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6 THE WORLD WILD WEB: EXAMINING HARMS ONLINE

7 WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26, 2025

8 House of Representatives,

9 Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade,

10 Committee on Energy and Commerce,

11 Washington, D.C.

12

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14 The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:03 a.m. in

15 2123 of the Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Gus

16 Bilirakis, [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

17

18 Present: Representatives Bilirakis, Fulcher,

19 Harshbarger, Cammack, Obernolte, James, Bentz, Houchin, Fry,

20 Lee, Kean, Evans, Goldman, Guthrie (ex officio); Schakowsky,

21 Castor, Soto, Trahan, Mullin, Clarke, Dingell, Veasey, Kelly,

22 Schrier, and Pallone (ex officio).

23 Also present: Representative Fedorchak.

24

25

26 Staff Present: Ansley Boylan, Director of Operations;

27 Jessica Donlon, General Counsel; Natalie Hellman,

28 Professional Staff Member; Megan Jackson, Staff Director;  
29 Daniel Kelly, Press Secretary; Sophie Khanahmadi, Deputy  
30 Staff Director; Alex Khlopin, Clerk; Giulia Leganski, Chief  
31 Counsel; Joel Miller, Chief Counsel; Brannon Rains,  
32 Professional Staff Member; Evangelos Razis, Professional  
33 Staff Member; Chris Sarley, Member Services/Stakeholder  
34 Director; Kaley Stidham, Press Assistant; Matt VanHyfte,  
35 Communications Director; Hannah Anton, Minority Policy  
36 Analyst; Keegan Cardman, Minority Staff Assistant; Waverly  
37 Gordon, Minority Deputy Staff Director and General Counsel;  
38 Tiffany Guarascio, Minority Staff Director; Perry Hamilton,  
39 Minority Member Services and Outreach Manager; Lisa Hone,  
40 Minority Chief Counsel, CMT; Mackenzie Kuhl, Minority Digital  
41 Manager; Matt Moore, Minority Press Assistant; Phoebe Rouge,  
42 Minority FTC Detailee; Andrew Souvall, Minority Director of  
43 Communications, Outreach, and Member Services; and C.J.  
44 Young, Minority Deputy Communications Director.

45

46           \*Mr. Bilirakis. The committee will come to order.

47           I would like to \_ before I begin my opening statement, I  
48 would like to yield for a brief moment to the chairman of the  
49 full committee.

50           You are recognized, sir.

51           \*The Chair. Thank you. Thank you very much for  
52 yielding. And I just want to set the stage for a second  
53 before we get started this morning.

54           We have a witness at our table today that has received a  
55 death threat that \_ I listened to the voicemail. Someone  
56 said he was a left-wing anarchist, and you are here \_ you can  
57 \_ people, if they want to listen to it on the committee, they  
58 are welcome to \_ left-wing anarchist, and you are you are  
59 testifying before Nazis today, and so \_ and received a death  
60 threat for that. We have our finest on Capitol Hill here  
61 with us today, our police officers in the room. It is not  
62 typical. We are going to make sure this is a safe hearing  
63 room. We are going to make sure we have a very important  
64 discussion in front of us today.

65           I talked to a mother yesterday, someone was going to  
66 share that lost her son two weeks ago to suicide because of  
67 what was going on to him online. This is a very serious  
68 topic. Most of the bills before us are bipartisan, and \_ I  
69 think all of them are, actually \_ and it is an issue we all  
70 want to address. But we need to make sure we do it in the

71 right tone. And I know my good friend who is the chairman is  
72 going to make sure this committee does it in the right tone  
73 today, and I appreciate our officers being here.

74 And I apologize for the witnesses for what you had to go  
75 through because you are here to testify for protecting our  
76 children. I know there has been other things, as well. And  
77 we just want to apologize for what you have had to go to  
78 [sic]. We know you do \_ and I have been to the Center for  
79 Missing Children, and what you deal with every day \_ and what  
80 you have to deal with, is just \_ it is disturbing. But it is  
81 \_ but I walked away going, well, I couldn't do that every  
82 day, but I am so happy there are people that are because you  
83 are there protecting our children. And what you see and do  
84 every day, and what you have \_ to see what our children go  
85 through. And it is just sad.

86 But I want to just set the tone. We are going to have a  
87 safe hearing room, and we are going to have a good hearing  
88 today, and we are going to focus on the subject at hand.

89 So I will yield back.

90 \*Mr. Bilirakis. The gentleman yields back. Thank you,  
91 Mr. Chairman.

92 Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the today's  
93 subcommittee hearing to examine risks to Americans' safety  
94 online. Today's hearing is an incredible \_ it really is  
95 extremely important, folks, and I am thankful we are hitting

96 the ground early this Congress to protect ourselves from \_  
97 and our children, more importantly \_ from dangers in the  
98 online world.

99 Technology has created a wonderful tool to gather  
100 information and connect us to the world. But with every new  
101 great tool, malicious actors have found a way to refigure  
102 technology to spread malice and harm people across the globe.  
103 While Congress has looked to build walls preventing these  
104 harms from occurring, we have failed to keep pace with  
105 technology. Take, for example, the important work Congress  
106 did to combat sexual exploitation of children. When Congress  
107 first worked on this issue it was hard to imagine artificial  
108 intelligence could be used to create fake but lifelike, non-  
109 consensual intimate images of children. Worse still, it was  
110 hard to imagine anyone so vile who would actually do it. But  
111 today these detestable people are extorting children with  
112 technology, creating these images and uploading them online  
113 for the world to see.

114 And it doesn't stop with deepfakes either. Criminals  
115 are masking themselves as friends or romantic partners to  
116 solicit intimate, authentic images of children, and ransoming  
117 these images for a quick buck. Detestable, as I said. The  
118 main \_ the pain these children experience is hard, and it  
119 breaks my heart. And I know it breaks your hearts, too. We  
120 have got to do something about it.

121           You ought to thank you [sic] for your work at the  
122 National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and for  
123 providing your expertise. We appreciate you so very much.  
124 Thanks for being here. Again, you are doing God's work. I  
125 am looking forward to your testimony and why Congress must  
126 act immediately to stop this abhorrent practice.

127           Congress must take a holistic approach to establish  
128 protections online, which why \_ that is why I am so proud to  
129 see many of our members working on different mechanisms to  
130 protect our children. I, for one, am eager to move the ball  
131 forward on the Kids Online Safety Act, and I know  
132 Representative Castor is, as well.

133           While this is not a legislative hearing, I am hoping we  
134 can use this hearing to improve the legislation and enact a  
135 law that provides parents with the tools they need, while  
136 also targeting illegal content from every \_ ever making its  
137 way to children's screens in the first place. Parents know  
138 their children the best, so we must adequately equip them  
139 with the tools they need to protect their families.

140           Unfortunately, it is clear the existing tools do not  
141 work. I am tired of hearing big tech insist that solutions  
142 are already in place when it is clear they are not working.  
143 And it is true they are not working. No more excuses, folks.  
144 We have to fix this. We have to hold big tech accountable.  
145 The very companies that have positioned themselves as the

146 gatekeepers of our children's online safety continue to let  
147 us down, as I said.

148 Dawn and Clare, thank you for being here to share your  
149 experiences and your commitment to driving real change.

150 This hearing should not be partisan. It is far too  
151 important of any [sic] issue to use a political \_ this is not  
152 a political circus, folks. We have got to save our kids.  
153 Whatever it takes, we must save our children. Many of us  
154 here today have introduced or are working on legislation to  
155 build protections from harms online. This is not a partisan  
156 issue, as I said before, and it impacts every one of our  
157 districts. And I know there are members here that will share  
158 stories, and I have one here.

159 In 2022 Mckenna Brown, a 16-year-old from the Tampa Bay  
160 area, tragically took her life after being victimized by  
161 cyber bullying through multiple social media apps and text  
162 messages. Mckinney's parents knew none of this until it was  
163 too late. Since then her mother, Cheryl, has been an  
164 advocate for change, urging lawmakers to give parents the  
165 tools necessary to keep the kids safe. I understand there  
166 are similarly situated parents here in the audience. Thank  
167 you so very much for coming, and I want to recognize your own  
168 stories, efforts, and commitment to protect children from  
169 online safety.

170 So I do have other comments, but I don't want to run

171 over. We are going to stick \_

172 \*Ms. Schakowsky. You are already over.

173 \*Mr. Bilirakis. \_ to the time.

174 [The prepared statement of Mr. Bilirakis follows:]

175

176 \*\*\*\*\*COMMITTEE INSERT\*\*\*\*\*

177

178           \*Mr. Bilirakis. And I am going to recognize now the  
179 ranking member from the great state of Illinois for her five  
180 minutes. Thank you.

181           You are recognized.

182           \*Ms. Schakowsky. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. You  
183 know, we had in place the \_ what we needed to protect our  
184 children, and that is why I am absolutely furious right now  
185 that the \_ there has been this effort to fire the two members  
186 of the \_

187           \*Voice. FTC.

188           \*Ms. Schakowsky. \_ of the \_ the two members of the FTC  
189 who were doing a wonderful job, bipartisan, making sure that  
190 we are \_ and I will go into more detail \_ protecting our  
191 children, which you seem so important \_ it is very important.  
192 But come on, we are now seeing the effort to fire these  
193 really important workers.

194           You know, it makes me absolutely so angry that the  
195 President of the United States thinks it is his ability and  
196 his right to fire these people, when in fact that is not  
197 true. It is against the law. These individuals \_ we have  
198 two here today \_ that have done such great work, their term  
199 had not \_ has not been over right now. So this was a  
200 decision \_ instead of justifying what is the rule according  
201 to the Supreme Court, this \_ these individuals should still  
202 be on the FTC Commission. So I don't really understand why

203 we would want to substitute others.

204 I understand that the Republicans are still in place,  
205 and yet the Democrats who worked so well are now considered  
206 fired, but they really cannot be legally, legally done. So I  
207 wanted to \_ what is this?

208 \*Voice. Gus, we worked on tickets and privacy.

209 \*Ms. Schakowsky. Hmm?

210 \*Voice. You wanted to say to Gus that you worked on  
211 tickets and privacy together.

212 \*Ms. Schakowsky. Yes. So Gus, I wanted to say to you  
213 we have worked on so many issues together on privacy, some  
214 things on children. I agree with you on the urgency of doing  
215 these things. We have a \_ we have the people in place who  
216 can help to do it. But now we don't have that bipartisan  
217 effort, and it makes no sense. And it should be overturned,  
218 and then continue to make sure that we are protecting our  
219 children.

220 What we are seeing right now, too, is that it is not  
221 only protecting our kids, but it is also \_

222 \*Voice. Rising food prices and \_

223 \*Ms. Schakowsky. Oh, yes, food prices. And that is  
224 certainly something that the President said. The food prices  
225 have to go down. Instead, they have gone up and the food  
226 prices, the gouging that was taking place is actually  
227 something, once again, that the full complement of the

228 Federal Trade Commission was looking at and doing something  
229 about.

230 Also \_ okay, what is next?

231 \*Voice. Gift to billionaires.

232 \*Ms. Schakowsky. So this is just one big gift to the  
233 billionaires, to the billionaires that were the ones that  
234 were at the front page at the \_ when the President was sworn  
235 in. Those were the people he had there. And what we need is  
236 something \_ the advocates for the individuals.

237 And I just want to say to the commissioners Bedoya and  
238 our witness right here \_ what is it?

239 \*Voice. Slaughter.

240 \*Ms. Schakowsky. Hmm?

241 \*Voice. Commissioner Slaughter.

242 \*Ms. Schakowsky. Yes, Commissioner Slaughter, who is  
243 here to talk about the work that they did. Behind her is her  
244 partner.

245 So it seems to me that we had in place something that  
246 worked for consumers, that helped our children, made sure  
247 that there were funds for the health care that they needed.  
248 And now that the \_ now the guarantee is gone. And so I just  
249 want to say that I am very disappointed we didn't hear a word  
250 from the Republicans about getting rid of the commissioners,  
251 didn't hear anything from you, Gus. And \_ well, you know,  
252 how many minutes did you take?

253           \*Mr. Bilirakis. No, I took about 38 seconds over.

254           \*Ms. Schakowsky. No, that is not true.

255           \*Mr. Bilirakis. I am giving you over a minute.

256           \*Voice. He gave you a minute and nine seconds over,  
257   yes.

258           \*Ms. Schakowsky. Okay, I yield back.

259           [The prepared statement of Ms. Schakowsky follows:]

260

261           \*\*\*\*\*COMMITTEE INSERT\*\*\*\*\*

262

263           \*Mr. Bilirakis. Okay. Okay. I am going to recognize  
264 now the ranking \_

265           \*Ms. Schakowsky. Ninety minutes over?

266           \*Mr. Bilirakis. \_ excuse me, the chairman of the full  
267 committee for his five minutes. Thank you.

268           \*The Chair. Thanks.

269           \*Mr. Bilirakis. You are recognized.

270           \*The Chair. Thanks, Mr. Chair, thanks for the  
271 recognition, and I really appreciate the witnesses being here  
272 today and all the family members here today.

273           You know, I wish I could say that we had in place  
274 everything we needed to keep our children safe online and we  
275 weren't having this hearing today, and this hearing is about  
276 children. It is not about what is going on here in  
277 Washington, D.C., and it is about children. It is about the  
278 families in this audience who have lost children.

279           It is about a phone call I had yesterday with the mother  
280 of Eli Heacock, who took his own life about two weeks ago  
281 because of something that was going on online. He was being  
282 scammed. He was \_ I guess the \_ I didn't even know the term  
283 "sextortion" until I started talking with her. I knew what  
284 was going on, but I didn't know that term. And he was a twin  
285 brother, and his \_ he \_ because he was a preemie, he had a  
286 feeding tube, 16 years old, had a feeding tube. And his  
287 mother said to me that, well, at least he didn't have to deal

288 with his feeding tube anymore when the medical examiner took  
289 it out.

290 And so he was a kid that everybody loved that \_ she  
291 said, "I couldn't believe people from five counties showed up  
292 to be at his funeral. I didn't know he touched that many  
293 lives.'" I mean, these are who we are here to talk about.  
294 This is what this hearing is about.

295 And I will say to my friend, the ranking member, that we  
296 want this to be bipartisan. We want these bills to get a  
297 bipartisan vote. And if everything was in place and had been  
298 in place, we wouldn't be talking about KOSA and children's  
299 online safety, which we are going to have a bill this year \_  
300 or it is going to pass as soon as we can get everything we  
301 need together to do. We are going to do TAKE IT DOWN Act.  
302 That is why we are having this hearing today to get this  
303 moving quickly. There was a bipartisan group of House  
304 members and Senators who met with the First Lady.

305 And we all saw the lady who was here during the State of  
306 the Union that was 15 years old and had fake nudes of her.  
307 Somebody took a picture of her, took her face and put it on a  
308 body, an unclothed body, and sent it out to her entire  
309 school. Could you imagine being a 14-year-old girl? It  
310 wasn't her body, but could you imagine being a 14-year-old  
311 girl and know that everybody in her school thinks that they  
312 saw her without her clothes on? How horrifying that is.

313           There was a lady from a young lady from New Jersey. The  
314 same thing happened to her. Those are just a couple of  
315 cases. Those are a couple of cases, and they happen to  
316 people all the time.

317           And so we are here for a very serious issue, and I  
318 really hope that \_ and I will take my good friend, the  
319 ranking member, up on her request that we make this  
320 bipartisan because it absolutely has to be bipartisan because  
321 it touches everybody and everybody's district. And I know  
322 some of us on this have the phone calls like I had yesterday.  
323 And if it doesn't \_ and, I mean, I know it moves everybody.  
324 I know it moves everybody here.

325           So I want to say \_ is that \_ the TAKE IT DOWN Act, which  
326 \_ and KOSA, and all these other bills that protect our  
327 children for online safety are going to be a focus of this  
328 subcommittee, a focus on this committee, and we are getting  
329 them across the House floor. I know TAKE IT DOWN Act has  
330 already passed the Senate. So we if we move this out of \_ we  
331 have this hearing, move it in markup and move it out of  
332 committee and it goes to the floor, it goes right to the  
333 President for signature and becomes law.

334           And as I said, I wish everything was in place and we  
335 weren't here today, but we are here today because not  
336 everything is in place.

337           And we have the witnesses that are here that are in the

338 front lines. As I said, I have been to the National Center  
339 for Missing and Exploited Children, and it is actually  
340 phenomenal, what you do and what you \_ I remember walking out  
341 of there going I can't believe you see what you see every  
342 day, but you do it because you want to protect children.  
343 That is why you are there. And you have to see it because  
344 people are doing it. If people weren't doing it, you  
345 wouldn't see it.

346           And so we have to have laws in place. That was the  
347 first bill that I ever had signed by a President. President  
348 Obama signed a reauthorization of the National Center for  
349 Missing and Exploited Children when I was on Ed and then in  
350 Labor when I first got here.

351           So I just want to hopefully use my time to say I know we  
352 have all been touched by cases in our district. We all care.  
353 We all want it to be better. We wish we could 100 percent  
354 fix it, but we know it absolutely has to be better. And the  
355 predators always try to stay one step ahead of us. So we  
356 have to have these meetings, these hearings. We have to have  
357 these bills. We have to continuously and vigorously \_ as  
358 long as I am chairman of this committee, we absolutely will  
359 vigorously look for ways to \_ so that I don't \_ so Members of  
360 Congress or people don't have to \_ you know, we don't want  
361 parents to see kids from all over the south central part of  
362 Kentucky showing up and say I didn't realize that my child

363 had touched so many lives. We want them to grow up so their  
364 parents can see how many lives they touch. And that is what  
365 this hearing is about.

366 And I know \_ hopefully, this is what we focus on. We  
367 won't focus on a commission. There is issues for that and  
368 time for that. What we are here today is to focus on how do  
369 we protect children.

370 [The prepared statement of The Chair follows:]

371

372 \*\*\*\*\*COMMITTEE INSERT\*\*\*\*\*

373

374           \*The Chair. And I will yield back.

375           \*Mr. Bilirakis. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate  
376 it. Well said. Thank you and God bless you. That is why I  
377 am here, is to protect our kids. And I am so blessed to have  
378 a chair and a ranking member that cares so much about our  
379 children, to save our kids whatever it takes.

380           So I \_ with that I am going to yield five minutes to the  
381 ranking member of the full committee, Mr. Pallone. Thank  
382 you.

383           \*Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to  
384 set the record straight for the people that are here today.

385           I know I am not suggesting that the chairman of the full  
386 committee or the chairman of the subcommittee don't care, but  
387 let's not kid the people here to suggest that these bills are  
388 going to become law.

389           The bottom line is we passed KOSA and we passed COPPA  
390 out of this committee in the last session. And the House  
391 Republican leadership refused to bring these bills to the  
392 floor. And you know why? They are in the pocket of big  
393 tech, and the big tech does not care at all about kids.

394           Did you \_ if you went to the inauguration you may have  
395 noticed that standing or sitting behind President Trump were  
396 all the leaders, the CEOs of big tech. They tell the  
397 Republicans what to do. Now, sure, our guys here on the  
398 committee are well intended and want to do things for the

399 public, care about the kids. But it doesn't matter because  
400 they, the House Republican leadership, they are going to do  
401 whatever big tech wants. Big tech does not want these bills.  
402 I appreciate your being here today, but it is not going to  
403 happen, not as long as big tech controls what goes on here.  
404 And they do.

405 Now, for years the members of this committee have worked  
406 together on a constructive, bipartisan basis to pass a broad  
407 array of consumer protection legislation. We have regularly  
408 delegated enforcement authority to the Federal Trade  
409 Commission, an agency that has consistently been America's  
410 strongest champion against the abuses of big tech. It is the  
411 FTC that enforces and prevents the abuses of big tech. But  
412 big tech's scammers, you know, their exploitation of nation's  
413 children and adults both on and offline, that is what we see  
414 every day, and it is getting worse.

415 But I find it extraordinary that the Republican majority  
416 has called this hearing to discuss ways to increase online  
417 safety, particularly for our nation's children, while  
418 willfully ignoring the outrageous, unlawful, and  
419 unconstitutional attempt just last week by President Trump to  
420 fire two duly nominated and confirmed members of the FTC. My  
421 Republican colleagues must understand that President Trump's  
422 unlawful attempt to fire the FTC commissioners fundamentally  
423 undermines the FTC's ability to continue to protect American

424 consumers.

425           And yet, rather than taking this threat seriously and  
426 holding the Trump Administration accountable, Republicans  
427 invited as a witness one of the contributors to Project 2025,  
428 which is the problem here. This is the playbook the  
429 Administration is using to create an oligarchy that benefits  
430 billionaires at the expense of everyone else, including  
431 little kids.

