

**Opening Statement of the Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
“Disinformation Nation: Social Media's Role in Promoting Extremism and
Misinformation”**

March 25, 2021

As prepared for delivery

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. 10 years ago—when I joined Big Tech platforms—I thought they would be a force for good.

I thought they would help us build relationships and promote transparency in Congress. I can testify today, I was wrong. That is not what has transpired. You've broken my trust. Yes, because you've failed to promote the battle of ideas and free speech.

Yes, because you censor political viewpoints you disagree with. Those polarizing actions matter for democracy. But, do you know what has convinced me Big Tech is a destructive force? It's how you've abused your power to manipulate and harm our children.

Your platforms are my biggest fear as a parent. I'm a mom of three school-aged kids. My husband and I are fighting the Big Tech battles in our household every day. It's a battle for their development,

A battle for their mental health and — ultimately — a battle for their safety. I've monitored where your algorithms lead them. It's frightening. I know I'm not alone. After multiple teenage suicides in my community, I reached out to our schools and we started asking questions.

What's going on with our kids? What's making them feel so alone? So empty and in despair? This is what I hear over and over again from parents...pediatricians... school administrators... and teachers.

They all are raising the alarm about **social media**. A day doesn't go by that I don't talk to friends and other parents who tell me: Their 14-year-old is depressed. She used to love soccer. Now, they can't get her to do anything. She never gets off her device or leaves her room.

I think about a mom who told me she can't leave her daughter alone **EVER** because she harms herself. Or the family who is recovering from almost losing their daughter to a predator she met online.

These stories are not unique to me or Eastern Washington. I recently heard of a young college student who has lost 9 friends to suicide. This is unimaginable. The science on social media is becoming clearer.

Between 2011 and 2018, rates of depression, self-harm, suicides, and suicide attempts exploded among American teens. During that time, rates of teen depression increased by more than **SIXTY percent**, with the larger increase among young girls.

Between 2009 and 2015, emergency room admissions for self-harm among 10 to 14-year-old girls tripled and suicides substantially increased.

One study found that during that time, teens who used their devices for 5 or more hours a day were 66 percent more likely to have at least one suicide-related outcome compared to those who used their device for just one. Other studies have found that teens who spend more time online report lower psychological well-being and more feelings of loneliness.

Remember our kids —the users —are the product. You—Big Tech—are **not** advocates for children. You exploit and profit off them.

Big Tech needs to be exposed and completely transparent for what you are doing to our children so parents like me can make informed decisions. We also expect Big Tech to do more to protect children because you haven't done enough. Big Tech has failed to be good stewards of your platforms. I have two daughters and a son with a disability.

Let me be clear, I do not want you defining what is true for them. I do not want their future manipulated by your algorithms. I do not want their self-worth defined by the engagement tools you've built to own their attention. I do not want them to be in danger from what you've created. I do not want their emotions and vulnerabilities taken advantage of so you can make more money and have more power.

I'm sure most of my colleagues on this committee—who are also parents and grandparents—feel the same way. Over 20 years ago, before we knew what Big Tech would become, Congress gave you liability protections.

I want to know why do you think you still deserve those protections today? What will it take for your business model to stop harming children? I know I speak for millions of moms when I say we need these answers and we will not rest until we get them.

Thank you.