

**Opening Statement of
CPAC Subcommittee Republican Leader Gus Bilirakis
Joint CPAC and C&T Subcommittee Hearing on
“Disinformation Nation : Social Media’s Role in Promoting
Extremism and Misinformation”
March 25, 2021**

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you for participating in today’s hearing. I have been thinking about this hearing since our side first requested it last year.

My time in Congress has provided me enough knowledge about the history of this committee to know what the Telecommunications Act was and importantly what it wasn’t.

Components of that law have been struck by the courts, while other provisions are interpreted and applied differently than first conceived. This is all a departure from Congressional intent.

Regardless of what one thinks of whether all of the Communications Decency Act was the right approach, the same Members that voted for Section 230 voted for that entire bill – the statute was meant to protect our society, specifically our kids.

To our witnesses today, here lies the problem for you. You don’t want the Federal government telling you what parts of your company you’re allowed to operate. Imagine things from our perspective when you pick and choose what parts of the law you want to follow.

I really do admire your ingenuity. You have created something truly remarkable. But with that power you must also be Good Samaritans, and you have an obligation to be stewards of your platform. If your legal department doesn’t believe you are bound to the intent of the law, I would hope your souls and consciences will.

Many of my colleagues will raise legitimate concerns about the attack on the Capitol from January, and other colleagues can point to what occurred in our cities

last summer. These were all incidents where social media escalated tension, incited chaos, and bred extremism through echo chambers and algorithms.

As the new Republican leader on the Consumer Protection and Commerce subcommittee, I have been digging into how your companies operate. That led me to run a survey of my district following our Big Tech hearing announcement. The conclusion is my constituents simply don't trust you anymore. With thousands of responses, over 82% said they do not trust Big Tech to be good stewards of their platforms or consistently enforce their policies. That includes my constituent who told me "We were providing information to local families on Teen Suicide Risks on Facebook Livestream, and it was blocked by Facebook." Another constituent said she is seeing "countless teens be bullied online or simply not able to process the devastating comparison game that they are forced to deal with on social media." Others told me they stopped using your services all together out of fear and distrust, one even told me they quit social media due to treatment from your companies over their family's Christian views. Each one of these represents a story of how your companies have failed people, and you'll be hearing from my colleagues with more of these stories about how Big Tech has lost its way, highlighting a much larger problem.

People want to use your services, but they suspect your coders are designing what they think we should see and hear, by keeping us online longer than ever, and all with the purpose to polarize and monetize us, disregarding any consequences for the assault on our inherent freedoms.

So I don't want to hear about how changing current law is going to hurt start-ups, because I've heard directly from them accusing you of anti-competitive tactics. None of us want to damage entrepreneurs.

What I do want to hear is what you will do to bring our country back from the fringes and stop the poisonous practices that drive depression, isolation, and suicide, and instead cooperate with law enforcement to protect our citizens. Our kids are being lost while you say you will "try to do better" as we've heard countless times already. We need true transparency and real change, not empty promises.

The fear you should have coming into this hearing today isn't that you're going to get yelled at by a Member of Congress, it's that our committee knows how to get things done when we come together. We can do this with you or without you. And we will.

Thank you, I yield back.