432           In creating the FTC Congress gave the agency broad  
433 authority to protect consumers from unfair or deceptive acts  
434 or practices and unfair competition in interstate commerce.  
435 Congress recognized the FTC needed to be independent from  
436 political pressure and be structured to ensure a measure of  
437 consistency across administrations so that it could conduct  
438 its work in an even-handed manner. And Congress created an  
439 agency led by commissioners from both parties, who cannot be  
440 removed by any president on a political whim, but only for,  
441 and I quote, "inefficiency, neglect of duty, or  
442 malfeasance.'`

443           But \_ and before now only one president had attempted to  
444 fire an FTC commissioner without good cause, and the Supreme  
445 Court made it clear in the FTC Act that Congress expressly  
446 and properly limited the ability of the executive branch to  
447 do so. But last week, in attempting to illegally fire  
448 Commissioners Slaughter and Bedoya, President Trump did not

449 claim that they engaged in inefficiency, neglect of duty, or  
450 malfeasance. To make such a claim would have been impossible  
451 because the commissioners have served with great distinction.

452         So I just want to say I guess it is obvious that I am  
453 outraged by President Trump's illegal attempts to oust these  
454 two commissioners. It certainly seems that President Trump's  
455 biggest donors, including Elon Musk, bought not just a seat  
456 to the front row at the President's inauguration, but also an  
457 agreement that companies will not face accountability for  
458 their misdeeds. And unfortunately, committee Republicans are  
459 likely to ignore this flagrant corruption and violation of  
460 the law.

461         So look, I just want to say I know that we have today  
462 with us one of the commissioners, Commissioner Slaughter. I  
463 still call her the commissioner. And behind him [sic] is  
464 sitting Commissioner Bedoya. And I call them the  
465 commissioners because they were not fired. They are still  
466 the commissioners.

467         And I am hopeful at some point they are going to take  
468 this to court, and the courts will overturn it as the courts  
469 have with almost everything the President Trump has done.  
470 And the question really is, when that happens, is the  
471 President going to abide by the courts, or is he going to say  
472 that I don't care about the courts because I don't care about  
473 the rule of law and I don't care about democracy?

474           So we will see at one point, hopefully, the members on  
475 the other side of the aisle, you know, stand up and, you  
476 know, defend the rule of law. But so far, I don't see it,  
477 unfortunately.

478           [The prepared statement of Mr. Pallone follows:]

479

480           \*\*\*\*\*COMMITTEE INSERT\*\*\*\*\*

481

482           \*Mr. Pallone. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

483           \*Mr. Bilirakis. The gentleman yields back. Now I am  
484 going to recognize the witnesses here today, or at least  
485 introduce them.

486           We appreciate you being here. Thank you so much for the  
487 sacrifice you are making, and thank you for doing what you  
488 know best, protecting our kids. And that is why we are here  
489 today.

490           First is Ms. Yiota Souras, chief legal officer, National  
491 Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

492           Thanks for being here, ma'am. I appreciate it so much.

493           Ms. Rebecca Kelly Slaughter, former commissioner,  
494 Federal Trade Commission.

495           Thanks for your appearance today.

496           Ms. Dawn Hawkins, senior advisor, National Center on  
497 Sexual Exploitation.

498           Thank you again for being here today. Thanks for your  
499 bravery.

500           And Ms. Clare Morell, Fellow, Ethics and Public Policy  
501 Center.

502           Thank you again for being here. So what I am going to  
503 do now is I will recognize our first witness, Ms. Souras.

504           You are recognized, ma'am, for your five minutes of  
505 testimony.

506           \*Ms. Souras. Thank you.

507           \*Mr. Bilirakis. Thank you.

508           [Pause.]

509           \*Ms. Souras. Technical issue, thank you.

510

511 STATEMENT OF YIOTA SOURAS, CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER, NATIONAL  
512 CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN; THE HON. REBECCA  
513 KELLY SLAUGHTER, FORMER COMMISSIONER, FEDERAL TRADE  
514 COMMISSION; DAWN HAWKINS, SENIOR ADVISOR, NATIONAL CENTER ON  
515 SEXUAL EXPLOITATION; AND CLARE MORELL, FELLOW, ETHICS AND  
516 PUBLIC POLICY CENTER

517

518 STATEMENT OF YIOTA SOURAS

519

520 \*Ms. Souras. Good morning, Chairman Bilirakis, Ranking  
521 Member Schakowsky \_

522 \*Mr. Bilirakis. Good morning.

523 \*Ms. Souras. \_ and members of the subcommittee. My  
524 name is Yiota Souras, and I am the chief legal officer for  
525 the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, or  
526 NCMEC.

527 For over 40 years NCMEC has operated as a non-profit  
528 organization to help find missing children, reduce child  
529 sexual exploitation, and prevent child victimization. I am  
530 honored to be here today to share NCMEC's perspective on the  
531 escalating threats to child safety online.

532 Congress has designated NCMEC to operate 16 programs  
533 relating to our mission. In many cases we are the first call  
534 a parent or law enforcement makes when a child goes missing  
535 or has been exploited. As a clearinghouse, we support law

536 enforcement in identifying, locating, and recovering child  
537 victims, we provide child safety education to schools and  
538 communities, and we support victims and families experiencing  
539 the trauma of a missing or exploited child.

540 Over the past 27 years we have handled hundreds of  
541 millions of reports relating to child pornography or, as it  
542 is more appropriately referred to, child sexual abuse  
543 material or CSAM. Based on our work we know that dangers to  
544 children online are expanding and severity, complexity, and  
545 scope. Today we are witnessing new threats to children  
546 online, including the use of generative artificial  
547 intelligence to exploit children and increases in children  
548 being victimized through online enticement and financial  
549 sextortion.

550 We need bipartisan, bicameral congressional action to  
551 address these new threats. We must provide more remedies to  
552 child victims, new tools for law enforcement, and enforceable  
553 regulations that incentivize online platforms to better  
554 detect, report, and remove child sexual exploitation.

555 While the threats are formidable, Congress has a real  
556 opportunity this term to confront the realities of child  
557 sexual exploitation and move legislation to protect children.  
558 NCMEC supports many of the legislative initiatives pending  
559 this term, including the following

560 The TAKE IT DOWN Act has broad bipartisan support and

561 will meaningfully impact child safety. NCMEC is encouraged  
562 by today's hearing, and urges the committee to pass this  
563 bill.

564 Law enforcement has informed NCMEC that CyberTipline  
565 reports containing nude or sexually exploitative images of a  
566 child often cannot be pursued because they do not constitute  
567 CSAM. This prevents law enforcement from intervening at the  
568 earliest indication that a child is being exploited, which is  
569 especially critical when a child is being enticed or  
570 sextorted. This legal gap leaves children at risk. TAKE IT  
571 DOWN closes this gap by criminalizing the knowing publication  
572 of these images, whether real or created by nudify apps or AI  
573 technology.

574 For child survivors, a primary goal is to ensure their  
575 images are taken down and not accessible online. The TAKE IT  
576 DOWN Act will achieve this by establishing a notice and  
577 removal requirement for online platforms.

578 Another important tool to safeguard children online is  
579 age gating enforced by robust age assurance measures. NCMEC  
580 is aware of debates regarding whether online platforms or  
581 device and app store providers should be responsible. NCMEC  
582 believes that the best approach is an all-of-the-above  
583 strategy. We support solutions that enforce shared  
584 responsibility between online platforms and device and app  
585 store providers, while ensuring parents have the necessary

586 tools to help protect their children. Online platforms,  
587 device, and app store providers and parents cannot on their  
588 own effectively protect children. Each must be involved to  
589 ensure children have safe online experiences.

590 NCMEC also strongly supports the right of a child victim  
591 to have their day in court and bring a civil lawsuit against  
592 all parties, including online platforms that host or  
593 facilitate their abuse. Currently, a child victimized by the  
594 endless recirculation of CSAM in which they are depicted has  
595 no civil recourse against an online platform. NCMEC  
596 recognizes the nuance required to legislate this private  
597 right of action. We remain available to assist the committee  
598 in crafting a remedy for as many children as possible that  
599 also can garner sufficient support to pass Congress.

600 Finally, we must update the CyberTipline reporting  
601 process. Under current law there are no requirements for  
602 what information an online platform must include in  
603 CyberTipline reports. This too often leads to companies  
604 submitting incomplete reports that law enforcement cannot  
605 investigate. Too many reports are submitted without basic  
606 information, including the identity and location of the  
607 victim and offender and, in some cases, even the actual  
608 content being reported. Platforms must be required to report  
609 specific information to the CyberTipline and to produce  
610 annual transparency reports.

611           In closing, thank you again for the opportunity to  
612 appear before this subcommittee. NCMEC encourages Congress  
613 to pass the TAKE IT DOWN Act and move legislation that holds  
614 online platforms accountable, ensures technology does not  
615 overtake child protection laws, and requires the online  
616 community to share responsibility. Like you, NCMEC believes  
617 that every child deserves a safe childhood.

618           Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

619           [The prepared statement of Ms. Souras follows:]

620

621           \*\*\*\*\*COMMITTEE INSERT\*\*\*\*\*

622

623           \*Mr. Bilirakis. I thank you for your testimony, and we  
624 are going to pass that TAKE IT DOWN Act, believe me.

625           Next we have Ms. Slaughter. You are recognized for five  
626 minutes for your testimony.

627

628 STATEMENT OF REBECCA KELLY SLAUGHTER

629

630           \*Ms. Slaughter. Thank you. Chairmen Guthrie and  
631 Bilirakis, Ranking Members Pallone and Schakowsky, and  
632 members of the subcommittee, good morning. I am Rebecca  
633 Kelly Slaughter. I am a mother of four, and I have been  
634 honored to serve as FTC commissioner for nearly seven years.  
635 In fact, it was exactly seven years ago on this date that  
636 President Trump first announced my nomination. Thank you for  
637 inviting me to testify about the FTC's vital consumer  
638 protection work involving online harms and to explain how  
639 that work is undermined by President's attempt to fire me and  
640 Commissioner Bedoya in direct violation of the FTC Act and  
641 binding Supreme Court precedent.

642           Congress created the FTC to protect Americans from  
643 unfair methods of competition and unfair and deceptive  
644 business practices. Congress structured the FTC as a  
645 bipartisan, five-member board whose members may be removed  
646 only for cause. The FTC's structure emphasizes  
647 accountability to you, the people's representatives, and it  
648 shields the FTC from undue influence or political  
649 interference so that we can protect American children,  
650 consumers, workers, and honest businesses without fear or  
651 favor.

652           In my time at the FTC I have given my all to our vital

653 mission, seeking to build bipartisan consensus around issues  
654 such as children's privacy, the right to repair, and  
655 affordable medicine. Commissioner Bedoya has worked just as  
656 hard. Yet last week we became the first FTC commissioners  
657 any president has purported to fire since FDR unlawfully  
658 removed Commissioner Humphrey in 1933. The Supreme Court  
659 unanimously rejected that move, and its decision has served  
660 as the foundation of independence not only at the FTC, but  
661 also at many other multi-member agencies such as the Federal  
662 Reserve.

663         So why did the President try to fire us last week? I  
664 can only assume that the President or his advisers are afraid  
665 of our voices. My colleague, Chairman Ferguson, a  
666 Republican, is running the FTC, and has his key staff in  
667 place. As a minority commissioner, my vote may not change  
668 the outcome of any particular matter, but I can provide  
669 accountability before Congress and the public. Removing me  
670 and Commissioner Bedoya means that we will all remain in the  
671 dark if the FTC veers off course, or if the President orders  
672 Chairman Ferguson to treat the most powerful companies in the  
673 world like the big tech firms whose CEOs flanked the  
674 President at his inauguration with kid gloves.

675         The illegal firings also sent a clear message to the  
676 FTC's majority commissioners: you now work under the shadow  
677 of arbitrary removal by the President.

678           Today's oligarchs have surely noticed that it is not the  
679 independent experts at the FTC or the courts who will decide  
680 their fate, but the President himself. And I fear what  
681 corporate lawbreakers will get away with. Commissioner  
682 Bedoya and I will be challenging our illegal removals. We  
683 are working to vindicate the law Congress passed because we  
684 care deeply about the honesty and the integrity of the FTC's  
685 work and how it affects the American people.

686           I need to take a moment to address the FTC staff  
687 directly.

688           Thank you. I see you. I see your hard work. Keep it  
689 up. I deeply appreciate it. Take care of each other and do  
690 every day what you do best, the right thing in the right way  
691 for the right reasons. We will see you soon.

692           Turning specifically to the world of online harms, the  
693 FTC has done extraordinary work, much of it on a bipartisan  
694 basis, especially to combat harms to children. But I worry  
695 about the future of that work. In my written testimony I  
696 describe four recent actions that may now be imperiled,  
697 including protecting kids from AI chatbots, updating  
698 children's privacy rules, ending video games' unfair practice  
699 of hooking kids on loot boxes, and setting social media  
700 services privacy practices. I have the same concern about  
701 the entirety of the FTC's work.

702           There is one other matter that I worry about most

703 immediately that I know is of concern to this committee. The  
704 FTC staff are currently alleging that the three big pharmacy  
705 middlemen, the PBMs, illegally inflated the price of insulin.  
706 That case is pending before the Commission's administrative  
707 court. Aside from myself and Commissioner Bedoya, no other  
708 sitting commissioner can participate in that case. I  
709 honestly don't know what will happen next.

710         On these pressing issues and others the presence of  
711 minority commissioners at the FTC lets us provide  
712 transparency into our work, which is essential for  
713 accountability. As Chairman Ferguson said recently, it is  
714 helpful for markets, for courts, for litigants, for  
715 government transparency to have people in the other party  
716 pointing out abuses and dissents. Whether it is a Republican  
717 or a Democrat in the White House, we will all be worse off  
718 without those voices.

719         Since President Trump first appointed me to the FTC, I  
720 have fostered collaborative dialog and compromise with each  
721 of my Republican colleagues. Commissioner Bedoya and I each  
722 swore an oath to serve the American people and the  
723 Constitution, and we will stand by these oaths. I believe  
724 the courts will vindicate our right to do our jobs. Thank  
725 you.

726

727

728 [The prepared statement of Ms. Slaughter follows:]

729

730 \*\*\*\*\*COMMITTEE INSERT\*\*\*\*\*

731

732           \*Mr. Bilirakis. Thank you, Ms. Slaughter.

733           Next I will call Ms. Hawkins for her \_ you are

734 recognized for your five minutes of testimony. Thank you

735 again for \_

736

737 STATEMENT OF DAWN HAWKINS

738

739 \*Ms. Hawkins. Thank you, Chairmen Guthrie and  
740 Bilirakis. Thank you, Ranking Members Pallone and Mrs.  
741 Schakowsky. I am grateful to be here among you. I am Dawn  
742 Hawkins with the National Center on Sexual Exploitation, a  
743 non-partisan non-profit with the Law Center prosecuting  
744 landmark cases against tech giants. I have spent 16 years  
745 fighting for human dignity. And as a mother of five, like  
746 millions of parents, this fight is deeply personal.

747 Tech companies built empires on our kids' backs. They  
748 have grown more profitable and less accountable. Meanwhile,  
749 since 2019, Congress has held 23 hearings but has passed  
750 nothing to prevent harm. This can be the Congress that  
751 finally says our kids deserve better.

752 It has been nearly 30 years since Congress passed laws  
753 to protect kids online. The Communications Decency Act,  
754 meant to help platforms remove sexually explicit content, has  
755 been distorted into near-total immunity, even for platforms  
756 that profit from child sexual abuse material. COPPA, meant  
757 to shield kids under 13 from greedy advertisers, has become a  
758 loophole. At 13 companies stop protecting youth, right when  
759 risks skyrocket. And now Congress is considering a 2.0  
760 version that still locks parents out of supporting the age  
761 group most targeted by predators: young teens.

762           That is how we got here: an Internet policy built for  
763 profit, not protection. We must change the legal and  
764 economic incentives so another generation of children are not  
765 sacrificed. I want our youth to thrive online, but right now  
766 this digital world is a danger zone. And it is not by  
767 accident; it is by design. If I, who live and breathe this  
768 work, can't protect my kids from the loopholes, how can other  
769 parents? And yet big tech tells us just monitor better,  
770 educate more, keep your kids offline. But how dare they?  
771 Parents aren't failing; the system is failing us.

772           When Apple's parental controls take 20 steps to set up,  
773 when Roblox says strangers can't contact your child but  
774 predators still reach them, when Snap Map shares kids' real-  
775 time location and YouTube Kids serve sexualized or violent  
776 content through autoplay, parents aren't just left in the  
777 dark; we're handed broken flashlights and told to find our  
778 way.

779           Meanwhile, companies hide behind half-baked tools and PR  
780 campaigns, but it is an illusion. In the Massachusetts  
781 TikTok case, internal documents show that their reset button  
782 designed to help teens escape harmful algorithms promoting  
783 suicide, eating disorders, and pornography was deliberately  
784 hard to use and reset after just 200 videos. That is only 10  
785 minutes of scrolling.

786           Let me tell you what is really happening. A teen boy is

787 sextorted after one image. Within hours he spirals into  
788 despair and he takes his own life. We have heard about Eli,  
789 but there are 41 others that I know about. His parents will  
790 never hear \_ their parents will never hear their laugh again  
791 because a predator reached them through the screen, and  
792 Instagram did nothing about it.

793 In another case, a girl rejects a boy at school and he  
794 retaliates by creating AI-generated CSAM that looked just  
795 like her, and he uploads it to pornography websites, and she  
796 is still fighting to get them taken down. But apps that  
797 enable that kind of abuse are in the app stores rated safe  
798 for four-year-olds.

799 Another boy is targeted on Snapchat, tricked into  
800 creating CSAM. His abuse is uploaded to Twitter, viewed  
801 160,000 times. Even after submitting proof that he was just  
802 a young teenage boy, Twitter refused to take it down. And  
803 when sued, Twitter \_ now X \_ argued that profiting from this  
804 abuse alongside sex traffickers is protected under CDA 230.  
805 Our lawyers are litigating this case right now.

806 These stories are horrific, but not rare. Apple and  
807 Google allow children \_ the front door to all of this is the  
808 app stores. Apple and Google allow children to silently sign  
809 contracts that give apps access to their camera, contracts,  
810 and location, yet their entire parental control system is  
811 based on age ratings. They label nudifying tools, chat

812 roulette apps, and strip club simulators as safe for nine-  
813 year-olds.

814 We have to act. Congress has the tools and we have  
815 bipartisan solutions.

816 Like car safety, online protection requires layers:  
817 seatbelts, airbags, and speed limits. Five steps.

818 We need to reform CDA 230 so platforms can't hide behind  
819 immunity.

820 Two, pass the App Store Accountability Act to empower  
821 parents before harm occurs with real ratings and verified  
822 parental consent.

823 Three, enact the Kids Online Safety Act to require  
824 platforms to design with well-being, not addiction, in mind.

825 Four, advance the TAKE IT DOWN, PROTECT, NO FAKES, and  
826 DEFIANCE Act.

827 And five don't cement the myth that teens become digital  
828 adults at age 13, as the current COPPA 2.0 would do.

829 Predators are thriving and children are dying. It  
830 should never again be easier to groom a child than to protect  
831 one. Please don't wait. Thank you.

832 [The prepared statement of Ms. Hawkins follows:]

833

834 \*\*\*\*\*COMMITTEE INSERT\*\*\*\*\*

835

836           \*Mr. Bilirakis. I want to thank you for the powerful  
837 testimony. We appreciate it so very much, and we hear you.  
838 Thank you.

839           Next we have Ms. Morell. You are recognized for five  
840 minutes. Thank you.

841

842 STATEMENT OF CLARE MORELL

843

844 \*Ms. Morell. Good morning, Chairman Guthrie, Chairman  
845 Bilirakis, Ranking Member Pallone, Ranking Member Schakowsky,  
846 and members of the subcommittee. My name is Clare Morell,  
847 and I am a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center,  
848 where I direct our technology and human flourishing project.

849 Over the last several years I have put out reports and  
850 model legislation for protecting kids online, now implemented  
851 in many states. I am also the mom of three and author of the  
852 forthcoming book, "The Tech Exit: A Practical Guide to  
853 Freeing Kids and Teens From Smartphones," which will be  
854 published this June.

855 I am here today because parents critically need better  
856 laws to back them up. If you take one thing away from my  
857 testimony today, let it be this: America's families need  
858 immediate action from Congress.

859 Tech companies want us to believe no more legislation is  
860 necessary. They have worked to convince us that if parents  
861 just enable time limits and parental controls, children will  
862 be safe. But leaving it up to parents is failing America's  
863 children. Time limits do nothing to address the underlying  
864 addictive design of these technologies. Their products  
865 hijack human brain vulnerabilities, especially of developing  
866 brains, and a brain exposed frequently to social media

867 resembles a brain hooked on the most highly addictive drugs.  
868 Even if a child is only on social media for 15 minutes a day,  
869 the constant craving it creates means kids are mentally  
870 consumed by what is happening on the app, even when they  
871 aren't using it. Kids take the virtual world with them long  
872 after they leave it.

