

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of**

Subcommittee on Communications and Technology Chair Michael F. Doyle

***Hearing on “Disinformation Nation: Social Media’s Role in Promoting Extremism and
Misinformation”***

March 25, 2021

Our nation is drowning in disinformation driven by social media. Platforms that were once used to share photos of kids with grandparents are all too often havens of hate, harassment, and division.

The way I see it, there are two faces to each of your platforms. Facebook has the family and friends neighborhood but it is right next to the one where there is a white nationalist rally every day.

YouTube is a place where people share quirky videos, but down the street, anti-vaxxers, covid deniers, QAnon supporters, and flat earthers are sharing videos. Twitter allows you to bring friends and celebrities into your home, but also holocaust deniers, terrorists and worse.

Now, it would be one thing if every user chose where to go organically, but almost everything is scripted on social media platforms. Facebook recognizes anti-social tendencies in one user and invites them to visit the white nationalists.

YouTube sees another user is interested in COVID-19 and auto-starts an anti-vax video. On Twitter a user following the trending conversation, never knowing it is driven by bots and coordinated disinformation networks run by foreign agents.

Your platforms have changed how people across the planet - communicate, connect, learn, and stay informed.

The power of this technology is awesome and terrifying - and each of you has failed to protect your users and the world from the worst consequences of your creations.

This is the first time the three of you have appeared before Congress since the deadly attack on the Capitol on January 6th. That event was not just an attack on our Democracy and our electoral process, but an attack on every member of this Committee and in the Congress.

Many of us were on the House floor and in the Capitol when that attack occurred and we were forced to stop our work of certifying the election - and retreat to safety - some of us wearing gas masks and fearing for our lives.

We fled as a mob desecrated the Capitol, the House floor, and our democratic process. People died that day, and hundreds were seriously injured.

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That attack and the movement that motivated it started and was nourished on your platforms. Your platforms suggested groups for people to join, videos they should view, and posts they should like - driving this movement forward with terrifying speed and efficiency.

FBI documents show that many of these individuals used your platforms to plan, recruit, and execute this attack.

According to independent research, users on Facebook were exposed 1.1 billion times to misinformation related to the election last year alone - despite changes to your policies and claims that you removed election misinformation.

Our nation is in the middle of a terrible pandemic. Nearly five hundred and fifty thousand Americans have lost their lives to this deadly disease - more than any other country on the planet. An independent study found that on Facebook alone, users across five countries, including the United States, were exposed to COVID disinformation an estimated 3.8 billion times - again despite claims of fixes and reforms.

And now as the Biden Administration is working to implement the American Rescue Plan and get vaccines in people's arms, we are faced with waves of disinformation on social media about the safety and efficacy of these shots.

These vaccines are the best chance we have to fight this virus, and the content that your websites are still promoting, still recommending, and still sharing - is one of the biggest reasons people are refusing the vaccine.

And things haven't changed - my staff found content on YouTube telling people not to get vaccines and was recommended similar videos.

The same was true on Instagram, where it was not only easy to find vaccine disinformation - but the platform recommended similar posts. The same thing happened on Facebook except they also had anti-vax groups to suggest as well.

Twitter was no different, if you go to any of the super spreader accounts that remain up despite policies meant to curb anti-vax content, you'll see this content.

You **can** take down this content, you **can** reduce division, you **can** fix this - but you choose not to.

We saw your platforms remove ISIS terrorist content; we saw you tamp down on COVID misinformation at the beginning of the pandemic; we have seen disinformation drop when you have promoted reliable news sources and removed serial disinformation super spreaders from your platforms.

You have the means, but time after time, you are picking engagement and profit over the health and safety of your users, our nation, and our democracy.

These are serious issues, and to be honest - it seems like you all just shrug off billion-dollar fines. Your companies need to be held accountable - we need rules, regulations, technical

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experts in government, and audit authority of your technologies. Ours is the committee of jurisdiction, and we will legislate to stop this. The stakes are simply too high.