

**Opening Statement of Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Section 230 Hearing
April 11, 2024**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

INTRO

Good afternoon, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Last month, this Committee led a bill that passed out of the House with overwhelming support to protect Americans against national security threats posed by TikTok.

The Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act is significant legislation that will protect Americans - and our children - from a CCP-controlled social media company that threatens America's national security and fails to uphold our values.

That debate also reignited longstanding concerns about U.S. social media companies and how Congress can keep them transparent and accountable to Americans.

Today, we will examine the law that provides the most significant protections for those social media companies...

...Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996.

A lot has changed since then...

...from recent developments in Artificial Intelligence and its applications...

...to the growth of Big Tech and other companies that have become increasingly integrated into our everyday lives.

Needless to say, this law is long overdue for meaningful updates, and I look forward to discussing those today.

FREE SPEECH

As written, this law was originally intended to protect Internet Service Providers from being held liable for content posted by a third-party user or from removing truly horrific or illegal content.

The intent was to make the Internet a safe space for users to connect and find information.

However, the Internet has changed dramatically since then.

As a result, Section 230 is now being weaponized by Big Tech against Americans.

Big Tech actively curates the content that appears on their platforms in order to control what we see and what we're allowed to post.

This level of moderation is similar to that of a traditional newspaper or publisher, who carefully curate the articles, opinions, and information they publish for their readers.

Just as a newspaper editor chooses which stories make it to the front page and which ones are relegated to the inner sections...

...Big Tech companies make decisions about the visibility and accessibility of content on their platforms.

As these companies increasingly evolve and act more like publishers, they have a responsibility to the American people to moderate their platforms in a fair way that upholds American values, like free speech.

No other class of company in the United States has full immunity from liability like Big Tech.

Protecting our Kids

The reality is that for years these companies have failed to be good stewards of their platforms, especially when it comes to how they're harming our kids.

We've seen numerous reports detailing how Big Tech encourages addictive behaviors in our children in order to keep them glued to their screens...

... and fails to protect their users from malicious actors on their platforms.

We've all heard countless heartbreaking stories of drug dealers targeting children with illegal drugs, including counterfeit drugs laced with fentanyl, which are killing hundreds of Americans every single day.

We also see platforms failing to take action to address cyberbullying and harassing content, which is contributing to the rise in teen mental health issues.

Parents and victims are unable to hold these platforms accountable for content they promote or amplify, due to the way laws like Section 230 are currently written.

This legislative shield allows Big Tech to hide from expensive lawsuits...

... and no one is held responsible for the loss of innocent lives.

I have said it before, and I will say it again: Big Tech remains my biggest fear as a parent, and they need to be held accountable for their actions.

CONCLUSION

These issues are not new.

Last Congress, we created the Big Tech Accountability Platform to examine these topics, and I led on a proposal to reform Section 230.

Big Tech is abusing the power granted to them by Congress.

They are censoring Americans, allowing and promoting illegal content, and turning a blind eye to how their platforms endanger our children.

It is long past time to reevaluate this unchecked power, and I am hopeful that this hearing is the start of an opportunity to work in a bipartisan way to do just that.

It's vital that we identify solutions that restore people's free speech online.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today and I yield back.