873         Social media's parental controls are also supposed to  
874 protect teens from bad actors and content, but they really  
875 only allow parents to set time limits and manage certain  
876 settings. They give parents no oversight of a child's feed  
877 or messages. Plus, the teen has to accept the parents'  
878 supervision and can cancel it at any time. In what sense is  
879 that a control?

880         Most of the popular apps like Snapchat, TikTok, and  
881 Discord also block access to third-party controls or filters  
882 that a parent may purchase, which means when a child can get  
883 to Pornhub inside of Snapchat in just five clicks without  
884 ever leaving the app, a parent would never know.

885         The ineffectiveness of filters and controls has ushered  
886 in a tidal wave of online pornography exposure among  
887 children. The average age of first exposure is now 12. And  
888 kids are not just seeing it. ER nurses increasingly see  
889 children sexually assaulting each other.

890         America's children are suffering. Parents are  
891 exasperated. They can't do it alone.

892           Recently, a mom found me after an event and with tears  
893 in her eyes said, "We did everything right. We had all the  
894 controls on. We had no idea our daughter got a burner phone  
895 and got sucked into pornography and dark erotic places on  
896 social media.'" Leaving it to parents will never work when  
897 there is zero parental involvement required whatsoever in the  
898 creation of a social media account, or in setting up a  
899 device, or in downloading apps.

900           Lastly, parents on their own can't protect kids from the  
901 collective harms caused by digital technologies. Even if a  
902 few teens use social media in a school or organization, it  
903 affects the entire cohort of young people, including those  
904 who don't use it at all. Time limits and parental controls  
905 can't change these negative group effects, nor can they  
906 protect children from seeing porn or beheading videos on  
907 another child's unprotected device.

908           These are collective action problems. They require  
909 policy solutions. So what should Congress do? I offer a few  
910 suggestions.

911           First, restrict social media out of childhood. Congress  
912 should age-restrict social media to 16 or 18 years old, just  
913 as it has age-restricted other addictive and unsafe products  
914 for kids like alcohol or tobacco.

915           Two, require app store age verification and parental  
916 consent like the App Store Accountability Act. Congress

917 should pass a law requiring app stores to verify the age of  
918 each user and, for minor users, require parental consent for  
919 each app download or in-app purchase.

920 Three, pass a Federal age verification law for  
921 pornography websites like the SCREEN Act. Nineteen states  
922 have now done so, but we need protection nationwide. Put the  
923 onus back where it belongs: on the porn sites, rather than  
924 parents.

925 Four, open up greater legal liability for online  
926 platforms by reforming section 230 and by further empowering  
927 existing authorities like the Federal Trade Commission and  
928 states attorney general with tools like greater product  
929 design liabilities for platforms.

930 And five, ensure there is legal accountability for AI so  
931 that companies will be compelled to make their products safe  
932 or otherwise pay the costs. Generative AI products should  
933 not receive section 230 immunity.

934 As a mother of three and on behalf of all parents across  
935 America, we need your help. Thank you for your time, and I  
936 look forward to your questions.

937 [The prepared statement of Ms. Morell follows:]

938

939 \*\*\*\*\*COMMITTEE INSERT\*\*\*\*\*

940

941           \*Mr. Bilirakis. Thank you so very much. I want to  
942 thank the entire panel for their testimony today, and I want  
943 to thank the audience for being here today, the parents and  
944 the child advocates and the children. You really do make a  
945 difference.

946           All right. I am going to go ahead and start with \_  
947 yield to myself for five minutes for questioning, and I am  
948 going to start with Ms. Souras.

949           Thank you again for being here today, and for all the  
950 work you and your colleagues at NCMEC do. I have no doubt  
951 your work is directly responsible for saving the lives of  
952 countless children. We appreciate you so much.

953           Heartbreakingly, our country is plagued with criminals  
954 who search for loopholes to terrorize Americans with non-  
955 consensual, intimate images. This must stop. The Senate  
956 recently passed the TAKE IT DOWN Act targeting the abhorrent  
957 criminals who engage in this practice. How will TAKE IT DOWN  
958 protect children from these predators and give Americans the  
959 tools to remove it from online? Please.

960           \*Ms. Souras. Thank you, Chairman Bilirakis, for the  
961 question.

962           I highlighted two of the most important factors of TAKE  
963 IT DOWN in my written testimony in great detail, but there  
964 are really two primary ways that TAKE IT DOWN will provide  
965 additional remedies to protect children online, both from

966 real nude, sexually exploitive images, and also the AI-  
967 generated images, as well.

968         So firstly, there is currently a legal gap that makes it  
969 very difficult for law enforcement to investigate and for  
970 prosecutors to pursue cases that involve nude or sexually  
971 exploitative images of a child that do not meet the legal  
972 definition of child pornography. The legal definition of  
973 child pornography requires sexually explicit conduct, sexual  
974 intercourse, and other very extreme forms of sexual  
975 interaction. But nude and sexually exploitative images often  
976 fall short of that definition. So crucially, TAKE IT DOWN  
977 will simply criminalize those images that currently law  
978 enforcement is struggling to find the proper avenue to  
979 investigate and pursue.

980         In addition to filling that legal gap, as we talked  
981 about, the TAKE IT DOWN bill will create a formal mechanism  
982 for notice and takedown \_ or notice and removal, as it is  
983 sometimes referred to. At NCMEC we hear from survivors that  
984 one of the core things that they are seeking is just to  
985 ensure their images aren't online anymore, to ensure that  
986 they can have control over those images when they do get  
987 circulated again. So TAKE IT DOWN will create, really, a  
988 process for a victim or somebody who is working closely with  
989 that victim to alert social media, an online platform when a  
990 child's image is online, and then it will create a process by

991 which that social media platform has to be on notice and  
992 remove that content within a certain period of days.

993 \*Mr. Bilirakis. Thank you so much.

994 Next, Ms. Hawkins, I was reading through your testimony.  
995 And I must say, as a father myself, and a grandfather, I  
996 really appreciate your comments on the difficulties parents  
997 face when trying to protect their children online. Your  
998 testimony highlights many options to protect children online,  
999 including establishing protections in KOSA, giving parents  
1000 more control over what applications are downloaded from app  
1001 stores, and updating rules related to minors' personal  
1002 information, to name just a few.

1003 So the question is, why is it important for Congress to  
1004 legislate on multiple fronts, as opposed to move one bill  
1005 that tackles only one of these particular issues?

1006 \*Ms. Hawkins. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for  
1007 the question.

1008 You are absolutely right. We wouldn't protect cars \_  
1009 kids in cars with just seatbelts. We need airbags and car  
1010 seats and crash-resistant features because kids' safety  
1011 deserves layers. And the same thing happens for children  
1012 online. These bills all tackle different entry points for  
1013 harm such as design flaws, parental disempowerment, image-  
1014 based sexual abuse, and predatory contracts. Together they  
1015 can form a net of protection, but alone they leave gaps and

1016 our children fall through.

1017           \*Mr. Bilirakis. Thank you so very much. Next I am  
1018 going to go ahead and ask this question quickly because I  
1019 want to stick to the five minutes.

1020           Parents need more tools and children need more  
1021 safeguards. So this is for Ms. Morell. What tools and  
1022 safeguards should exist online to protect children?

1023           I know you have brought this up, obviously, but do you  
1024 want to elaborate briefly? Thank you.

1025           \*Ms. Morell. Yes, thank you for the question, and I  
1026 know we are short on time.

1027           I would just say, as Ms. Hawkins said, we need multiple  
1028 layers. I think a critical tool is just actual parental  
1029 involvement in the creation of a social media account or in  
1030 downloading apps. Right now parents are not part of that  
1031 process. And so even if a parent wants their child off  
1032 social media, a child can easily enter their birth date,  
1033 agree to a whole host of terms and conditions, enter a  
1034 contract with a tech company, all without a parent's  
1035 knowledge. And so the critical tools I think we need are  
1036 putting parents back in the driver's seat of their kids  
1037 online experiences.

1038           \*Mr. Bilirakis. Very good. Thank you very much.

1039           And now I will yield five minutes to the ranking member  
1040 of the subcommittee, Ms. Schakowsky.

1041           \*Ms. Schakowsky. I take great pride in having been a  
1042 consumer protection leader for years and years in the state  
1043 legislature and here now in the Congress. But one of the  
1044 things that has been such a help is to have the Federal Trade  
1045 Commission to be the cop on the beat, to make sure that these  
1046 things are happening.

1047           If this were to go through as the President wanted it \_  
1048 which would be illegal, so I am hoping that you will take  
1049 this to court \_ what would the \_ how would this affect  
1050 consumers and all the people who need the work that you do?  
1051 If you could, tell me that. Thank you.

1052           \*Ms. Slaughter. Thank you. Yes, you are right. The  
1053 FTC does very vital consumer protection work including  
1054 advocacy, including getting money back to people who have  
1055 been harmed. In fact, last year the FTC returned \$337  
1056 million back into the pockets of people who had it wrongfully  
1057 taken from them, from frauds and scams. And it does that on  
1058 a bipartisan basis through changes in administration, through  
1059 transitions. That bipartisan structure of the FTC that  
1060 Congress created provides enormous value to the people that  
1061 we serve \_ the children, the parents, the consumers, the  
1062 workers, the honest businesses \_ because it provides  
1063 continuity and credibility in our work.

1064           Let me give you a couple of examples. There are ways in  
1065 which the commissioners come together and find consensus on

1066 important cases and important matters that protect consumers.  
1067 So for example, when we are thinking about children, we  
1068 brought a case against Epic, where we got \$500 million in  
1069 penalties for Epic \_ from Epic for how they treated children  
1070 through Fortnite, including how kids were paying \_ tricked  
1071 into paying for games.

1072 And also, importantly to the witnesses in this  
1073 subcommittee, allowing strangers to have access to children  
1074 to communicate through that online game, that was an  
1075 important bipartisan effort of the committee. My former  
1076 colleague, Commissioner Wilson, wrote a very powerful  
1077 concurrence in that case about that work related to children  
1078 in particular.

1079 Sometimes we don't find consensus, and that is also  
1080 important for the Commission because we can help provide  
1081 accountability and transparency to Congress and to the public  
1082 about other ways things could be done, maybe more relief that  
1083 was left on the table or where commissioners think there was  
1084 an overreach by the Commission. That is an \_ also an  
1085 important thing to highlight.

1086 So I think the structure of the FTC that Congress  
1087 created drives towards bipartisan consensus, continuity,  
1088 credibility, and provides accountability and transparency  
1089 even where that consensus isn't reached. And all of that  
1090 redounds to the benefit of the people that we serve.

1091           \*Ms. Schakowsky. So what you are saying, though, is  
1092 that because of the ability of the Federal Trade Commission,  
1093 things really can happen. I mean, there are laws that make  
1094 it safer for our kids and our consumers.

1095           \*Ms. Slaughter. Yes, that is exactly right. The  
1096 Federal Trade Commission administers the Federal Trade  
1097 Commission Act, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act,  
1098 and various other laws that are designed by Congress to  
1099 protect children, to protect consumers. And we want that  
1100 administration to be done without fear or favor, impartially,  
1101 based on the facts and the law in front of the Commission,  
1102 not based on fear of removal for failure to do a favor for a  
1103 political donor or one of the big tech companies that don't  
1104 particularly care for our aggressive enforcement approach.

1105           \*Ms. Schakowsky. Well, I want to thank you,  
1106 Congresswoman Slaughter. Congresswoman? No, that is not  
1107 correct. For the work that you do. And let us hope that the  
1108 courts will decide that the Federal Trade Commission is the  
1109 appropriate way that we protect our consumers. And you do it  
1110 in a bipartisan way, except that right now the Democrats have  
1111 been excluded from this, so we have to fight back. Thank you  
1112 very much.

1113           And I yield back.

1114           \*Mr. Bilirakis. I thank the gentlelady. And next we  
1115 have \_ we are going to recognize the chairman of the full

1116 committee, Mr. Guthrie from the great state of Kentucky, for  
1117 his five minutes of questioning.

1118 \*The Chair. Thanks, and I appreciate the ranking member  
1119 saying "Congresswoman Slaughter," because she was a great  
1120 lady. She represented upstate New York, but you could tell  
1121 from her accent she was from Appalachia, Kentucky, couldn't  
1122 you? So thanks for that.

1123 You know, getting back to, as you mentioned \_ thanks,  
1124 Ms. Hawkins, for mentioning Eli. And you look at \_ as a  
1125 parent and a grandparent now, I obviously have  
1126 responsibilities and roles. But what you \_ we saw with Eli  
1127 was they think it was just a one-time, as you mentioned \_  
1128 into one evening, it happened in one evening. And so we all  
1129 need to be alert, but you can't be alert 100 percent of every  
1130 second of the day, 100 percent of the time. So it is  
1131 important that we have these new laws in place. And, you  
1132 know, Eli was mentioned \_ he was a twin, so he was a preemie.  
1133 And I had mentioned some of the things he had to live with in  
1134 life. And so I didn't mention that, you know, his sister is  
1135 now spending the first two weeks of her 16 years on Earth  
1136 without him. So if you think about that, just all the pain  
1137 that this has caused.

1138 And, you know, just \_ it is hard to imagine what  
1139 families have gone through. And so Ms. Souras and Ms.  
1140 Hawkins, would you just share how the TAKE IT DOWN Act would

1141 help us hold these people responsible?

1142 Other laws \_ you said, KOSA, TAKE IT DOWN Act  
1143 particularly would hold these people responsible. I will  
1144 start with Ms. Souras, if you would.

1145 \*Ms. Souras. Thank you, Chairman Guthrie.

1146 Absolutely, TAKE IT DOWN, as I described earlier, is  
1147 really going to fill for children this crucial legal gap that  
1148 exists right now. I think people often think that, you know,  
1149 any image of a child that may be exploitative in some way,  
1150 that may include some nudity automatically is child  
1151 pornography. And under the law that is actually not  
1152 accurate. Child pornography is a very severe, extreme form  
1153 of sexual exploitation. It requires sexually explicit  
1154 conduct.

1155 But we see now this proliferation, especially in  
1156 enticement cases and financial sextortion cases, as you  
1157 mentioned with your constituent, and absolutely with AI-  
1158 generated imagery we see nude and sexually exploitative  
1159 imagery proliferating more, and there simply aren't legal  
1160 avenues to address this appropriately. So we need TAKE IT  
1161 DOWN. We need to fill that legal gap. We need to give law  
1162 enforcement tools and prosecutors tools so that they can  
1163 intervene at the earliest possible moment that a child is  
1164 being enticed or sextorted or abused online, and they can  
1165 prevent further abuse.

1166           \*The Chair. Thank you.

1167           Ms. Hawkins?

1168           \*Ms. Hawkins. And I will add to that the TAKE IT DOWN  
1169 Act would bring significant hope to individuals like Eli or  
1170 Gavin Guffey, Mr. Fry in South Carolina.

1171           A lot of these youth feel hopeless because we are told  
1172 again and again if you make a mistake, if you take a photo of  
1173 yourself, if you share it online and it gets out there, there  
1174 is nothing that you can do. And these predators, they just  
1175 \_ that is what they use, that kind of desperation. And this  
1176 would give law enforcement and these youth \_ and adults,  
1177 frankly, too, hope that we can get \_ we could do something  
1178 about it, and we can take this kind of abuse content down.

1179           \*The Chair. Okay. Ms. Morell, do you have a comment on  
1180 that, as well?

1181           \*Ms. Morell. I would agree. I would agree that I think  
1182 I am really concerned about the threats of AI as the kind of  
1183 next wave of threats to our kids online, and I think that we  
1184 need solutions that are going to make it really clear that  
1185 there will be consequences if AI products are used to harm  
1186 kids.

1187           \*The Chair. Okay. So \_ and also the three of you  
1188 again, so it requires websites and social media platforms,  
1189 the TAKE IT DOWN Act, to remove non-consensual intimate  
1190 images within 48 hours of requests, finally giving survivors

1191 and their families \_ giving them a new avenue for recourse.

1192 As an advocate who works with many of these families,  
1193 can you speak to why providing new notice and take-down tools  
1194 are so critical?

1195 Do you want to start, Ms. Souras?

1196 \*Ms. Souras. Absolutely. Thank you.

1197 As I mentioned earlier, for many survivors it is really  
1198 not about criminal remedies, it is not about prosecuting  
1199 somebody, it is not about going to court with their own civil  
1200 lawsuit. It is simply about making sure those images do not  
1201 continue to circulate, are not online. So notice and take-  
1202 down programs \_ NCMEC operates one. Obviously, we are a non-  
1203 profit. It is a voluntary initiative that we operate.  
1204 Social media platforms can comply with our request or not  
1205 when we serve a notice and take-down on a company \_

1206 \*The Chair. Do you have instances of giving a take-down  
1207 notice and being told no?

1208 \*Ms. Souras. We have, actually, on our website a list  
1209 of companies that are not responsive or take a \_ an  
1210 unacceptably long time to respond.

1211 \*The Chair. So that is publicly available. That is  
1212 good.

1213 \*Ms. Souras. Absolutely. I am happy to provide those  
1214 details after the hearing.

1215 But what the notice and take-down provision within TAKE

1216 IT DOWN Act does is it codifies that. So it provides some  
1217 teeth. It provides a formal process. It requires and puts  
1218 companies on notice that they must actually engage.

1219 \*The Chair. Ms. Hawkins?

1220 \*Ms. Hawkins. We have also requested our attorneys that  
1221 content be removed and the companies ignore. Google, for  
1222 example, told us that a victim of sex trafficking \_ her  
1223 trafficker is in prison \_ that there were no signs of  
1224 coercion in the material, so they wouldn't remove it.

1225 You know, we need the TAKE IT DOWN Act because otherwise  
1226 this content just proliferates more and more. I am a victim  
1227 myself of image-based sexual abuse. Now that my kids are  
1228 about to get online, I live in absolute fear about what my  
1229 kids are going to see about me.

1230 \*The Chair. Thank you. Thank you for showing \_ my time  
1231 is up, but for the importance of this. Thank you.

1232 I yield back.

1233 \*Mr. Bilirakis. I thank the chairman. Thank you. The  
1234 gentleman yields back. Now I recognize the ranking member of  
1235 the full committee, Mr. Pallone, for his five minutes of  
1236 questioning.

1237 \*Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1238 As I have said, President Trump's attempted illegal  
1239 firings of the Democratic FTC commissioners is not only a  
1240 blatant violation of the law, but also puts American

1241 consumers in danger of kneecapping the very agencies designed  
1242 by Congress to protect all of us from unfair and deceptive  
1243 business practices and unfair methods of competition.

1244         And I have to say again that I am disappointed that my  
1245 Republican colleagues, including those on this committee,  
1246 have remained silent as the President threatens the  
1247 independence of this agency. And Republicans on this  
1248 committee have routinely said that they care deeply about  
1249 protecting all people, and especially our kids, from online  
1250 harm. I heard you all say that today. But now you remain  
1251 silent as the agency that protects consumers is threatened.

1252         And make no mistake, this is just the beginning.  
1253 President Trump has sent a clear message that he is willing  
1254 to ignore the rule of law and Supreme Court precedent to  
1255 benefit himself and his billionaire buddies. So Mr.  
1256 Chairman, I would like to ask \_ oh, is he not \_ Chairman  
1257 Guthrie is not here, right? No.

1258         Let me ask Chairman Bilirakis if \_ are you planning on  
1259 holding an oversight hearing or any kind of hearing to demand  
1260 answers from the Trump Administration about this illegal  
1261 action by the President with regard to the FTC commissioners  
1262 that I believe harms consumers and harm [sic] our children,  
1263 are you planning on any kind of hearing on that issue, if you  
1264 will?

1265         \*Mr. Bilirakis. I can \_ yes, I don't have \_ I have to

1266 speak with the full committee chair, and I would be happy to  
1267 discuss it with you, as well. The three of us can get  
1268 together. As a matter of fact, we can even talk to the  
1269 ranking member of committee, the subcommittee. So, yes, we  
1270 can have those discussions.

1271       \*Mr. Pallone. All right, I appreciate that. I am  
1272 concerned that, as President Trump escalates his attacks on  
1273 our democracy and gleefully destroys the institutions created  
1274 by Congress to benefit all Americans, I just wonder if there  
1275 is any action that President Trump could take that will  
1276 result in an oversight hearing on this committee, because I  
1277 do believe that part of this committee's responsibility is to  
1278 review actions taken by the President, regardless of the fact  
1279 that he is a Republican. And the illegal attempted firing of  
1280 Commissioners Slaughter and Bedoya, I think, is just the  
1281 beginning. And if my Republican colleagues refuse to speak  
1282 out, they are going to show everyone that they are willing to  
1283 put the profits of big tech billionaires ahead of kids'  
1284 online safety.

1285       So let me go to Commissioner Slaughter. In your view,  
1286 if this illegal move is allowed to stand, is anything  
1287 stopping President Trump from removing any sitting  
1288 commissioner, including those from the Republican Party, for  
1289 launching investigations he does not agree with or refusing  
1290 to dismiss cases against his crooked big tech buddies?

