

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “The World Wild Web: Examining Harms Online”

March 26, 2025

For years, the members of this Committee have worked together on a constructive, bipartisan basis to pass a broad array of consumer protection legislation. We have regularly delegated enforcement authority to the Federal Trade Commission, an agency that has consistently been Americans’ strongest champion against the abuses of Big Tech, fly-by-night scammers, and all who seek to exploit our nation’s children and adults both on and offline.

So, I find it extraordinary that the Republican Majority has called this hearing to discuss ways to increase online safety, particularly for our nation’s children, while willfully ignoring the outrageous, unlawful, and unconstitutional attempt just last week by President Trump to fire two duly nominated and confirmed members of the FTC.

My Republican colleagues must understand that President Trump’s unlawful attempt to fire the FTC Commissioners fundamentally undermines the FTC’s ability to continue to protect American consumers. And yet, rather than taking this threat seriously and holding the Trump Administration accountable, Republicans invited as a witness one of the contributors to Project 2025, which is the playbook the Administration is using to create an oligarchy that benefits billionaires at the expense of everyone else.

In creating the FTC, Congress gave the agency broad authority to protect consumers from unfair or deceptive acts or practices and unfair competition in interstate commerce. Congress recognized the FTC needed to be independent from political pressure and be structured to ensure a measure of consistency across administrations so that it could conduct its work in an even handed manner. Congress therefore created an agency led by Commissioners from both parties who cannot be removed by any President on a political whim, but only for “inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance.”

Before now, only one President has attempted to fire an FTC Commissioner without good cause and the Supreme Court made it clear that in the FTC Act, Congress expressly and properly limited the ability of the Executive Branch to do so.

Last week, in attempting to illegally fire Commissioners Slaughter and Bedoya, President Trump did not claim that they engaged in inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance.” To make such a claim would have been impossible, because Commissioners Slaughter and Bedoya have served with great distinction. Working with Commissioners of both parties, they have made sure that under their watch the FTC has aggressively protected Americans from deceptive

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and unfair acts and practices and worked to keep markets competitive for the benefits of consumers and honest businesses through independent, bipartisan law enforcement.

I am outraged by President Trump's illegal attempts to oust these two Commissioners. It certainly seems that President Trump's biggest donors, including Elon Musk, bought not just a seat to the front row of the President's inauguration, but also an agreement their companies will not face accountability for their misdeeds.

And, unfortunately, Committee Republicans are likely to ignore this flagrant corruption and violation of the law. Their silence and inaction is a gross failure of our Constitutional oversight duty and puts at risk the important work of an independent FTC that has benefited all Americans for more than a century.

The FTC has taken on big tech with groundbreaking actions against Twitter and Facebook that put profits over consumers' privacy. It has been a critical guardian of Americans' online security, holding companies like Marriott and GoDaddy accountable for violating consumer's trust with reckless data security practices. And the FTC has fought companies like TikTok, Amazon, and Epic Games for practices that put kids in harm's way.

In light of this long record in protecting Americans from reckless profiteering and outright fraud in the age of the internet, President Trump's actions stand in stark opposition to any honest attempt to combat the threats the online world poses.

If my Republican colleagues really want to make the internet a safer place for our nation's children, they should be fighting with us to ensure the most effective cop on the beat can continue its essential work. If they continue to bury their heads in the sand, we will once again know that they are beholden to billionaires' bottom line and have no interest in actually protecting children.

I thank Commissioner Slaughter for testifying today and Commissioner Bedoya, who is showing his support by sitting behind her. President Trump's illegal action against them is a blatant power grab to consolidate unchecked power in his White House. It's an outrage and should be reversed. Thank you and I yield back.