all my time on this committee, there has never been a more obvious direct attack on the First Amendment.

I want to be very clear...condemning the January 6th attack and upholding truth and facts is a shared, bipartisan goal.

But that is not what this hearing is about.

If the Majority was interested in meaningful change, you would not schedule a hyper-partisan hearing to shame and blame.

You certainly would not send letters pressuring companies to block conservative media outlets.

I am not only disappointed in this hearing, I am deeply troubled by it.

Every journalist—from MSNBC and CNN to the New York Times—should be concerned by the Majority’s actions.

And anyone who values free speech and a free press should be worried.

Public officials using their platform to pressure private companies to censor media outlets they disagree with?...

...That sounds like actions from the Chinese Communist Party, not duly-elected representatives of the United States Congress.

Here, we cherish free speech and a free independent press.

We believe in dialogue and in the battle of ideas.

Rather than censor and silence constitutionally protected speech, the answer is MORE speech.

That's the American way.

Chairman Pallone and Chairman Doyle, you once believed threats against broadcasters for airing legally protected speech to be illegal.

Less than a year ago, you sent a letter to the FCC decrying attempts to censor or interfere with broadcasters' discretion to air legally protected content.

Mr. Chairman I ask unanimous consent to enter this letter into the record.

You said... quote "At a time when autocratic governments around the world are using the coronavirus pandemic as an excuse to suppress press freedoms, we must reaffirm, not undermine, American's commitment to a free press."

I ask you now—What’s changed?

As you once put it...quote “to stay silent could undermine the First Amendment.”

I call on you both to publicly denounce your colleagues’ censorship campaign over the news they disagree with.

Is this the standard you want to set? Under your new view, liberal media would cease to exist.

Should CNN still be carried after hosting Governor Cuomo?

For months, liberal media lauded him and legitimized his lethal response to COVID-19. He even won an Emmy for his use of TV to spread misinformation.

How do we know it was misinformation? Because of a balance of conservative networks that pursued investigative journalism.

Should MSNBC still be carried after years of pushing the false “Russia collusion” narrative?

Thanks to independent journalists and a robust free press, we learned their reporting was false.

Does your new standard stop with cable news or should it now be applied to social media?

This is a dangerous and Unamerican standard you are setting for more control to redefine for yourselves what is true.

Do you think Republican Members of Congress agree with all of the content on liberal media?

No.

Have we sent TV companies threatening letters to stop carrying certain channels? No.

We support the spirit of the First Amendment.

It states “Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.”

The Majority appears to be quasi-legislating its attack on the First Amendment by using their public positions of power to coerce private companies to censor political speech.

It’s an abuse of power.

Today, the media is their target.

Very soon it will be on Big Tech CEOs for more censorship.

Next, it is forcing an ideology in our schools... where we work...what books we read... who we communicate with... and how we practice our faith.

This is frightening. Do you know what the worst part is?

It’s already being mandated in our culture.

There are people in America today... who are afraid to stand up and say this is wrong.

They are afraid of a woke system that is getting them fired, canceled, and shamed.

So they are silent. They have no voice.

They can't trust broken institutions to protect them.

This culture of fear is unjust....

... and it's absurd this committee is now using fear to force everyone to be the same or be destroyed.

We should be leading a better example.

Rather than abuse its power and force a state religion of liberal ideology, I urge this committee to seek excellence.

Let's come together around our most basic principles for freedom.

Let's give people hope in the Promise of America again--- so they have the courage to be unique, creative, and live their lives without fear.

I yield back.