1291 I know you got into this a little in your opening, but  
1292 you got two minutes if \_ you know, take the two minutes if  
1293 you can, to, you know, to talk more about it, if you will.

1294 \*Ms. Slaughter. Thank you, sir. You are correct. The  
1295 same constitutional and statutory principle that protects me  
1296 from removal, protects majority commissioners from removal,  
1297 protects members of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors  
1298 protects members at many other agencies. And so, if I can  
1299 legally be removed in violation of the plain language of the  
1300 statute, I don't think there is anything that would stop  
1301 other commissioners from being removed, including the  
1302 majority commissioners.

1303 And I think it is worth pointing out, relevant to the  
1304 conversation we are having here today, I agree with so much  
1305 of what the witnesses at this table are saying. They are  
1306 highlighting incredibly important issues. My colleague,  
1307 Commissioner Bedoya, has been a particular thought leader on  
1308 the issue of kids and the attention economy and online  
1309 addictive behavior. This is something we care incredibly  
1310 deeply about. And in fact, in January of this year we took  
1311 the unusual step of making public the fact that the FTC  
1312 referred to the Department of Justice a complaint against  
1313 Snap for the harms caused by its AI chatbot directed at  
1314 children. My colleague \_ now Chairman \_ Ferguson dissented,  
1315 and expressed concerns about the First Amendment rights of

1316 those chatbots. That is an important conversation that we  
1317 can have, that we can have on a bipartisan commission.

1318 But the underlying concern about the harms to kids as  
1319 these technologies are developing is enormously important,  
1320 requires bipartisan attention. And I really worry that not  
1321 only is the Commission deprived of the voices of myself and  
1322 Commissioner Bedoya, but that the Republican commissioners at  
1323 the FTC will similarly feel pressure to avoid taking actions  
1324 that may be consistent and required by the law, but unpopular  
1325 with some of the President's supporters.

1326 \*Mr. Pallone. Thank you so much.

1327 I yield back.

1328 \*Mr. Bilirakis. The gentleman yields back. Now I will  
1329 recognize the vice chair of the subcommittee, Mr. Fulcher,  
1330 for his five minutes of questioning.

1331 \*Mr. Fulcher. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I  
1332 have to admit I might be a little bit confused if I am in the  
1333 right committee hearing. I we have seen how \_ seem to have  
1334 got sidetracked into presidential branch personnel  
1335 discussions and food prices. So I do have some questions,  
1336 but they have to do with kids' online safety and that subject  
1337 matter. Am I in the right place? Do I have that subject  
1338 matter?

1339 \*Mr. Bilirakis. Yes, sir.

1340 \*Mr. Fulcher. All right. Thank you.

1341           So Ms. Morell, this question has to do with section 230  
1342 immunity. And we have had a lot of discussions on that in  
1343 the past, but I would like to just talk with you for a minute  
1344 about how section 230 immunity protection should apply when  
1345 you insert an AI algorithm them to that. This is uncharted  
1346 territory for us. And could you just \_ do you believe that  
1347 that immunity should protect \_ should \_ protection should be  
1348 in place if there is an AI algorithm that is clearly changing  
1349 the content or redirecting it?

1350           \*Ms. Morell. I do not. I think it is clear that AI  
1351 products are not hosting third-party speech. Section 230 was  
1352 meant to protect platforms for liability for hosting third-  
1353 party content. AI chatbots, AI tools are actually a product.  
1354 It is product design. It is not meant to be protected by  
1355 section 230, and it is not hosting another person's speech.  
1356 It is a computer-generated product. People are training it,  
1357 training the AI on certain data, and they \_ it is being  
1358 taught to recognize certain patterns. And so the output of  
1359 AI is actually a just amalgamation of data that has been  
1360 recognized by a process.

1361           And so to me, that clearly falls under product design,  
1362 not under section 230 immunity, which is meant to protect  
1363 platforms from liability for hosting the speech of other  
1364 people.

1365           \*Mr. Fulcher. So those comments make sense to me, and I

1366 would parallel your thought process there.

1367 Our challenge as a legislative body is trying to put  
1368 this \_ it \_ how do we put this into a legislative format?  
1369 And if we are able to do that, how do we make that  
1370 enforceable?

1371 And I realize this might be out of your lane, but if you  
1372 have any comments on that, I would be interested in hearing  
1373 enforceability.

1374 \*Ms. Morell. Yes. My brief comment would be I think a  
1375 very narrow solution would just be a clarification, and a  
1376 bipartisan bill was introduced in the Senate to this effect  
1377 last Congress that would just clarify that section 230  
1378 immunity should not apply to generative AI. And what that  
1379 means, then, is that there is a path through litigation for  
1380 these companies to be held accountable for harms caused by  
1381 those products.

1382 And so it just \_ it doesn't actually need to necessarily  
1383 prescribe all the actions, but it just opens up legal  
1384 liability. And that is what we see in America, that the way  
1385 we typically hold private companies accountable for harms to  
1386 consumers is through channels of litigation. And so I think  
1387 having that open would compel AI companies to make sure that  
1388 their products are not \_

1389 \*Mr. Fulcher. Okay.

1390 \*Ms. Morell. \_ harming consumers.

1391           \*Mr. Fulcher. Ms. Souras, just your perspective. Same  
1392 question. Section 230 immunity, AI intervention there, but  
1393 in the lens of sexual exploitation. Your comments or  
1394 thoughts?

1395           \*Ms. Souras. Absolutely. So I definitely join in the  
1396 opinion of my colleague at the end of the panel table.

1397           I would also add that AI is actually joining as a  
1398 partner in content creation. So in addition to not \_ simply  
1399 not hosting third-party content, it is part of the creative  
1400 process. We see offenders going on using text or image-based  
1401 AI tools to really create the vision that they have for what  
1402 they want to see, what kind of sexual exploitation they want  
1403 to see of a child, to engage with AI sexually as a child.

1404           So again, AI clearly is beyond the scope of section 230  
1405 because, again, not hosting, but actually creating content  
1406 with you as the user.

1407           My view \_ and I would \_ you know, would want to give it  
1408 a little more deliberation, I don't think that needs to be  
1409 clarified within section 230. I think we need to see  
1410 lawsuits filed, and we need to see how courts will address  
1411 this. Because when you look at what AI is doing, again, it  
1412 is clearly outside the scope of what section 230 was intended  
1413 to \_

1414           \*Mr. Fulcher. So I am going to stay with you. We have  
1415 only got 30 seconds left. But on the same vein, deepfakes,

1416 and I am concerned about the impact of that. Is there a  
1417 legislative or \_ is there a role for Congress in perhaps  
1418 identifying digital forgeries, or quick comments on deepfakes  
1419 and how we might deal with that with enforcement?

1420 \*Ms. Souras. Absolutely. I would just highlight three  
1421 items. So we are dealing with criminal provisions in TAKE IT  
1422 DOWN. I think there also is room for Congress to look at  
1423 civil remedies, as well, for victims who are abused or  
1424 exploited through deepfakes.

1425 But I also think Congress has a real \_ a very important  
1426 role in looking at preventative measures. How are companies,  
1427 AI companies, being allowed to red team, to use technology to  
1428 ensure their products are safe before they rush to market?

1429 \*Mr. Fulcher. Okay, thank you for that.

1430 Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

1431 \*Mr. Bilirakis. I appreciate it very much. Thanks for  
1432 yielding back, and now I will recognize my friend and partner  
1433 in the KOSA legislation that we are going to keep pushing  
1434 forward, get it across the finish line this time, and I will  
1435 recognize my fellow Floridian, Ms. Castor, for her five  
1436 minutes of questioning.

1437 \*Ms. Castor. Well, thank you, Chairman Bilirakis, and  
1438 you deserve a lot of credit for helping to hammer out the  
1439 Kids Online Safety Act and moving the legislation through  
1440 committee last year.

1441           You know, for many years the committee has worked on  
1442 this because the online harms to kids, the exploitation is  
1443 plain as day to parents and families across the country. Big  
1444 tech platforms use their manipulative designs to addict kids  
1445 to their products and funnel them to harmful or exploitative  
1446 content. They collect massive amounts of personal  
1447 information, some of it incredibly sensitive, to fuel their  
1448 algorithms, always elevating their profits over kids' safety.  
1449 That is why I partnered with Representative Bilirakis and Tim  
1450 Walberg, leaders in the Senate, a lot of the advocates in the  
1451 in the audience today to help establish safeguards for kids  
1452 online.

1453           KOSA would provide young people and parents with the  
1454 tools, safeguards, transparency needed. It is a design code.  
1455 COPPA, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, bans the  
1456 big tech platforms from collecting the private data. You  
1457 need both working together. COPPA, remember, would ban  
1458 advertising targeted to kids and teens, create an eraser  
1459 button for parents and kids to eliminate that personal  
1460 information online. But both rely on a strong Federal Trade  
1461 Commission to enforce the law.

1462           The bills passed out of the Energy and Commerce  
1463 Committee on September 18 of last year. So we pressed the  
1464 Speaker to bring them up for a vote. It was passed  
1465 bipartisan in the Senate, over 60 votes \_ probably, I think

1466 it was, about 90 votes, September 18. October we pressed the  
1467 Speaker, Mike Johnson, and Steve Scalise to bring it up. We  
1468 pressed in November. Parents and advocates kept on it. They  
1469 pressed in December and are demoralized today because the  
1470 Republican Speaker and majority leader blocked it, even in  
1471 the face of the Surgeon General's report, the higher rates of  
1472 suicides, all the tragedies that are all too plain today, the  
1473 pornography that is so exploitative online and all of the  
1474 addiction. So then the parents, I have to say, were very  
1475 dejected, as many of us were at the inauguration to see these  
1476 big tech CEOs have a front row seat at President Trump's  
1477 swearing in.

1478           And then what happens last week? The President takes  
1479 the cops off the beat, the folks who are charged with  
1480 enforcing kids safety laws, privacy laws. It is illegal.  
1481 What they have done to Commissioners Bedoya and Slaughter is  
1482 illegal.

1483           The law that Congress passed years ago directed the  
1484 Commission to be bipartisan, independent. It is an  
1485 enforcement agency to protect Americans from unfair and  
1486 deceptive practices. And now they just want to throw the law  
1487 out the door. And yes, we can talk about the importance of  
1488 passing new legislation here in this hearing, but if you take  
1489 the cops off the beat, you give the big tech CEOs a front row  
1490 seat to the inauguration, you block the KOSA and COPPA that

1491 was hammered out over years of work in this committee, you  
1492 can \_ you know, how do you restore trust on this? And it is  
1493 going to be up to this committee to stand up for parents and  
1494 young people, and stand up to these big tech CEOs who want to  
1495 control our lives. And they are willing to sacrifice our  
1496 kid's well-being for their profits. And I ask my Republican  
1497 colleagues, please join us in this. Say something about  
1498 taking the cops off the beat from the FTC.

1499           Commissioner Slaughter, thank you so much. You were  
1500 working with your colleagues to address youth safety and  
1501 privacy online. What do you recommend now going forward for  
1502 this committee? And how can we restore the cops on the beat  
1503 back at the FTC?

1504           \*Ms. Slaughter. Thank you. I agree with you, and I  
1505 agree with the witnesses here that there are important laws  
1506 that Congress needs to pass. I have been really concerned  
1507 about whether the statutory tools the FTC right \_ has right  
1508 now are up to the job, and I have advocated for privacy  
1509 legislation and other tools.

1510           But the really important question is how will those be  
1511 administered. If Congress can pass the laws, how will they  
1512 be administered, and will they be administered without fear  
1513 or favor, which is what every American deserves, and  
1514 especially what every parent sitting in this audience today  
1515 deserves. I can't tell you how deeply moved I am,

1516 personally, by the stories that we are hearing, and how very  
1517 much I want to be able to get back to work on behalf of these  
1518 parents and other parents out there.

1519 We need an FTC that is fully composed to be able to do  
1520 that administration of the laws without fear or favor and  
1521 help protect our kids.

1522 \*Ms. Castor. Thank you very much.

1523 I yield back.

1524 \*Mr. Bilirakis. I thank the gentlelady. The gentlelady  
1525 yields back. Now I will recognize Ms. Harshbarger from the  
1526 great State of Tennessee for her five minutes of questioning.

1527 \*Mrs. Harshbarger. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want  
1528 to thank the witnesses for being here today. I want to thank  
1529 you for speaking up for our kids.

1530 You know, if the examples against innocent children that  
1531 you provided in your testimony do not give us members a  
1532 righteous anger about this issue, then we better \_ we just  
1533 better check our very soul. And as a parent \_ and I know  
1534 there is parents in the audience who have gone through this,  
1535 and I am so sorry for you because it could happen to anybody,  
1536 don't ever think that you are exempt from this happening \_  
1537 young people, you listen. If you read the testimony of what  
1538 happened to these children, you probably wouldn't let them  
1539 online or you probably wouldn't get online. You know, as a  
1540 parent you try to make sure your child is safe and kept away

1541 from harm. But it is very clear, as technology continues to  
1542 accelerate, just how difficult it is to protect your kids  
1543 from these predators.

1544         And if you \_ listen, if they are sick, depraved,  
1545 possessed, and dangerous criminals, they are what they are.  
1546 And if you really, really want to know what I think they  
1547 should do with these once law enforcement catches one, then  
1548 you see me after this hearing is over, and I will be happy to  
1549 tell you what I think. I want to start with Ms. Souras.

1550         Your very powerful testimony gave horrifying accounts of  
1551 children being preyed upon by adult sex offenders. With the  
1552 data already available, how can platforms better identify  
1553 users who are posing as children?

1554         \*Ms. Souras. Thank you for the question.

1555         In every other industry there is a concept of know your  
1556 customer. It is what provides safety and compliance. And  
1557 that simply does not exist online.

1558         \*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes.

1559         \*Ms. Souras. It does not exist for social media  
1560 companies. So, you know, that is certainly first and  
1561 foremost. They need to know who is getting online, how they  
1562 are registering, if they are representing themselves  
1563 truthfully, whether they are an adult, whether they are a  
1564 teenager.

1565         We have seen in some of these sextortion cases that

1566 individuals are creating profiles, you know, grown men, adult  
1567 men are creating profiles indicating that they are a 15, 16-  
1568 year-old girl. They are allowed to post photos and create a  
1569 whole persona online that, to a child, especially a child who  
1570 is very trusting, who has only been online for a few years,  
1571 seems very authentic.

1572 \*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes.

1573 \*Ms. Souras. So, you know, I would definitely say they  
1574 need to know their customer. There needs to be transparency  
1575 reporting around how social media platforms are accomplishing  
1576 that task.

1577 And there also needs to be age assurance. I think all  
1578 of us have touched on that issue a little bit, that there is  
1579 still a lot to be determined around how best to effectuate  
1580 that, but we need to create spaces for children online that  
1581 are safe. You know, we allow children to get online, have  
1582 private conversations 24-hours a day with whoever is online,  
1583 exchange content, videos, and images. We would never allow  
1584 that in real life.

1585 \*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes.

1586 \*Ms. Souras. So we need to understand the environment  
1587 and we need to work together to accomplish that.

1588 \*Mrs. Harshbarger. Do you think this information could  
1589 prove an asset for parents monitoring their child's online  
1590 activity to ensure they are interacting with their peers and

1591 not some sick, perverted monster who deserves to be locked up  
1592 until Judgment Day?

1593 \*Ms. Souras. Absolutely. I think all of us, you know,  
1594 agree that parents play a role here, but tech companies need  
1595 to meet them, I would say, more than halfway. They need to  
1596 provide tools that are comprehensible, that are easy \_

1597 \*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes.

1598 \*Ms. Souras. \_ that are accurate, and they need to  
1599 provide transparency so parents actually understand how the  
1600 algorithms work and how the apps work.

1601 \*Mrs. Harshbarger. You know, it is sad to say, though,  
1602 that, you know, I interacted with middle schoolers and taught  
1603 Sunday school for 24 years, and I used to say it was a  
1604 fatherless society. But it is a parentless society in a lot  
1605 of ways. And some of those children don't always have a  
1606 parent who will protect them.

1607 I understand that the National Center for Missing and  
1608 Exploited Children and Law Enforcement are interested in  
1609 prioritizing quality of reports over pure quantity, and that  
1610 one thing that has helped with that is bundling of reports.  
1611 Could you tell us a little bit why that is so important, and  
1612 how could we encourage more companies to do that?

1613 \*Ms. Souras. Absolutely. So the process of receiving  
1614 CyberTipline reports at NCMEC really \_ if I can just give a  
1615 brief explanation, we are the \_ operate the online reporting

1616 mechanism for reports regarding child sexual exploitation.  
1617 So we are flooded with tens of millions of reports from  
1618 social media companies. And then we provide those reports to  
1619 law enforcement \_ around the world, but, of course,  
1620 domestically, Federal and state local law enforcement.

1621 There has been a really, I would say, an issue in recent  
1622 years, as companies are increasing the volume of reports,  
1623 that reports that are really related regarding the same  
1624 image, regarding the same incident, regarding the same  
1625 timeframe have been reported one by one, as separate reports.

1626 \*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes.

1627 \*Ms. Souras. That creates a tremendous burden for law  
1628 enforcement. So we were very gratified this year that Meta,  
1629 which is one of the larger reporters \_ it is certainly one of  
1630 the larger social media companies \_ agreed to start bundling  
1631 incidents that are related. It reduces the work burden and  
1632 the time that law enforcement has \_

1633 \*Mrs. Harshbarger. Yes.

1634 \*Ms. Souras. \_ to consume on those reports.

1635 \*Mrs. Harshbarger. Okay, very good. And I think I am  
1636 over my time, so I yield back.

1637 \*Mr. Bilirakis. I thank the gentlelady. Now I  
1638 recognize my friend from the State of Florida, Mr. Soto, for  
1639 his five minutes of questioning.

1640 \*Mr. Soto. Thank you, Chairman, and thank you to all

1641 the families for coming today.

1642 Sexual exploitation, bullying online is a horrific  
1643 threat to our families across the nation. Democrats, we  
1644 support KOSA, we voted for it already last term. We also  
1645 support the TAKE IT DOWN Act, and we stand with the families  
1646 here today and the excruciating stories that you have had to  
1647 tell us.

1648 The reason why we are so furious is because President  
1649 Trump just illegally fired two of the five Federal Trade  
1650 Commission commissioners. They are here today, both Ms.  
1651 Slaughter and Mr. Bedoya. The FTC is already charged with  
1652 protecting kids online. And so when these folks are fired it  
1653 is just outrageous to see no one say anything about it. We  
1654 are talking about standing with these families, and then none  
1655 of you will stand up to President Trump when he just  
1656 dismantled the very Commission that is charged with doing  
1657 this stuff. When KOSA is passed, when TAKE IT DOWN is  
1658 passed, it will be the FTC that will be enforcing it. That  
1659 is why we are so frustrated today, because the Commission is  
1660 now paralyzed. Our Republican colleagues say nothing because  
1661 they are scared of the President. So they express sympathy,  
1662 but do nothing about restoring the Commission.

1663 The second concern is we passed KOSA last term and it  
1664 never made it to the House floor. It was killed by Speaker  
1665 Johnson. And then the Internet privacy bill, we even had a

1666 hearing set for it to voted out of the committee, and that  
1667 hearing was pulled back in front of the entire Capitol \_ what  
1668 an embarrassment \_ because the powers that be didn't want  
1669 this bill to pass. Internet privacy should have passed. It  
1670 passed when we had the House. And we need the Speaker, we  
1671 need the chairman and others to stand with us on this.  
1672 Sympathy is not enough. Hearing all your stories is not  
1673 enough. And then when we see tech billionaires having better  
1674 seats than Republican governors at Trump's inaugural, that  
1675 does not inspire confidence.

1676         So we have brought you here to hear your stories, and we  
1677 appreciate it. My biggest fear is that nothing is going to  
1678 happen again, and that would be an absolute travesty. We \_  
1679 these families deserve to be heard and not used for hearing  
1680 their stories, sound sympathetic, have a listening ear, and  
1681 then nothing happens.

1682         Commissioner Slaughter, it is really important as \_ that  
1683 we address all the families that are here today. The FTC is  
1684 already charged with whatever laws are already on the books  
1685 to help protect children online and \_ so it would be great to  
1686 kind of explain what \_ the work that you all were doing right  
1687 before you were fired.

1688         \*Ms. Slaughter. Sure, thank you. I agree with you  
1689 about the importance of thinking about the families that are  
1690 here today and the people that they are representing. I \_ it

1691 is such a critical issue. It moves me so deeply as a human,  
1692 as a parent, and as a Federal Trade commissioner. And I  
1693 share the view of the parents on this panel and in this room  
1694 that parents can do their absolute best \_ I try to do my  
1695 absolute best for my children. And like some of my fellow  
1696 panelists, I am pretty expert in this stuff, and it is still  
1697 really hard for me.

1698 So what we need is for the government to empower  
1699 government agencies to make sure that the onus is on the  
1700 companies to keep children safe in the first instant. And in  
1701 order to do that well, we need the government agencies to not  
1702 be afraid of those companies.

