

Opening Statement of Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers
As Prepared for Delivery
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Innovation, Data, and Commerce
Hearing titled “Legislative Solutions to Protect Kids Online and Ensure
Americans’ Data Privacy Rights”
April 17, 2024

Good morning, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Right now, the average American spends nearly 7 hours online a day... with 2.5 hours of that time being spent on social media platforms.

The consequences range from increased suicide rates and depression, to increased polarization and loss of trust in our institutions.

All the while, these companies are collecting nearly every data point imaginable which they use to then control what we see and when we see it.

Many of these tools were created with good intentions...to bring people together.

But over time they have strayed from their core mission in the interest of more control over our lives.

This isn't the American dream. America was built on individual liberty and freedom...freedom of thought, expression, and speech.

Our founders fought for these freedoms because they were tired of living under the crushing weight of tyranny.

They were tired of being told how to think and how to live by a few elites who thought they knew best... and who exploited others for their own power and wealth.

Fast forward to today, we find ourselves living in a similar, modern form of digital tyranny.

Where a handful of companies and bad actors are exploiting our personal information, monetizing it, and using it to manipulate how we think and act.

Many companies are using their control over our data to erode people's agency... their rights... their individuality.

It's time for that status quo to change.

Today, we will be discussing several pieces of legislation, including the American Privacy Rights Act...

...to give people the RIGHT to control their personal information online and not have it used against them.

We're putting people back in control of who they are, what they think, and how they live their lives.

This is especially necessary for our children.

As a mom of three school-aged children, Big Tech platforms are my biggest fear.

The algorithms developed by these companies are specifically designed to get kids hooked to their platforms...

... and they've been used to target children with content that leads to dangerous, life-threatening behaviors.

For me and my husband, as well as millions of parents across the country...

...this is a battle for our kids' development, their mental health, and ultimately, their safety.

The American Privacy Rights Act is foundational for protecting our kids online.

Working together with other important legislation like the Kids Online Safety Act, the Children's and Teen's Online Privacy Protection Act, and other bills...

...which we're also discussing today...

... these solutions will ensure the best protections to date for our children.

Today we find ourselves at a crossroads...

We can either continue down the path we're on, letting companies and bad actors continue to collect troves of our data unchecked... while they trample on core American values like free expression, free speech, and individuality...

...or we can give people the right to control their information online.

Congress has been trying to develop and pass comprehensive data privacy and security legislation for decades.

With the American Privacy Rights Act, we are at a unique moment in history where we finally have the opportunity to return the internet to its original promise of being a force for prosperity and good.

I'd like to thank Senator Cantwell for working with me on this landmark draft bill.

I would also like to thank Ranking Member Pallone, who has been a trusted partner over the years as we have worked together on privacy.

We would not be here today without his tireless efforts and leadership, and I look forward to continuing to work with him to strengthen privacy protections for Americans.

I'd also like to thank the members of this committee—Republicans and Democrats--many of whom have also been involved in these efforts over several congresses.

I look forward to continuing to work together to get this legislation through Congress and signed into law.

I yield back.