1703 \*Mr. Soto. And when we pass KOSA and you are reinstated  
1704 as a commissioner after we win in court, what can you then do  
1705 to help enforce these laws to protect these families?

1706 \*Ms. Slaughter. Well, I can do the kinds of things I  
1707 have been doing for the last seven years as an FTC  
1708 commissioner, which is taking on the biggest companies in the  
1709 world without fear or favor, based on the facts and based on  
1710 the law. I voted to bring lawsuits against Meta. I have \_  
1711 involving privacy practices, including involving kids. I  
1712 voted for a settlement with Amazon over Alexa's collection of  
1713 children's voice data that was illegal. I worked with my  
1714 colleague, Commissioner Wilson, a Republican, and my former  
1715 colleague, Commissioner Chopra, a Democrat, to set up a study

1716 on social media and video streaming service's privacy  
1717 practices to provide transparency to the public, to this  
1718 committee, to Congress about all of the data that is  
1719 collected by these companies and how it should be \_ how it is  
1720 used. And that study was finally published this fall. We  
1721 brought cases I mentioned against Epic involving  
1722 communication with children and tricking children into  
1723 payments. I referenced in my testimony a case we brought  
1724 just last fall against Genshin Impact for loot boxes that  
1725 trick kids and get them hooked into gambling with their  
1726 parents' money online.

1727       \*Mr. Soto. Thank you for the extensive things you are  
1728 doing.

1729       Members, these families don't need our sympathies. They  
1730 have come here today for action. And I plan to vote to  
1731 support these bills.

1732       \*Mr. Bilirakis. Thank you. The gentleman yields back,  
1733 and I believe Mr. Obernolte is next.

1734       So we will ask you to stick within the five minutes if  
1735 you can, and I will recognize you for your five minutes of  
1736 questioning.

1737       \*Mr. Obernolte. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am so  
1738 happy that we are having this hearing because it is on a  
1739 topic that is deeply personal to me and, I think, incredibly  
1740 important.

1741           Particularly talking about the TAKE IT DOWN Act, I had  
1742 the honor of last year leading the House AI Task Force, and  
1743 if you read our report you know that the issue of non-  
1744 consensual intimate imagery is one of what we felt is the  
1745 most pressing issues that needs to be dealt with immediately.  
1746 And we feel like this is low-hanging fruit. Everyone ought  
1747 to be able to agree that this is unacceptable. This is a  
1748 problem that is being faced by youth across our country, and  
1749 I am hoping that maybe we can be an example here where \_ we  
1750 are in an era of intense political polarization, but I think  
1751 this is something we can do on a bipartisan basis. And so I  
1752 am really happy that we are having the discussion about that  
1753 today.

1754           Also, the App Store Accountability Act, I think, is an  
1755 important piece of legislation. I want to talk about that a  
1756 little bit. I ran a development studio that did app  
1757 development for a number of years, and so it is \_ this is  
1758 something I know a little bit about. And this bill needs  
1759 some work.

1760           You know, one of the points I wanted to make is that  
1761 when we are talking about the difference between putting  
1762 obligations on app stores and putting obligations on  
1763 developers, most developers of apps are not professional  
1764 companies like the one I ran. They are a couple of people  
1765 making an app for fun in a garage. And so to the extent that

1766 you can, you want to put applications \_ you want to put  
1767 obligations on the app stores, not the developers. And I  
1768 will give you a couple of concrete examples.

1769         There is specific language in the bill about when  
1770 developers are required to use the application programming  
1771 interface of an app store \_ we call it an API \_ and there is  
1772 no need to make developers do that. The app store can  
1773 enforce those restrictions. For example, you wouldn't need,  
1774 as a developer, to have to enforce an age limit. If you are  
1775 saying this application is for adults only, the app store can  
1776 enforce that and not allow children to even launch the app.  
1777 That is what you want to do.

1778         The same thing with purchase restrictions, same thing  
1779 with time usage restrictions. So I am hopeful that we can  
1780 tighten up some of that language and make it clear where  
1781 those obligations lie as this bill moves forward.

1782         And then lastly, I just wanted to spend a minute talking  
1783 about enforcement, because we have heard some pretty  
1784 compelling testimony this morning about the need for  
1785 reforming section 230. I think someone brought that up.  
1786 Several witnesses just talked about private right of action.  
1787 And I think we need to be very cautious about that because we  
1788 have a number of different tools in our toolbox when it comes  
1789 to enforcement, and I don't think anyone would agree that the  
1790 world would be a better place if we just sued each other more

1791 often, right? That is the last resort. We want people to  
1792 follow the law and be good actors without having to resort to  
1793 using the courts to enforce the law.

1794 I \_ along the years of my public service earlier I  
1795 served as the mayor of a small city. I think a number of us  
1796 on the dais have had that honor. And I had an occasion where  
1797 an abusive law firm rolled through town and sued a number of  
1798 our businesses under the Americans with Disabilities Act for  
1799 little minor technical violations. And so I saw, you know,  
1800 the flip side of this, when lawsuits are used abusively. And  
1801 I think what it taught me is that companies that want \_ that  
1802 have a profit motive for bringing these lawsuits are not  
1803 suing big tech. You know, they are suing the mom-and-pop  
1804 people that don't have the resources to defend themselves.

1805 So what I am saying is this should be the last resort.  
1806 We have better tools. Civil penalties is great. FTC  
1807 enforcement under \_ as an unfair or deceptive business  
1808 practice is a powerful tool. Empowering state attorney  
1809 generals is a powerful tool. Private right of action is a  
1810 last resort, and I hope we can keep that in mind as we move  
1811 forward because what we don't want to create is another ADA  
1812 that creates a profit incentive for abusive lawsuits against  
1813 Americans and American companies.

1814 But I want to thank everyone for your very heartfelt  
1815 testimony this morning. I have really enjoyed the hearing,

1816 and I am looking forward to working particularly with the  
1817 TAKE IT DOWN Act to resolve this critically important issue.

1818 I yield back.

1819 \*Mr. Bilirakis. I appreciate it. Thank you for that  
1820 valuable information. I appreciate it. The gentleman yields  
1821 back. Now I recognize Mrs. Trahan for her five minutes of  
1822 questioning.

1823 \*Mrs. Trahan. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank  
1824 the families who are here today sharing their stories. I  
1825 want to thank our witnesses, particularly FTC Commissioner  
1826 Slaughter, for being here to testify today. I also saw FTC  
1827 Commissioner Bedoya earlier, sitting behind the witnesses,  
1828 and I want to thank him for coming.

1829 Our Democratic FTC commissioners have been through a lot  
1830 in the past week, and I applaud them for showing up to shed  
1831 light on the Administration's latest assault on independent  
1832 agencies tasked with protecting hard-working Americans from  
1833 corporate abuses. The President's unlawful actions don't  
1834 just hinder the commissioners from doing their work. These  
1835 reckless and lawless decisions will directly hurt consumers  
1836 and prevent this committee from enacting strong, effective,  
1837 and enforceable laws to protect Americans, especially our  
1838 children, online.

1839 The FTC has \_ was purposefully designed as an  
1840 independent agency by Congress. Lawmakers understood the

1841 incompatibility of partisanship and consumer protection, and  
1842 sought to safeguard against powerful interests influencing  
1843 the work of the agency.

1844         The FTC's current Republican chair, Andrew Ferguson,  
1845 understands the importance of independence, as well. In his  
1846 nomination hearing before the Senate Commerce Committee  
1847 Ferguson testified that, "consumer protection and competition  
1848 are not partisan issues.'" In an interview with the Mercatus  
1849 Center last year, Ferguson explained that independence  
1850 encourages careful deliberation and allows for the Commission  
1851 to "test theories internally before marching them out the  
1852 door.'" Chair Ferguson makes a fundamental point that  
1853 President Trump clearly does not understand: consumer  
1854 protection is not and should never be a partisan endeavor; it  
1855 requires the best minds to come together to protect those who  
1856 would otherwise be abused by powerful corporate actors.

1857         The subject of today's hearing is online safety,  
1858 particularly for our kids. I have been outspoken about  
1859 holding big tech accountable, protecting consumers' personal  
1860 data, and demanding transparency from online service  
1861 providers. So too have many of \_ have my Republican  
1862 colleagues with whom I have worked on these issues over the  
1863 years. But I must ask the obvious question: How can we  
1864 possibly legislate to protect Americans online when the FTC,  
1865 the cops on the beat enforcing Federal competition and

1866 consumer protection laws, lacks its independence? What does  
1867 it mean for independent governance if the FTC's sitting  
1868 commissioners can be arbitrarily fired by a capricious  
1869 president?

1870           And while we talk about President Trump's illegal  
1871 attempt to block dedicated consumer protectors from  
1872 completing their work, we must also acknowledge the  
1873 precarious environment in which FTC employees are currently  
1874 doing their work. President Trump's illegal attempt to fire  
1875 Commissioners Slaughter and Bedoya adds further uncertainty  
1876 to a work culture laden with looming fears of mass layoffs  
1877 and forced relocations. Preserving the FTC's independence  
1878 while increasing its capacity should be a goal shared by  
1879 every member of this committee, especially if we hope to pass  
1880 meaningful legislation to protect consumers and kids online.

1881           Commissioner Slaughter, I only have one question for you  
1882 today, and you can take the entire balance of the time to  
1883 answer it. How important is a strong and independent FTC for  
1884 watch-dogging online harms, especially threats to consumer  
1885 privacy?

1886           \*Ms. Slaughter. Thank you. Excuse me. It is  
1887 critically important. It is critically important. There is  
1888 not another Federal agency that is doing this work. There is  
1889 not a substitute for the FTC in terms of policing the world's  
1890 most powerful corporations, and policing them without fear or

1891 favor.

1892 I think there is also no substitute for the FTC in terms  
1893 of the work we do to provide transparency and accountability  
1894 through our market studies, through our research program,  
1895 through our testimony to Congress. That is work that I have  
1896 been so honored to do, first as a minority commissioner, then  
1897 is a majority commissioner, now is a minority commissioner  
1898 again. I have seen all sides of it, and I have seen the real  
1899 benefits that the American people get from having a balance  
1900 of perspectives on the FTC the way Congress designed and the  
1901 way the Supreme Court upheld almost 100 years ago.

1902 \*Mrs. Trahan. Well, thank you for your service.

1903 I yield back.

1904 \*Mr. Bilirakis. I thank the gentlelady. Now I will  
1905 recognize the \_ Mrs. Cammack, Mrs. Cammack, my Florida fellow  
1906 Florida Gator. I recognize her for five minutes of  
1907 questioning.

1908 \*Mrs. Cammack. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank  
1909 you to our witnesses for being here today as we examine the  
1910 many dangers that exist in what some have rightly called the  
1911 wild west of the Internet. Today's hearing, the World Wide  
1912 Web, examining harms online, could not be more timely. From  
1913 exploitation to manipulation, we know that the Internet has  
1914 become a breeding ground for serious threats, especially to  
1915 those most vulnerable, our kids.

1916           I want to begin by personally apologizing to the parents  
1917 and the guests here in the committee room today for the  
1918 behavior of some of my colleagues. We are here to focus on  
1919 kids and the issue at hand, not play liberal Catch Phrase,  
1920 talk about food prices, or talk about billionaires. Anything  
1921 that deviates from that is politically motivated, and it is  
1922 disgusting. And I am so sorry that you are in this room  
1923 championing this issue because you have had and experienced  
1924 tragedy in your family. I am so very sorry, and I hope that  
1925 my colleagues will apologize.

1926           For me, personally, I want to focus on the most  
1927 disturbing and deeply personal harms facing some of \_ some  
1928 people online. I don't want to talk about employment status  
1929 from a former commissioner. I want to talk about the kids  
1930 that are facing these tragedies. So I am going to start with  
1931 you, Ms. Hawkins. Online platforms are fueling the wildfire  
1932 spread of non-consensual intimate images, including the AI-  
1933 generated deepfakes, which have been talked about here today.  
1934 There is zero accountability. Do you believe that Congress  
1935 should hold these platforms liable \_ and I am using the word  
1936 "liable" deliberately \_ when they knowingly allow this kind  
1937 of harmful content to stay up?

1938           And what kind of enforcement tools do we have in our  
1939 toolbox? Because there is, in fact, more than one. So for  
1940 the record, would you please describe?

1941           \*Ms. Hawkins. I will say that if we upload a clip from  
1942 Disney, a Disney movie, it is removed immediately by big  
1943 tech.

1944           \*Mrs. Cammack. Yes.

1945           \*Ms. Hawkins. But if sexual abuse is uploaded, the most  
1946 horrific moments in our lives are uploaded to the Internet,  
1947 it is monetized and it garners thousands of views and  
1948 downloads and shares. There is so much that we can do. But  
1949 as long as tech has no incentive to listen to survivors, to  
1950 remove this material we will see no change. The TAKE IT DOWN  
1951 Act would do that significantly, but so too would sunseting  
1952 CDA 230. This committee almost called for that last year.

1953           The problem right now is tech is not coming to the  
1954 table. We must have them at the table to negotiate and  
1955 figure out the right solution.

1956           \*Mrs. Cammack. I agree with you, and I am disappointed  
1957 to hear that all of a sudden one side is against big tech  
1958 when all along this has been a bipartisan issue. We have  
1959 seen conservatives censored online, we have seen progressive  
1960 voices censored online. There has been a collective call for  
1961 reform with the big tech companies, and this is another  
1962 example where we can come together in a bipartisan way \_ in  
1963 this case to protect our kids, especially online.

1964           And beyond the FTC \_ because there seems to be a lot of  
1965 focus on former Commissioner Slaughter's employment status \_

1966 can you talk about the FTC, but also the partners in order to  
1967 enforce how we go about holding the companies accountable,  
1968 taking the content down? How do we help give our survivors  
1969 and the victims resources?

1970 \*Ms. Hawkins. I am not an expert on the FTC, but what  
1971 \_ from what I understand and I have seen is we don't have the  
1972 laws on the books right now for us to protect children  
1973 online. It is not strong enough. Congress must act.

1974 Right now we need \_ you know, there is so much to say to  
1975 that. One thing I want to transition and explain, too, is  
1976 the app stores. Right now, you know, that is the gateway.  
1977 Almost all of our youth, the content that they are consuming  
1978 is through the app stores. We can see such significant  
1979 progress if we just make them accountable to \_ and provide  
1980 parental opportunities.

1981 \*Mrs. Cammack. Absolutely. And I think there is a  
1982 coalition of apps that are working on this and other issues  
1983 in the periphery, which will be very beneficial.

1984 I want to jump to the state laws that are currently on  
1985 the books. And we know that as every state continues to add  
1986 the laws, it becomes this patchwork deal where Congress will  
1987 be forced to act. And we do need to act. And I agree with  
1988 the chairman that, yes, we will take action, and we are  
1989 willing to go it alone if need be, because this is the right  
1990 thing to do for parents, for families, and for kids.

1991           But almost every state currently has laws on the books  
1992 today that protect people from non-consensual imagery. But  
1993 20 states are now only covering deepfakes specifically. Now,  
1994 given that, talk about at what point is the tipping point for  
1995 Congress to step in?

1996           \*Ms. Hawkins. The reality is that those laws largely  
1997 only focus on the initial creation and upload of the  
1998 material. And what we know is immediately, once this  
1999 material is uploaded, again thousands of views, maybe within  
2000 hours, countless downloads. And it is quite inefficient.  
2001 Congress brings efficiency here, and we need more, you know,  
2002 energy. And we need a solution that holds the tech companies  
2003 to \_ that forces them to listen to us when this is happening  
2004 to us.

2005           \*Mrs. Cammack. Well, and I know my time is expired, so  
2006 I will yield. But I also say thank you for being here in the  
2007 face of threats to stand up for kids and for families. Thank  
2008 you.

2009           \*Mr. Bilirakis. Thank you. We all thank you. All  
2010 right, next we have the \_ let's see, who is next on the  
2011 Democrat side?

2012           \*Mrs. Dingell. Dingell.

2013           \*Mr. Bilirakis. Mrs. Dingell, there she is. Okay, Mrs.  
2014 Dingell, you are recognized for five minutes of questioning.

2015           \*Mrs. Dingell. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2016 I want to start by saying thank you to all of the  
2017 witnesses who I have worked with for a long time before I  
2018 ever got to Congress. And like all of my colleagues, both  
2019 sides of the aisle, we are horrified by the fact that there  
2020 were death threats. I do not like the normalizing of  
2021 violence or bullying or anything we are seeing. And we are  
2022 here today because we are fighting that.

2023 And when I look at the parents, you need to know people  
2024 on both sides care deeply. That is why we have been trying  
2025 for years to get legislation through. I have sat with  
2026 parents. My own sister died of suicide. I understand that  
2027 pain. And there isn't a member in this room that doesn't  
2028 care about you, and I want to make that really clear. And  
2029 what we really want to do is actually get something done.  
2030 And I need to say that.

2031 I am proud to co-lead the bipartisan, bicameral TAKE IT  
2032 DOWN Act, which recently passed the Senate unanimously and,  
2033 for the record, was included in the end-of-the-year budget  
2034 bill before it got killed. I won't say who it was because I  
2035 won't make it partisan, but we got to work together because  
2036 we know this has to get done.

2037 And my colleagues here have brought up the firing of  
2038 these two commissioners because it happened because he didn't  
2039 like them. And we got to be clear here. The FTC is an  
2040 independent agency, and what happened is blatantly

2041 unconstitutional. And independent agencies are intended to  
2042 be insulated from political motivations. And this is the  
2043 organization that is supposed to be keeping us safe. Without  
2044 a functioning FTC, how can we expect to enforce the TAKE IT  
2045 DOWN Act if it becomes law? And I am asking every colleague  
2046 on the other side of the aisle to pledge to work to get this  
2047 done. Please. We got to stop the politics. We got to get  
2048 it done. How do we go after bad actors, protect consumers,  
2049 and hold platforms accountable? The simple answer is we  
2050 cannot. Gutting the FTC means gutting our ability to protect  
2051 kids and women online.

2052         And as artificial technology advances, so do new forms  
2053 of abuse. Primarily, who do they target? Women and  
2054 children. Deepfake pornography is being used as a tool for  
2055 harassment, humiliation, and intimidation, particularly  
2056 against women who speak out and advocate for themselves or  
2057 for children. That is what happened to you all today, and  
2058 not a member at this dais thinks that that is okay. I want  
2059 to make that really, really clear.

2060         The TAKE IT DOWN Act provides victims with a path to  
2061 justice, ensures these images are removed, and holds  
2062 perpetrators accountable. I want to work with all  
2063 stakeholders to pass the strongest bill possible and get this  
2064 bill across the finish line, and I am begging my colleagues  
2065 to help me do this. If we succeed in passing this important

2066 legislation, we got to make sure that we have got a body that  
2067 is going to enforce it so that we don't have women  
2068 unprotected against this growing threat. One of our most  
2069 important jobs in Congress is to protect people, including  
2070 from the growing harms online. And I will tell you, it is  
2071 only getting worse. It is just getting worse by the day.

2072         So Commissioner Slaughter, let me ask you this question.  
2073 Without a fully independent, functional FTC, do you believe  
2074 the agency's current authority is sufficient to effectively  
2075 enforce the TAKE IT DOWN Act and hold platforms accountable,  
2076 or do we need to take additional action to strengthen  
2077 potential enforcement capabilities?

2078         \*Ms. Slaughter. Thank you.

2079         Look, I would also like to not be here talking about my  
2080 employment status. I would like to be here talking about  
2081 this important work that the FTC has been doing and will be  
2082 doing in the future to address these critically, critically  
2083 important issues for American families, for parents across  
2084 the country. Cyber bullying doesn't distinguish between  
2085 Republicans and Democrats, blue states and red states. This  
2086 is something that affects all of us and, I agree, we all need  
2087 to be working together on.

2088         With respect to specific legislation, I think an  
2089 important role at the FTC has been to take the laws that  
2090 Congress has passed, to faithfully administer them, and then

2091 to go back to Congress if we think something needs to be  
2092 improved or needs \_ or leaves gaps. And I think we have had  
2093 some of those conversations around privacy generally, we have  
2094 had those conversations around COPPA. If the \_ if Congress  
2095 passes KOSA, if Congress passes TAKE IT DOWN, you certainly  
2096 have my commitment to faithfully administer those laws and  
2097 let you know if there is more that the FTC needs.

2098 \*Mrs. Dingell. Mr. Chairman, I am out of time. Let's  
2099 just pledge to work with each other and get these bills done.

2100 \*Mr. Bilirakis. In these children's memories, these  
2101 beautiful children here, these pictures of these beautiful  
2102 children.

2103 Thank you very much for coming, and you are going to  
2104 make a difference, and we are going to work together to get  
2105 this done.

2106 Okay, next we have Mr. James, my good friend from the  
2107 State of Michigan. You are recognized for five minutes of  
2108 questioning.

2109 \*Mr. James. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is not a  
2110 partisan issue. This is something that we should be able to  
2111 work together and get done.

2112 I have three young boys. John is 11, Hudson is 10 in 2  
2113 days, and Christian is 6. And my six-year-old, when \_ wanted  
2114 to watch cartoons, saw something nice up on TV, a cartoon,  
2115 innocent. And he was able, through the app store on our

2116 television, to buy Max, HBO, Cinemax, Showtime, and he was  
2117 able to gain access through that just in a portal.

2118         It is vital to make sure that we hold our virtual stores  
2119 to the same standards that we hold our physical stores when  
2120 it comes to material that is adult or addictive. And that is  
2121 why I am leading on this app store bill that makes sure that  
2122 we continue behind states that are taking the first step by  
2123 making sure that we have a national accountability act that  
2124 harmonizes the effectiveness of giving parents the tools to  
2125 take care of their children. The lack of guardrails in the  
2126 digital app stores defies logic and puts children at risk.  
2127 There is simply no good reason why app stores should be  
2128 allowed to circumvent the same lawful ID checks that brick-  
2129 and-mortar stores abide to protect children from accessing  
2130 age restricted items such as, again, alcohol and tobacco.

2131         In other words, we don't rely on Marlboro or Budweiser  
2132 to ensure kids aren't purchasing their products. We look at  
2133 CVS, we look at 7-Eleven, we look at the supermarkets to age  
2134 gate. The app ecosystem should be no different than what is  
2135 currently established in the United States of America. These  
2136 app stores are out of touch, and they need to come to  
2137 reality.

2138         This is not a partisan issue, as I said before. This is  
2139 common-sense policy across party lines, and it is also what  
2140 parents want. It is what parents are demanding, parents like

2141 us. We have seen similar legislation gaining steam and  
2142 picking up momentum around the country, other states \_  
2143 Alabama, Kentucky, New Mexico, Alaska, and other states \_  
2144 this issue is far too important not to get this bill signed  
2145 into law in this Congress. It is critical that we get this  
2146 done and we get it right.

2147 My first question is for Ms. Hawkins. Clearly, the  
2148 status quo is not working, and the current policy framework  
2149 around these digital app stores is failing to protect our  
2150 children. What loopholes does this bill rectify in our  
2151 current law?

2152 And can you elaborate on why this bill, in your opinion,  
2153 is built to withstand a legal challenge, given the focus on  
2154 contracts, terms, and service.

2155 \*Ms. Hawkins. Yes. Thank you. Thank you, Congressman  
2156 James.

2157 Right now our children are signing contracts, complex  
2158 terms of service agreements with app stores, with apps  
2159 individually every time they download it. These contracts  
2160 allow access to their contact list, to their camera, to their  
2161 photos, to their exact location. And parents often have no  
2162 idea at all. There is no other place in American law where  
2163 kids are allowed to sign contracts and broker into these  
2164 really intense agreements. So that is one loophole.

2165 Another, though, is the age ratings. Parents think that

2166 they have given permission to their kids to get access to  
2167 apps that are appropriate for their age. And the entire  
2168 parental control system on both iOS and Google devices is  
2169 based on these ages that Google and Apple have said, yes,  
2170 these are right. But we are finding \_ there is the non-  
2171 partisan organizations Heat Initiative and Parents Together.  
2172 They just released a report where 200 apps had harmful  
2173 content. Our organization has found hundreds going back  
2174 every year for five years that are rated for 4-year-olds, 9-  
2175 year-olds, 12-year-olds. And it has sexually explicit  
2176 content and allow strangers to communicate directly. It  
2177 gives access to location. The list goes on. Unless there is  
2178 accurate age ratings, we as parents can't make the decisions  
2179 about whether this is appropriate content or material for our  
2180 kids, and the entire system for safety doesn't even work.

2181 \*Mr. James. Thank you, Madam.

2182 Ms. Slaughter, when were you sworn in?

2183 \*Ms. Slaughter. I was originally sworn in on May 2,  
2184 2018.

2185 \*Mr. James. May 2, 2018. And you were chairman of the  
2186 FTC for a small period of time, were you not?

2187 \*Ms. Slaughter. I was the acting chair \_

2188 \*Mr. James. Acting.

2189 \*Ms. Slaughter. \_ from January to June of 2021.

2190 \*Mr. James. Acting chair of \_ June 2021. I would ask

2191 my colleagues, but I am running low on time. Do you recall  
2192 who was in the majority in Congress during that time period?

2193 \*Ms. Slaughter. I believe the Democrats were \_

2194 \*Mr. James. Democrats were the majority in Congress.  
2195 Do you remember who the president was at that time?

2196 \*Ms. Slaughter. It was Joe Biden.

2197 \*Mr. James. It was Joe Biden. Joe Biden's approval  
2198 rate was 57 percent. And yet since 2018 and 2022, 33 kids  
2199 younger than 13 have died as a result of challenges on  
2200 TikTok. Democrats are furious. They are incensed. They are  
2201 outraged over these firings. But Republicans are outraged by  
2202 dead babies and child porn. Do you ever think that maybe you  
2203 might not have been as good at your job as you thought you  
2204 were? Do you think that maybe something should change?

2205 My colleagues on the left are continuously saying \_ and  
2206 I believe you said \_ we need to empower the government  
2207 agencies. Well, what we are here to do is empower the  
2208 parents because when you empower parents you give children a  
2209 chance. And we need to try something different than what has  
2210 failed over the past seven years.

2211 Mr. Chairman, I yield.

2212 \*Mr. Bilirakis. Thank you. The gentleman yields back,  
2213 and now I will recognize Ms. Kelly.

2214 I believe Ms. Kelly is here, no?

2215 \*Ms. Kelly. Yes, it is me.

2216           \*Mr. Bilirakis. She is not here, okay.

2217           \*Ms. Kelly. I am right here.

2218           \*Mr. Bilirakis. Oh, you are right here. I recognize  
2219 you \_

2220           \*Ms. Kelly. Thank you.

2221           \*Mr. Bilirakis. \_ for your five minutes of questioning.

2222           \*Ms. Kelly. First of all, I want to thank the witnesses  
2223 and your detailed answers. I really, really appreciate it.

2224           And I want to thank the parents. I know you came to my  
2225 office, and we have spoken before, but I am compelled to say  
2226 I don't need a person here to apologize for me. I am proud  
2227 of how I carry myself. I am proud of what I do. I am proud  
2228 that I am on the bills that you guys have talked about. I am  
2229 a ally. And also, I have three grandchildren and I care  
2230 about all kids. I used to work in a child abuse place. I  
2231 don't need anybody saying we care more about someone's job  
2232 than we care about kids. That is very insulting, very  
2233 insulting.

2234           Ms. Slaughter, I am going to respect you and not talk  
2235 about how you don't have your job. But I want you to talk  
2236 about why ideologies and differences make a difference, even  
2237 though it sounds like you guys work together in so many ways  
2238 in a bipartisan way.

2239           \*Ms. Slaughter. Sure, thank you. I think it is  
2240 incredibly valuable for Congress, for the public, and most

2241 importantly for the people that we serve for the FTC to  
2242 function as Congress designed, as a multi-member agency with  
2243 bipartisan representation, with commissioners who serve  
2244 staggered terms over years so that we can work with each  
2245 other, learn from each other, build towards consensus where  
2246 it is available, and respectfully disagree with each other  
2247 where that consensus can't be found. Those respectful  
2248 disagreements provide transparency and accountability to the  
2249 public, to advocates, to parents to hear about what else  
2250 Congress could be doing, what else the FTC could be doing.  
2251 So I will talk about a couple of important cases.

2252         In \_ when I was in minority commissioner originally, the  
2253 FTC had a landmark case against Facebook, a \$5 billion  
2254 settlement of a privacy violation involving how they dealt  
2255 with data including kids data. I dissented from that  
2256 settlement because, even though the majority at the time  
2257 thought that \$5 billion was a lot of money, I thought it  
2258 wasn't enough to be effectively deterrent for that company.  
2259 Sharing that disagreement publicly helps inform Congress and  
2260 the American public about the work of the agency.

2261         I will give you another example related to kids.  
2262 Another settlement I dissented from was the FTC settlement  
2263 with Google and YouTube over child-directed content on  
2264 YouTube in violation of COPPA. I actually thought the case  
2265 was good, the claims were good. I didn't think the

2266 settlement got it done because it allowed bad actors to  
2267 illegally say \_ claim that their content was not child-  
2268 directed, and they just had to be trusted about that. And  
2269 all of us who are concerned about the content our children  
2270 access online and think we are trying to protect them by  
2271 using age gates or using child-directed limitations are  
2272 imperiled if those limitations don't actually work and the  
2273 bad actors can work around them as we have heard some of  
2274 these other witnesses talking about today.

2275 \*Ms. Kelly. Thank you. Also we have talked mostly  
2276 about young children, but also there are seniors and other  
2277 vulnerable populations and, of course, young children also.  
2278 And I plan to introduce \_ reintroduce my Protecting Seniors  
2279 from Emergency Scams Act, which will help us identify \_ help  
2280 older adults identify scams.

2281 And I know \_ I hear you about the children, because I  
2282 look at my grandson and some of the times I have said, "What  
2283 is this?" But the only thing is he does ask. His mother  
2284 has, I think, scared him to death if he does it. So he does  
2285 ask first. But I have seen some interesting things on his  
2286 phone.

2287 Can you talk about the malicious actors and, you know,  
2288 if the FTC is significantly weakened because of fired  
2289 commissioners and people not being there?

2290 \*Ms. Slaughter. Yes. Well, I think it is pretty clear

2291 that corporate lawbreakers are in it to make money, right?  
2292 They do these things because they are profitable. Some of  
2293 the things we have heard about today are done for even more  
2294 malign reasons. But ultimately, companies facilitate this  
2295 lawbreaking because it is profitable to them to do so.

2296 And so our job is to ensure that our focus is on the law  
2297 that Congress passed, and administering those laws without  
2298 fear or favor, and not being cowed by corporate power or  
2299 corporate profits but instead keeping our focus on the people  
2300 that we serve. And the independence of the FTC protects it  
2301 from that kind of political or partisan interference that  
2302 would inhibit the ability to hold corporate lawbreakers  
2303 accountable.

2304 \*Ms. Kelly. Thank you very much, and thank you for your  
2305 service, and good luck. And thanks to all the witnesses.  
2306 Again, you were really great. And thank you to the parents  
2307 for being here. We will get this done.

2308 I yield back.

2309 \*Mr. Bilirakis. The gentlelady yields back. Now I will  
2310 recognize Mr. Bentz for his five minutes of questioning.

2311 \*Mr. Bentz. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all the  
2312 witnesses for being here today.

2313 In preparation for this hearing I looked at the title.  
2314 It said, "The World Wide Web: Examining Online Harms.'" And  
2315 of course, I am totally supportive of the fact that we are

2316 prioritizing kids, but I decided I would go back and take a  
2317 quick look at just how much online time people were spending.

2318         So I am sure that all of you are aware of the fact that  
2319 Americans now spend seven hours and three minutes a day \_  
2320 each one of us, apparently \_ online. We also \_ I looked at  
2321 the ages. I see here from 0 to 8, 2.5 hours; from 8 to 10  
2322 years old, 6 hours; 11 to 14, 9 hours; 15 to 18, 7.5 hours a  
2323 day. So when we talk about what we are going to do about  
2324 this problem, boy, is it a big problem, a huge, almost  
2325 insurmountable problem.

2326         And as I watch my kids and others, I note the  
2327 diminishment of critical thinking, the diminishment of  
2328 skills, the diminishment of self-sufficiency. There is no  
2329 lack of problems created online. But I am happy today that  
2330 we are talking about children. This is, obviously, what we  
2331 need to be doing.

2332         Ms. Morell, your attorneys must have looked at this  
2333 bill. Is it going to pass free speech scrutiny?

2334         \*Ms. Morell. Could you specify which bill?

2335         \*Mr. Bentz. When I say "this bill" I mean the protect  
2336 our kids bill, the \_

2337         \*Ms. Morell. The protect our kids bill?

2338         \*Mr. Bentz. Yes, the one we have been talking about the  
2339 entire time today.

2340         \*Ms. Morell. Oh, TAKE IT DOWN, or KOSA?

2341 \*Mr. Bentz. TAKE IT DOWN.

2342 \*Ms. Morell. Oh, TAKE IT DOWN.

2343 \*Mr. Bentz. TAKE IT DOWN, yes, TAKE IT DOWN, forgive  
2344 me.

2345 \*Ms. Morell. To pass free speech concerns I believe it  
2346 would. This is just trying to say that platforms \_ because  
2347 in section 230 there is a Good Samaritan provision that  
2348 incentivizes platforms and said you will be protected from  
2349 liability for removing content that is obscene, lewd,  
2350 lascivious, otherwise objectionable, but there has been no  
2351 accompanying stick to that carrot. And what TAKE IT DOWN  
2352 would say is that platforms cannot host content if they are  
2353 contacted knowingly that is non-consensual imagery, and they  
2354 need to remove that.

2355 And so I think that is well within the authority of the  
2356 government to do that.

2357 \*Mr. Bentz. So in anticipation of this hearing I went  
2358 and, of course, researched the TAKE IT DOWN bill, and looked  
2359 at some of the critical comments on it. It appears that  
2360 there are questions that have been raised by various  
2361 commentators about it, and I think we heard Congressman  
2362 Obernolte reference the fact that it is not a perfect bill.  
2363 I \_ we want this bill to survive, so I hope you have reached  
2364 out. And whatever suggestions you have or anybody on the  
2365 panel that we should change this bill, please tell us.

2366 Because in looking at the history of everyone trying to get  
2367 this done, obviously, First Amendment issues are going to  
2368 come up.

2369 Why I am asking you questions, your testimony touches on  
2370 the limits of some content-filtering tools available. I take  
2371 it these things are not effective. Tell me why.

2372 \*Ms. Morell. Yes. So content filters have not been  
2373 effective in the smartphone app-based ecosystem because often  
2374 filters do not have access to the material inside of apps.  
2375 And so pornography today is not restricted to pornography  
2376 websites; it is on social media itself. And as I mentioned  
2377 in my opening, often social media is the first entry point  
2378 for kids, and they don't \_ they are not meaning to access it,  
2379 but they stumble upon a link and they click on it. And  
2380 because there is no age gating on these porn sites, they are  
2381 immediately able to get through to Pornhub.

2382 And so the filters are not working. It is very  
2383 difficult. They often don't filter the in-app browsers that  
2384 \_ each individual application actually has its own portal to  
2385 the Internet, and so it has been an incredibly difficult  
2386 problem for parents on their own. And so that is why I have  
2387 been supportive of solutions like age verification that would  
2388 actually require the porn sites to verify this person is an  
2389 adult before letting a child through, because filters are  
2390 just not working for parents. And the technology has changed

2391 over the last 20 years. It has made it extremely difficult  
2392 for filters to work.

2393 \*Mr. Bentz. I want to move back to a much more  
2394 difficult issue in that section 230. So I was on Judiciary  
2395 until I had the good fortune of being selected for this  
2396 particular committee, and I must say in the days and weeks I  
2397 spent studying section 230 it appeared to me hugely  
2398 challenging to change it. Do you have some suggestions on  
2399 how we might actually do that?

2400 \*Ms. Morell. A couple of quick suggestions. I would  
2401 say one critical thing would just be to clarify that section  
2402 230 does not apply to product design, to the company's own  
2403 wrongdoing or their own algorithms. That is their product.  
2404 I think that has been an issue that we have seen of lawsuits  
2405 getting thrown out in court claiming section 230 immunity  
2406 when it was not the speech the platform was hosting of third  
2407 parties, but it was actually the product design of those  
2408 platforms, algorithms connecting sex traffickers to their  
2409 victims or promoting blackout challenges into the feed of a  
2410 10-year-old girl who then took her life by accident. And so  
2411 I think it is really important to clarify section 230 was not  
2412 meant to cover product design.

2413 I would also say a bad Samaritan carve-out to say that  
2414 if you are knowingly hosting criminal content or criminal  
2415 behavior on your website, you do not get to hide behind

2416 section 230's immunity to accompany the Good Samaritan  
2417 provision. We need a kind of commensurate bad Samaritan  
2418 carve-out for knowingly hosting criminal material.

2419 \*Mr. Bentz. Thank you.

2420 I yield back.

2421 \*Mr. Bilirakis. Thank you very much, and thank you for  
2422 making those suggestions. If we have any constitutional  
2423 concerns, we want to make sure that we fix them now because  
2424 ultimately we got to get this through, so \_ to protect our  
2425 kids. So thank you very much, I appreciate it.

2426 And next we are going to ask Ms. Clarke. She has five  
2427 minutes for questioning.

2428 You are recognized.

2429 \*Ms. Clarke. Good afternoon, and thank you, Mr.  
2430 Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member Schakowsky. And thank  
2431 you to our witnesses for being here to testify, and to  
2432 Commissioner Bedoya, who is also in attendance. Thank you  
2433 for your hard work and dedication to the people of the United  
2434 States.

2435 I find it disingenuous to convene this hearing on  
2436 protecting children from online harms while Donald Trump  
2437 dismantles the very agency that Congress created to protect  
2438 consumers, including children. Having said that, where there  
2439 is a will, there is a way. And we have to determine whether  
2440 in fact there is a will.

2441           For decades the FTC has provided clarity for businesses  
2442 and consumers protecting the American public from deceptive  
2443 or unfair practices and unfair methods of competition.  
2444 President Trump's attempted illegal firing of the Democratic  
2445 FTC commissioners is a continuation of the Administration's  
2446 anti-consumer agenda that promotes scams, deceptive  
2447 practices, and costs Americans lives and money. I am curious  
2448 how Mr. Trump and my Republican colleagues think this  
2449 unlawful attempt furthers the mission of the FTC to protect  
2450 the public from deceptive or unfair business practices and  
2451 from unfair methods of competition through law enforcement,  
2452 advocacy, research, and education. It is also no coincidence  
2453 that the Trump's Project 2025 went as far as to question if  
2454 the FTC should "continue to exist.'`

2455           So having said that, with the rapid advancement of  
2456 artificial intelligence consumers are faced with the  
2457 increasingly acute potential harms of algorithmic  
2458 discrimination. Facial recognition technology is a clear  
2459 example of a tool powered by AI that time and time again has  
2460 been prone to unjustified bias, particularly against members  
2461 of communities of color.

2462           In 2023 the FTC took action against Rite Aid to address  
2463 the company's harmful misuse of biased AI tools, and for  
2464 years hundreds of Rite Aid stores used facial recognition  
2465 technology to identify consumers it deemed likely to engage

2466 in shoplifting and alert store employees to their presence.  
2467 According to the FTC, employees acting on false positive  
2468 alerts followed consumers around in its stores, searched  
2469 them, ordered them to leave, called the police to confront or  
2470 remove consumers, and publicly accused them, sometimes in  
2471 front of friends and family, of shoplifting and other  
2472 wrongdoing. Also, according to the FTC, Rite Aid's actions  
2473 disproportionately impacted people of color.

2474         It is nothing new that AI can prove \_ can often prove  
2475 inaccurate and fail to properly identify people, especially  
2476 when it comes to race, age, or gender. Rite Aid not only  
2477 failed its customers by refusing to notify patrons of the use  
2478 of biometric surveillance, but they also failed to test its  
2479 own program for accuracy before deploying it.

2480         The role the FTC played in holding Rite Aid accountable  
2481 cannot be overlooked. This is just an example. And we must  
2482 acknowledge the importance of a bipartisan FTC in properly  
2483 protecting consumers. Without a bipartisan FTC, consumers  
2484 will lose their advocate to obtain recourse when they have  
2485 been taken advantage of by scammers.

2486         So Commissioner Slaughter, what concerns do you have  
2487 about the FTC's ability to address harmful discriminatory  
2488 behavior moving forward without consultation from the  
2489 Democratic commissioners?

2490         \*Ms. Slaughter. Thank you, Congresswoman. I am very

2491 concerned about the FTC's ability to execute all of its  
2492 mission, including the important parts of our mission that  
2493 address new emerging technologies and how they are deployed  
2494 in the marketplace. The law requires that that deployment be  
2495 free of unfair or deceptive acts and practices, and we need  
2496 to be able to have robust, bipartisan conversations about how  
2497 those laws are being executed.

2498         You mentioned the Rite Aid case. That is an important  
2499 one. Another important one is the Snap case, where AI  
2500 chatbots \_ I actually can't get into the specific details of  
2501 the case because the fact of it was made public, but not the  
2502 details, but it was a case where the FTC referred very  
2503 serious concerns about the use of AI chatbots to the  
2504 Department of Justice.

2505         And there is bipartisan debate and also bipartisan  
2506 agreement about these issues. That debate makes us stronger.  
2507 It makes the work better. It makes it more durable. And I  
2508 think that that is true whether I serve in the minority or in  
2509 the majority. It is the fact of having a diverse set of  
2510 viewpoints to inform the work of the FTC that allows that  
2511 work to be both effective and durable.

2512         \*Ms. Clarke. Let me thank you for all of your hard work  
2513 and dedication.

2514         To the parents in the room, your loss is not lost on us.  
2515 And I have been battling in this committee for many years

2516 around the fact that we have allowed no guardrails to be  
2517 placed around the technologies that our children are being  
2518 exposed to.

2519 I understand that my time has been finished.

2520 \*Mr. Fulcher. [Presiding.] The gentlelady's \_

2521 \*Ms. Clarke. But I did want to say to you, where there  
2522 is a will \_

2523 \*Mr. Fulcher. The gentlelady's time has expired.

2524 \*Ms. Clarke. \_ there is a way, and we will get \_

2525 \*Mr. Fulcher. The gentlelady's time has expired.

2526 \*Ms. Clarke. And I yield back.

2527 \*Mr. Fulcher. The chair recognizes the representative  
2528 from Indiana, Representative Houchin.

2529 \*Mrs. Houchin. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also want to  
2530 thank Chairman Guthrie, subcommittee Chair Bilirakis, and all  
2531 the staff who worked hard to make this hearing possible.

2532 I especially want to thank the witnesses for being here  
2533 today and apologize to you for what you have had to go  
2534 through in the last several hours. It is unfair and  
2535 disappointing.

2536 While I am new to this committee, I am not new to these  
2537 issues. I am a parent of two daughters who are now young  
2538 adults and a son who is a teenager. And they have grown up  
2539 surrounded by social media and immersed in the digital world.  
2540 And as a parent I want to directly respond to Ms. Hawkins.

2541 I have experienced everything that you mentioned with,  
2542 you know, the failures in the protections that are supposed  
2543 to be in place, Apple devices having confusing parental  
2544 controls, Roblox claiming that people cannot message your  
2545 children and access your children when they can, Snap map,  
2546 and also YouTube Kids which my son, when he was very young, I  
2547 thought was protected because it is YouTube Kids, and he was  
2548 on the app so long that it turned into something that he  
2549 shouldn't have seen. We tried everything, every protection  
2550 possible. We had parental apps that \_ like Qustodio that are  
2551 supposed to protect kids from some of these things.

2552 But one of the things that happens in these  
2553 circumstances is, even as parents, if we are as vigilant as  
2554 possible, they can still go to other kids' devices and access  
2555 these apps, and we cannot monitor them 100 percent of the  
2556 time. My daughter found a workaround to stay on her phone.

2557 So I am very grateful we are having this hearing today,  
2558 and I want to make special recognition of the parents that  
2559 are here in the audience, and I want to apologize to you for  
2560 the things that are being taken away from this conversation  
2561 not being focused on protecting children, but instead on  
2562 someone's job at the FTC. I think that is completely unfair.

2563 I was also stopped in the hallway by a reporter who only  
2564 wanted to ask me about the FTC. I did not comment because  
2565 this hearing today is about protecting kids. A follow-up

2566 question was asked and I said, "I am not commenting because  
2567 this hearing today is about protecting kids.'" And shame on  
2568 the media if the only thing they cover from today is the FTC  
2569 because children are dying, and parents need to hear this  
2570 information. I am new to the committee, and at today's  
2571 hearing the core is protecting kids.

2572 I do want to recognize Mason Bogard. Mason Bogard's  
2573 memory is with us today. Mason's mother, Joanne, sent me a  
2574 powerful letter that I want to read a portion of. "My 15-  
2575 year-old son, Mason, was our youngest of three children. He  
2576 enjoyed playing his drums and entertaining his friends and  
2577 family with his witty humor. He had just started his first  
2578 job at a landscape business and was excited to start driver's  
2579 ed. He enjoyed everything about the outdoors, including  
2580 camping, hiking, and his love of fishing. He liked watching  
2581 videos online to learn how to make new fishing lures and  
2582 master his woodworking skills. He was a child of God, and  
2583 knew he was loved by his family and friends. What I want you  
2584 to know is that Mason was living a healthy and well-balanced  
2585 lifestyle as a typical teen. Mason is no longer with us as a  
2586 result of the choking challenge. And I think of Mason every  
2587 time we discuss these issues.'" His story stays with me, and  
2588 so does the challenge coin that his mother gave me, which I  
2589 keep as a reminder of what we are fighting for.

2590 Sadly, Mason's story is not unique. Annalee Schott was

2591 exposed to extremely graphic videos and images on platforms  
2592 like TikTok and Instagram, so graphic that she even witnessed  
2593 a live suicide being streamed. That experience had a  
2594 devastating impact on her mental health, and ultimately led  
2595 to her taking her own life in November of 2020.

2596 Becca Schmill died at 18 after unknowingly purchasing  
2597 fentanyl-laced cocaine online. Her mother traces Becca's  
2598 struggles back to trauma that was facilitated by social  
2599 media, sexual assault, cyber bullying, and easy-to-access  
2600 dangerous drugs.

2601 Then there is Walker Montgomery. Walker was the victim  
2602 of a horrific sextortion scheme. He was blackmailed after  
2603 unknowingly participating in a sexual encounter that was  
2604 secretly recorded by someone pretending to be someone else.  
2605 The perpetrators demanded \$1,000 or they would release the  
2606 footage to his friends and family. He tragically took his  
2607 own life.

2608 These are real kids, real families, real tragedies.  
2609 These are complex issues with legal and regulatory  
2610 implications. But we should not \_ it shouldn't be so complex  
2611 that we don't achieve our shared goal which is to protect  
2612 kids. Meeting with parents like Joanne and those who loved  
2613 Annalee, Becca, and Walker is both heartbreaking and  
2614 motivating. These families have turned unimaginable grief  
2615 into a mission to help prevent other tragedies. Every time I

2616 meet with them I am reminded why this work matters, and I am  
2617 proud to be a champion for them.

2618 Mr. Chairman, I don't have any questions. I yield back.

2619 \*Mr. Fulcher. Thank you. The chair recognizes the  
2620 gentleman from California, Congressman Mullin.

2621 \*Mr. Mullin. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you all for  
2622 being here.

2623 I want to begin by reiterating that the bills and  
2624 approaches discussed here today to protect our children  
2625 online would fall to the FTC to enforce. Congress  
2626 established the FTC as an independent agency with a clear  
2627 mandate to protect consumers from unfair, deceptive, and  
2628 fraudulent practices. For 90 years the President has not  
2629 been able to fire an FTC commissioner without just cause.  
2630 And yet today we find ourselves a week removed from the  
2631 attempted unlawful firings of two FTC commissioners by the  
2632 President. Beyond that, the chair of the FTC has gone along  
2633 with the Elon Musk DOGE operation and dismissed a number of  
2634 FTC employees with probationary status, also without cause.

2635 I am having a hard time figuring out why anyone on  
2636 either side of the aisle would want this. If the FTC is no  
2637 longer an independent agency, and if it no longer has the  
2638 resources it needs to actually get the work done, then what  
2639 are we even doing here?

2640 I am deeply concerned about a rollback of some of the

2641 strong consumer protection work that the FTC has done over  
2642 the last several years. Much of it was bipartisan, but some  
2643 of it, particularly some of the work done during the last few  
2644 months of the Biden Administration, was passed on a strictly  
2645 partisan basis in order to address a breach of driving  
2646 location data by a major car company, a referral of a  
2647 consumer complaint against Snap to the Department of Justice  
2648 in order to prevent location-based targeted advertising  
2649 without user consent, a new click-to-cancel rule that  
2650 prevents unfair business practices and enables consumers to  
2651 more easily unsubscribe from recurring charges.

2652         Despite the clear benefits to consumers of all of this  
2653 work, none of these initiatives were supported by the other  
2654 two commissioners, who, at least for now, remain in their  
2655 position. So Commissioner Slaughter, as I understand it, you  
2656 will be challenging the President's attempts to unlawfully  
2657 fire you and Commissioner Bedoya, as well. While that  
2658 challenge is underway, will the two other commissioners undo  
2659 all of this progress I cited?

2660         How does your attempted firing impact the FTC's  
2661 legitimacy, authority, and role, and what does that mean for  
2662 American consumers and businesses?

2663         \*Ms. Slaughter. Thank you.

2664         I think at the moment it is really unclear what happens  
2665 to any FTC action. As you notice \_ as you noted, we haven't

2666 been in a position like this in over 90 years, so there is a  
2667 lot we don't know about what happens. And what concerns me  
2668 is that throws work, even work that I would agree with, into  
2669 question. The last thing I voted on before the President  
2670 tried to fire me was a 40 challenge to a medical device  
2671 merger that would raise the cost of health care even further.

2672         There is a lot of things that I agree on with my  
2673 Republican colleagues, and that is work that is done best on  
2674 a bipartisan basis. There are also good things that I think  
2675 the agency has done that they don't support. It has always  
2676 been clear to me that they might try to undo some of the  
2677 progress that I think we made in the last administration, and  
2678 they are entitled to do that as a majority, but they need to  
2679 get the votes to do that. And they, under the law, need to  
2680 do that in the face of the transparency and accountability  
2681 that minority votes would provide. And that is helpful to  
2682 Congress and to the American public.

2683         \*Mr. Mullin. And Commissioner, in your prior testimony  
2684 you have outlined several examples of the FTC enforcing  
2685 online safety. Can you expand on the steps taken over the  
2686 last four years to bring more technologists into the agency?

2687         How is this expertise being undermined by the  
2688 Administration's actions?

2689         And what impact will this have on the FTC's ability to  
2690 investigate and protect consumers' online safety moving

2691 forward, in your opinion?

2692 \*Ms. Slaughter. I think one of our big accomplishments  
2693 during the last administration was setting up the Office of  
2694 Technology. The FTC was created by Congress to be a body of  
2695 independent experts, and we have long relied on the expertise  
2696 of economists and others. We \_ Chair Khan set up an Office  
2697 of Technology and built it out with really expert  
2698 technologists who can inform our research work, our casework,  
2699 and report out to the public about technological trends. And  
2700 that is enormously valuable. That office is much smaller now  
2701 than it was even two months ago. I couldn't give you the  
2702 exact numbers, but it is substantially smaller, and I worry  
2703 that that critically important expertise is being limited by  
2704 some of the broader cuts we are seeing across the government.

2705 \*Mr. Mullin. Well, Commissioner, I would like to thank  
2706 you for your service, which is not over, and for your  
2707 continued efforts to protect our children and American  
2708 consumers. So thank you.

2709 And with that, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

2710 \*Mr. Fulcher. Thank you. The chair recognizes the  
2711 gentleman from South Carolina, Congressman Fry.

2712 \*Mr. Fry. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having this  
2713 hearing today. Thank you to the witnesses, to the parents in  
2714 the room who are here, who have traveled far.

2715 The bravery, Ms. Hawkins, of dealing with the stuff that

2716 you dealt with yesterday with the death threats, I think that  
2717 there is no place in this.

2718           And I am going to go off the reservation a little bit  
2719 here in that there is a reason why Democrats are viewed by  
2720 the American people at an all-time low. It is because they  
2721 can't keep the main thing the main thing. We are here today,  
2722 to be clear, 100 percent \_ everyone knew the assignment when  
2723 we got into this hearing room ahead of time. We are here to  
2724 talk about children's safety online. And all I hear from the  
2725 other side is rantings and ravings about the FTC. If you  
2726 want to talk about the FTC, go do a one-minute speech on the  
2727 House floor. You want to talk about the FTC? Have a press  
2728 conference. Here \_

2729           \*Ms. Castor. Will the gentleman yield?

2730           \*Mr. Fry. No, I am not \_ this is my time. Here we are  
2731 here to talk about children. But they can't seem to get it,  
2732 and that is why they are viewed deeply unpopular by the  
2733 American people right now.

2734           And in fact, the witness from the FTC spent four of her  
2735 five minutes talking about how she was fired, and not the  
2736 actual subject while we are here. So that is frustrating to  
2737 me.

2738           But there is broad bipartisan consensus on a lot of this  
2739 stuff. We are here to examine that, on ways that we can  
2740 advance sensible policy.

2741           Ms. Hawkins, you talked about somebody from South  
2742 Carolina, Mr. Guffey, who is a state representative, and his  
2743 son Gavin, who was involved in a sextortion scheme. And I am  
2744 glad that law enforcement is doing something about it now,  
2745 but that doesn't replace his son.

2746           And so what can we do as policymakers up here? There is  
2747 a lot. Sextortion, AI-generated abuse and imagery, online  
2748 platforms turning a blind eye. These are all things that we  
2749 recognize. The danger is real, and it is accelerating what  
2750 we have now.

2751           Ms. Souras, your testimony highlighted an astounding  
2752 1,325 percent increase in AI-generated child sexual abuse  
2753 material. What are the challenges of law enforcement in  
2754 identifying those \_ under the current scheme identifying and  
2755 distinguishing AI-generated images from real victims?

2756           \*Ms. Souras. Thank you for the question. That is a  
2757 challenge both for NCMEC that has a child victim  
2758 identification program that works closely with law  
2759 enforcement and, obviously, all law enforcement agencies that  
2760 are \_ when they see an image of the sexual abuse of a child,  
2761 they often do not know where that child is. They need to  
2762 identify that child. They need to locate that child. There  
2763 is a lot of work that goes into that.

2764           Now that we have AI-generated imagery \_ and, you know, I  
2765 am told by the analysts at NCMEC that the technology is so

2766 good now that it is very, very difficult to distinguish. It  
2767 was easier six months ago, a year ago, but now it is very  
2768 difficult to distinguish between an image that is AI-  
2769 generated of a child being sexually abused and an actual  
2770 image of a child being sexually abused.

2771         So what we have is a flood of imagery, some that is \_ I  
2772 will call it fake, but it is a digital forgery, and some that  
2773 is a real child who might be in an actively abusive  
2774 situation. And law enforcement \_ and again, and NCMEC, in  
2775 our support role, have to somehow decipher which are the real  
2776 children. So we face the real danger that somebody will  
2777 spend time trying to identify a child who simply does not  
2778 exist, it is an AI-generated child, while a real child  
2779 currently in an abusive situation waits in the queue.

2780         \*Mr. Fry. Do you think legislation could properly  
2781 address that challenge that we have?

2782         \*Ms. Souras. I think it could, again, if we look  
2783 especially upstream so that we can prevent this technology  
2784 from even being allowed to create that imagery to begin with.

2785         \*Mr. Fry. Thank you for that.

2786         Ms. Morell, you know, tech companies knowingly design  
2787 addictive platforms and evade meaningful age verification.  
2788 Your testimony talked about that. In your view, what  
2789 specific legal requirements beyond just parental controls  
2790 should Congress evaluate to stop the cycle of exposure and

2791 exploitation?

2792           \*Ms. Morell. Yes, so I will say I am on the extreme  
2793 end. I would kind of plant my flag in the ground on saying I  
2794 think Congress should seriously consider that the environment  
2795 and the underlying design of social media is so harmful to  
2796 children it should actually be age-restricted out of  
2797 childhood. The default age for social media has been 13, but  
2798 not because of a specific law related to social media but  
2799 because of COPPA passed in 1996, before social media even  
2800 existed, about data collection.

2801           And so I think we really need an updated legal regime  
2802 that really tries to delay social media as far as possible.  
2803 Because if you talk to parents, almost every parent says I  
2804 wish that my child wasn't on social media, but I feel  
2805 compelled to let them on these apps because every one of  
2806 their friends is on it. And that, to me, is a classic  
2807 collective action problem that the government has a very  
2808 critical role to play in solving, where then each individual  
2809 parent doesn't have to face that battle on their own.

2810           We can say, like alcohol or tobacco or even operating  
2811 firearms or driving cars, technologies we have recognized are  
2812 just too powerful for a child to handle. I think we are  
2813 seeing that in the way social media has even changed over  
2814 time, how aggressive the algorithms are, that the entire  
2815 nature and environment it creates and the underlying design

2816 is not a place for children.

2817 \*Mr. Fry. Thank you for that.

2818 Mr. Chairman, before I yield I want to enter three  
2819 articles into the record about Mr. Guffey and his fight from  
2820 various periodicals in South Carolina.

2821 \*Mr. Bilirakis. [Presiding.] Without objection, so  
2822 ordered.

2823 [The information follows:]

2824

2825 \*\*\*\*\*COMMITTEE INSERT\*\*\*\*\*

2826

2827           \*Mr. Fry. Thank you so much.

2828           \*Mr. Bilirakis. Okay. The gentleman yields back. Ms.  
2829 Schrier, Dr. Schrier, you are recognized for five minutes of  
2830 questioning.

2831           \*Ms. Schrier. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to  
2832 all of the witnesses for being here today. Thank you for the  
2833 parents for being here today. And a special thank you to  
2834 Commissioners Bedoya and Slaughter for being here today. Oh,  
2835 also thanks, Mr. Fry, for lecturing a pediatrician about  
2836 caring for children, but not for your leadership in blocking  
2837 our bill that protects children.

2838           Amen, Ms. Morell. I have a 16-year-old, and he is  
2839 forbidden from downloading any social media on his phone.

2840           So we are here today to talk about online safety for  
2841 children. It is an issue I care deeply about that I have  
2842 been working on for years. And as a pediatrician I have seen  
2843 the negative effects that unfettered screen time and social  
2844 media has had on children. In fact, I witnessed in my own  
2845 practice the steep rise in depression and anxiety and eating  
2846 disorders that absolutely paralleled the rise in social media  
2847 use by kids. I even had a patient who had to change school  
2848 districts twice because of online bullying, and it followed  
2849 her. So this is one reason I have been such a champion for  
2850 cracking down on the way social media companies abuse  
2851 children like privacy violations, algorithms that keep them

2852 addicted, and a lack of protection from abuse by others, and  
2853 it is the reason that I am particularly frustrated that  
2854 Republican leadership blocked the Kids Online Safety Act from  
2855 even coming to the floor for a bipartisan vote.

2856         But there is an elephant in the room. As we have heard  
2857 today, President Trump has fired the only two Democratic  
2858 commissioners at the FTC. These firings upend nearly a  
2859 century of precedent through this illegal attempt to fire  
2860 them. Commissioners Slaughter and Bedoya have championed and  
2861 enforced the protection of children on social media  
2862 platforms, and this is the commission that holds big tech  
2863 accountable.

2864         It is also the commission that protected consumers last  
2865 year by preventing the merger between Kroger and Albertsons  
2866 which would have jacked up prices in the grocery stores even  
2867 more. So the FTC is one of the most important independent  
2868 agencies in our government, and an agency that was  
2869 commissioned by Congress to be independent, bipartisan, and  
2870 with terms spanning administrations.

2871         But I fear that, without two Democratic commissioners, a  
2872 partisan FTC might withdraw from its mission in this  
2873 political environment with an emboldened executive branch  
2874 that has been quite successful in bending Republicans to his  
2875 will. This administration has clearly aligned itself with  
2876 big tech, front row seats at the inauguration, but \_ rather

2877 than with the American consumer.

2878           So Commissioner Slaughter, I am nearly last to speak  
2879 today. And I just want to give you, first of all, thanks for  
2880 enforcing our laws. But second I would like to just give you  
2881 the platform for the next two minutes to talk about anything  
2882 you would like that you either want to reiterate or have not  
2883 had time to address today.

2884           \*Ms. Slaughter. Thank you. I feel like I have had a  
2885 lot of opportunity to share my perspective, but I think the  
2886 most important thing that I haven't had a chance to say is it  
2887 really is not about me or about Commissioner Bedoya. We love  
2888 our agency. We love our jobs. We want to do it. But I  
2889 could be very happy spending time with my four kids and  
2890 trying to police their social media use unsuccessfully more.  
2891 But what I care about and what Commissioner Bedoya cares  
2892 about is the integrity of the work of the agency precisely  
2893 because of the people who are sitting in this room today.

2894           I feel he feels very, very driven to make sure that  
2895 government and the institutions that Congress has designed  
2896 are working for parents like those behind us and for every  
2897 other parent so they don't have to be in that position going  
2898 forward. It is so important.

2899           It is not about being a Democrat. It is not about being  
2900 in the minority. It would be true throughout the  
2901 Commission's history. I think it is important to have a

2902 variety of voices and a variety of perspectives, as Congress  
2903 designed, precisely because these issues that the FTC is  
2904 tasked with handling are so important to the American people.  
2905 And I care deeply about them, and I want that work to  
2906 continue.

2907 I have heard so much common ground with my fellow  
2908 witnesses today, and so much shared concern that I have with  
2909 them about the way technology today is operating outside the  
2910 bounds of what the law is and also what the law should be.  
2911 And we want to make sure that the focus of the agency is on  
2912 protecting those kids and protecting those families.

2913 \*Ms. Schrier. Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you to  
2914 our witnesses to the parents here today. And that is the  
2915 whole point, to offer our condolences and make sure this does  
2916 not happen to any other child or parent.

2917 I yield back.

2918 \*Mr. Bilirakis. The gentlelady yields back. I now will  
2919 recognize Ms. Laurel Lee for her five minutes of questioning.

2920 \*Ms. Lee. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this  
2921 important hearing, and I also express my gratitude to each of  
2922 our witnesses for being here today and sharing your important  
2923 testimony with us.

2924 So during the last Congress I had an opportunity to work  
2925 on legislation related to protecting children, most notably  
2926 the REPORT Act, and was fortunate to partner with a number of

2927 the groups that are represented here today in crafting that  
2928 policy. And I look forward to continuing our work together  
2929 on protecting kids online here in this committee.

2930 As our committee explores legislation such as COPPA, we  
2931 face the task of ensuring that we are making the right  
2932 decisions and keeping our children safe. Your input and your  
2933 testimony, as you have heard today, is so valuable to us  
2934 drafting legislation and getting it right. Ms. Morell, as  
2935 you noted \_ I thank you for being here and for sharing your  
2936 expertise and your thoughtful insight about these challenges.  
2937 And as you noted, it has been many years since Congress  
2938 enacted privacy protections for children online. And in  
2939 those years technology has evolved and outpaced the  
2940 protections that we have currently in place. I am eager to  
2941 work on COPPA with Representatives Castor and Walberg to  
2942 improve protections for minors in a way that is in keeping  
2943 with the threats we face in the 21st century.

2944 Now, one thing I want to touch on specifically is the  
2945 targeted ads. So as they relate to adults, those can  
2946 sometimes be helpful in retail and other applications. They  
2947 can sometimes be something that is a benefit to the consumer.  
2948 But for targeted ads as they relate to children and young  
2949 people, will you explain to us why that practice in  
2950 particular is harmful?

2951 \*Ms. Morell. Yes, it is extremely harmful because

2952 children are not \_ don't have the maturity that an adult has  
2953 to be able to make decisions for themselves and to discern  
2954 truth from false claims. And so I think it is really  
2955 dangerous that these businesses are allowed to target ads to  
2956 children in ways that then they feel compelled then that they  
2957 should buy this product and they are not discerning. And so  
2958 I think it is a really predatory practice.

2959       \*Ms. Lee. And on that note, in your testimony you  
2960 identify how big tech continues to recruit younger and  
2961 younger users to their platforms. And you were just speaking  
2962 with Representative Fry about your view that we really ought  
2963 to just restrict access to these platforms to a higher age.  
2964 Tell us a little bit more about your thoughts on that  
2965 subject.

2966       \*Ms. Morell. Yes. So I think that the nature of social  
2967 media today is not a safe place for children. I feel like  
2968 example after example has shown that the environment created  
2969 by the product design, the way that their algorithms work,  
2970 the kinds of material it promotes, which is often the most  
2971 sensational or violent or explicit materials, what gets  
2972 promoted into children's feed have made it an extremely  
2973 unsafe place, as well as the metrics are designed to  
2974 incentivize children to even post sexual images of  
2975 themselves. And it has normalized a lot of the practices  
2976 that we are talking about.

2977           Why are teens creating deepfake pornography? Because  
2978 the environment and nature of the online world is extremely  
2979 sexualized and violent. And so it is not a safe place for  
2980 children. And I have said this before, but the same way that  
2981 in the real world we don't take children to bars or strip  
2982 clubs and then try to blindfold them there, we just don't  
2983 take them to those places. And I think social media has  
2984 gotten to that point today that, unless the business model  
2985 vastly changes, it is not a safe environment for children,  
2986 nor is it a safe substance because, as we have seen, brain  
2987 studies show it acts on the brain like highly addictive  
2988 drugs.

2989           And so for both those reasons I think the precedent in  
2990 our laws tell us to age-restrict it out of childhood.

2991           \*Ms. Lee. And Ms. Hawkins, one of the things that you  
2992 have emphasized is the vulnerability of young teens who are  
2993 not protected after the age of 13 under our current scheme.  
2994 Would you like to speak on this, as well, and how you think  
2995 that should change?

2996           \*Ms. Hawkins. Thank you. Well, one of the problems  
2997 with COPPA originally passed is that it set the digital age  
2998 \_ inadvertently set the digital age of adulthood at 13. And  
2999 even though it was focused on privacy, big tech has just run  
3000 away with this idea, and they have literally \_ I mean, one  
3001 time I met with Google 10 years ago. I walked out of the

3002 meeting with Google, and we were talking about, you know,  
3003 filters for 13, 14, 15-year-olds. And they said, "Why would  
3004 we want to block pornography from a 14-year-old? They are  
3005 adults at that age.'" And that is when I realized the impact  
3006 of creating this digital adulthood age.

3007 And I just ask \_ there is so much good in COPPA 2.0.  
3008 There is so much good, and we need it. But I also ask that  
3009 we not further cement this idea that we are digital adults at  
3010 that age, and that parents are not needed.

3011 \*Ms. Lee. Thank you.

3012 Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

3013 \*Mr. Bilirakis. Thank you. I thank the gentlelady.  
3014 Now we have Mr. Veasey.

3015 You recognized, sir, for your five minutes of  
3016 questioning.

3017 \*Mr. Veasey. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to  
3018 thank the witnesses for being here today. I think that we  
3019 have learned a lot today that blocking bills like COPPA and  
3020 other things that are \_ that protect our kids is bad, and  
3021 that we shouldn't be doing that. And so I appreciate your  
3022 comments today and you sharing some of those things.

3023 I also wanted to talk very briefly about the attempted  
3024 removal of two minority commissioners from the FTC, and how I  
3025 think that that is really bad for the things that we are  
3026 trying to accomplish here today to protect our children and

3027 other consumers, as this agency has a very long history of  
3028 doing. It is unconstitutional. It is wrong. And that is  
3029 the type of thing that could really further wreck our kids  
3030 and our teenagers' lives. And that is not what we want. I  
3031 think that is the one thing that we have heard from the panel  
3032 is that we don't want things that are going to make it harder  
3033 for our young people. We want to protect them, and we can't  
3034 do that if we are going to try to undermine the Constitution.

3035         Commissioner Slaughter, I wanted to ask you. You have a  
3036 very strong record for advocating for consumer protections  
3037 with \_ and with ongoing supply chain disruptions and shifting  
3038 tariff policies, I really worry that unfair and deceptive  
3039 business practices are going to be on the horizon. How does  
3040 President Trump's attempt to remove you and the other  
3041 commissioner from the minority impact the Federal Trade  
3042 Commission's ability to hold corporations and people that  
3043 want to hurt our kids and other consumers through things like  
3044 price gouging accountable?

3045         \*Ms. Slaughter. Thank you. Congress designed the FTC  
3046 over 100 years ago, 111 years ago, and set it up to be a  
3047 bipartisan agency made up of members from both parties who  
3048 serve staggered terms because Congress understood that that  
3049 was a really important way to insulate the work of the FTC  
3050 from corrupting influences, from partisanship, and from  
3051 political interference.

3052           Over the time I have served at the FTC our staff have  
3053 gone up against some of the most powerful companies in court.  
3054 They have done that supported by commissioners from both  
3055 parties because we understand that our obligation is to  
3056 enforce the law without fear or favor. That is based in the  
3057 design of the FTC that Congress set up. And I am very  
3058 concerned that my attempted removal not only eliminates the  
3059 bipartisan voices that Congress intended, but it also sends a  
3060 message to the majority commissioners that they too could be  
3061 removed at a whim if they are not willing to take action that  
3062 may be a favor to some of these big, big companies, the most  
3063 powerful companies in the world. And that is really  
3064 concerning if what we want \_ what we all want, I think, is  
3065 for the focus of the administration of the law to be on the  
3066 American people \_

3067           \*Mr. Veasey. Yes.

3068           \*Ms. Slaughter. \_ the children, the consumers, the  
3069 workers, and honest businesses.

3070           \*Mr. Veasey. That is scary, because that is almost the  
3071 type of thing that you hear of in a communist country.

3072           Commissioner Slaughter also, I know, as the nation's top  
3073 privacy enforcer, that you guys want to protect Americans'  
3074 data, their personal data. And data \_ again, that could be \_  
3075 and I think everybody on this panel seems to express an  
3076 interest in helping kids, especially, and that kids can have

3077 data. All of us can. And I wanted to ask you, with data  
3078 breaches on the rise and targeted advertisements constantly  
3079 testing the limits of consumer privacy, how does your  
3080 attempted removal and the other commissioners attempted  
3081 removal weaken the FTC's ability to protect users online?

3082 And do you see this as part of a broader effort to  
3083 undermine the agency's independence?

3084 \*Ms. Slaughter. Yes, I am very worried about it. The  
3085 FTC has conducted a study on social media and video streaming  
3086 services' data collection and use practices. I mentioned it  
3087 a little bit earlier. It started under the first Trump  
3088 Administration. It was the product of a bipartisan effort by  
3089 myself, former Commissioner Wilson, former Commissioner  
3090 Chopra. We finally released the report last year.

3091 And what I didn't get a chance to say is that report  
3092 talks not only about the way data is collected, but also how  
3093 it is used. We have heard a little bit about some of the  
3094 really disturbing challenges that kids are set up with  
3095 online. We heard about the choking challenge. There has  
3096 been the Tide pod challenge. The report that we issued  
3097 talked about the ways in which companies use data to fuel  
3098 engagement and interest, including around things like this  
3099 that create real material harms for kids that cannot be  
3100 undone.

3101 \*Mr. Veasey. Yes.

3102 \*Ms. Slaughter. Once it happens, it is too late.

3103 \*Mr. Veasey. Yes.

3104 \*Ms. Slaughter. So our job, as all of the parents in  
3105 this audience know, is to get ahead of those problems, to  
3106 send clear signals to the market on a bipartisan basis about  
3107 what conduct is prohibited by the law and how companies bear  
3108 the burden of following the law, and that that needs to be  
3109 done without fear or favor.

3110 \*Mr. Veasey. Thank you.

3111 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3112 \*Mr. Bilirakis. I appreciate it. I thank the gentleman  
3113 for yielding back. And now we will recognize Mr. Kean from  
3114 the great State of New Jersey.

3115 You are recognized for five minutes of questioning, sir.

3116 \*Mr. Kean. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to  
3117 all of our witnesses for being here today. Last Congress,  
3118 following a horrific deepfake incident at high school in my  
3119 district, I made AI safety a priority. I led efforts on the  
3120 AI Labeling Act. I co-led the Preventing Deepfakes of  
3121 Intimate Images Act, and I am cosponsoring the TAKE IT DOWN  
3122 Act. We must ensure proper oversight holding bad actors  
3123 accountable and fostering responsibility among AI companies  
3124 and users.

3125 While AI safeguards remain critically important, another  
3126 focus \_ now is expanding towards data privacy concerns,

3127 particularly on how we protect Americans, especially  
3128 children, from online exploitation and data misuse. As  
3129 Congress considers Federal data privacy standards, today's  
3130 discussions will help us understand the challenges families  
3131 face and the most effective ways to ensure stronger  
3132 protections moving forward.

3133 Ms. Souras, what legal and technological challenges  
3134 exist in preventing the spread of malicious deepfake  
3135 pornography?

3136 And what role does Congress play in strengthening  
3137 protections for victims while holding perpetrators  
3138 accountable?

3139 \*Ms. Souras. Thank you for the question, Congressman.  
3140 Let me address the technical challenges first.

3141 I think there is a rush to market. We are our country  
3142 of innovation. We saw this when the Internet first arose.  
3143 We are seeing this with AI now. There is tremendous  
3144 competition and pressure to rush products to market without  
3145 safety by design, without consideration of how children will  
3146 interact with these tools and how offenders will misuse these  
3147 tools. So that is, I think, the primary challenge.

3148 There also is really, again, a lack of safety by design.  
3149 We have heard that term, I think, throughout the hearing  
3150 today. It is embedded in several pending bills that I think  
3151 will be addressed this term. But it is really the concept of

3152 requiring companies before they roll out a new service, a new  
3153 platform, a new product to really consider the dangers to  
3154 children \_ again, the misuse by offenders, and how a child  
3155 might interact with the new technology \_ and safeguard those  
3156 children.

3157 I think the final issue is, again, looking to the  
3158 upstream. We need to look upstream on technology in terms of  
3159 AI producers and AI developers. We need to help those  
3160 producers that want to create a self \_ a safe product. We  
3161 need to consider red teaming so they actually have the  
3162 ability to test that AI and make sure it is not available or  
3163 able to produce child sexual exploitation material. That is  
3164 a complicated partnership that needs to occur to achieve  
3165 that. But we need to again look upstream and prevent this  
3166 imagery from being created in the first place, rather than  
3167 focusing only on criminal or civil remedies down the road.

3168 If I can, just to address the legal challenges as well,  
3169 so I don't really think there is unclear liability around AI  
3170 companies. I think it is clear that they are not protected  
3171 by section 230. I do think there is a lack of clarity around  
3172 civil and criminal remedies. Obviously, TAKE IT DOWN will  
3173 address the criminal remedies. There have been some bills  
3174 pending in the last term, and I expect to see them  
3175 reintroduced this term as well that would address the civil  
3176 penalties. So again, we really need those three avenues to

3177 completely protect children from AI.

3178 \*Mr. Kean. Thank you.

3179 Ms. Hawkins, is there anything you would like to add on  
3180 that?

3181 \*Ms. Hawkins. I want to add just that behind me sits  
3182 the Young People's Alliance, a group of young people; the  
3183 parents of Matthew and Grace also. And we have walked these  
3184 halls together asking for Congress to take action. And we  
3185 join together again asking once more.

3186 We felt outrage when the Kids Online Safety Act, when  
3187 the TAKE IT DOWN Act, when so many of these other bills  
3188 didn't pass last year. And we just come before you asking  
3189 for Congress to finally take action.

3190 \*Mr. Kean. Thank you. Thank you.

3191 Ms. Morell, what are the key obstacles preventing  
3192 parents from effectively utilizing existing online safety  
3193 tools?

3194 And how can Congress address these gaps without  
3195 infringing on First Amendment rights?

3196 \*Ms. Morell. Yes. So the current gaps is that the  
3197 tools made available to parents don't actually allow parents  
3198 oversight or insight into what is happening on a child's feed  
3199 or their direct messages, which is where a lot of the  
3200 sextortion schemes or predators are gaining access to  
3201 children through these messages that parents have no access

3202 to. And the parental supervision tools available are really  
3203 just to set time limits or certain restrictions on the app,  
3204 but often those restrictions aren't effective. And also the  
3205 teen can cancel this supervision at any time. And so it is  
3206 not really an effective control in that sense.

3207 And so what I have argued and advocated for is really  
3208 age-restricting social media out of childhood as an unsafe  
3209 substance and dangerous environment for children. That would  
3210 empower all parents to be able to protect their kids,  
3211 including \_ this hasn't really been mentioned, but a lot of  
3212 children are left unprotected because they don't have  
3213 involved parents. And I think we need to care for America's  
3214 children across the board, whether or not they have involved  
3215 parents putting those controls in place or not. And so that  
3216 is why I have advocated for solutions that age-restrict it  
3217 out of childhood.

3218 And the last thing I would say is I think the other way  
3219 that we hold companies accountable for harms to children is  
3220 opening up liability against them. And that has largely been  
3221 blocked because of section 230. And so KOSA and other bills  
3222 like it would try to actually clarify that companies need to  
3223 be liable for mitigating objective harms to children in their  
3224 product design.

3225 \*Mr. Kean. Thank you.

3226 I yield back.

3227           \*Mr. Bilirakis. I appreciate it. The gentleman yields  
3228 back and I now recognize Mr. Evans from the great State of  
3229 Colorado.

3230           \*Mr. Evans. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, to the ranking  
3231 member, to the witnesses for coming today and, of course, to  
3232 the families and to the parents who are in the audience. My  
3233 first question will be to Ms. Souras with NCMEC.

3234           I was a cop for a little over 10 years, so I have  
3235 personally worked these cases that originated with tips from  
3236 NCMEC. I know the great work that you do. And  
3237 unfortunately, I know the truly terrible and traumatic events  
3238 that you often have to monitor and then refer out for  
3239 investigation: digital alterations, revenge porn, online  
3240 bullying, AI, deepfake, sextortion, and the list goes on and  
3241 on. And I think it is critically important to note how  
3242 horrible and graphic these crimes are.

3243           One of the things that I did in law enforcement was peer  
3244 support. And so that is police officers taking care of other  
3245 police officers to safeguard and shepherd the mental health  
3246 of first responders. And some of the highest levels of  
3247 trauma that we ever see in law enforcement is the crimes  
3248 against children \_ investigators, because of just the  
3249 absolutely brutal and graphic nature of these crimes. And  
3250 NCMEC and the work that you do is at the front lines of being  
3251 able to identify and refer out for further investigation in

3252 this space.

3253           And so my first question to you comes from something  
3254 that you had mentioned in your written testimony where you  
3255 were talking about some of the challenges of online digital  
3256 security with end-to-end encryption, but how end-to-end  
3257 encryption also makes it more difficult at times to be able  
3258 to actually identify this. And so my question to you is, can  
3259 you speak a little bit about how we can protect online  
3260 privacy with good encryption, but also make sure that  
3261 entities like NCMEC have the tools that they need to be able  
3262 to find, interdict, and refer out for investigation some of  
3263 these heinous crimes?

3264           \*Ms. Souras. Thank you for the question.

3265           So I think when we are talking about end-to-end  
3266 encryption and child safety, it is a balancing act, right?  
3267 Like so many other things in our legal system. NCMEC has  
3268 been very public that we support end-to-end encryption for  
3269 consumer privacy. Obviously, everybody wants their medical,  
3270 their legal, you know, their financial information to be  
3271 protected through strong security measures, end-to-end  
3272 encrypted, et cetera. We have probably all in this room been  
3273 hacked previously due to a lack of digital security.

3274           However, there has to be a balance regarding child  
3275 safety, and I feel like this has become a, you know, a little  
3276 bit of a choice where you have to pick one at the sacrifice

3277 of the other, and we simply don't believe that is the case.

3278           So when you are considering child safety considerations,  
3279 again, those are not financial, medical, legal concerns that  
3280 adults are engaging in. We are talking about children  
3281 engaging with adults, with offenders on social media. There  
3282 are platforms there that simply do not need to be default  
3283 end-to-end encrypted. Children's accounts do not need to be  
3284 default end-to-end encrypted. We need to make sure there is  
3285 visibility and transparency if children are going to be  
3286 online in those environments so that a company has the  
3287 ability to detect, right? This is all about detection. If a  
3288 company cannot see what is going on, how an offender is  
3289 approaching a child, what kind of imagery they are soliciting  
3290 or sending that child, we will never get a report at NCMEC,  
3291 and law enforcement will never get a report to investigate  
3292 and safeguard a child.

3293           So we support balancing using the technology that is  
3294 available to us to protect the digital security that end-to-  
3295 end encryption provides, while also ensuring that child  
3296 safety is balanced with that.

3297           \*Mr. Evans. Thank you. And kind of a follow-up  
3298 corollary to that, my home state, Colorado, unfortunately has  
3299 the distinction of having the second-highest number of  
3300 teenage overdose deaths as a result of illegal drugs being  
3301 sold. And we know a lot of times those transactions occur

3302 through online interactions with kids, with juveniles,  
3303 through social media or other apps. Can you speak a little  
3304 bit to how the work that NCMEC has been doing in the child  
3305 sexual exploitation space \_ can we use that as a corollary to  
3306 be able to identify and interdict some of these drug  
3307 transactions that, again, are taking thousands and thousands  
3308 of lives around the country?

3309 And often times the operating principle that some of  
3310 these perpetrators use is very similar. They use coded  
3311 language. They are trying to evade detection online. Can  
3312 you speak to that?

3313 \*Ms. Souras. Absolutely. And it is a great question,  
3314 and an issue that we have discussed with several other groups  
3315 and Members of Congress, as well, previously.

3316 I think there is a corollary. You know, our  
3317 CyberTipline, which is the receiver of reports relating to  
3318 child sexual exploitation that we evaluate, handle, and then  
3319 send to law enforcement, is a good model because it relies on  
3320 detection by technology companies, by online platforms.  
3321 Again, based on emojis, like you said, based on coded  
3322 language, based on direct solicitations, that would be very  
3323 similar for drugs in many ways as it is for CSAM or  
3324 exploitation of children.

3325 Again, having a reporting mechanism that is centralized  
3326 \_ again, for drug transactions \_ would also facilitate

3327 determining a jurisdiction, determining where an offender is,  
3328 where a victim is, and allowing law enforcement to pursue  
3329 their investigation.

3330 \*Mr. Evans. Thank you. I yield back.

3331 \*Mr. Bilirakis. The gentleman yields back. I will  
3332 recognize Mr. Coleman from the great State of Texas for five  
3333 minutes. Goldman, excuse me, Goldman, excuse me.

3334 \*Mr. Goldman. Goldman, Coleman, it all sounds \_

3335 \*Mr. Bilirakis. I apologize.

3336 \*Mr. Goldman. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very  
3337 much.

3338 Elliston Berry is a constituent of mine. And those of  
3339 you who don't know her, she was a victim of deepfake revenge  
3340 porn. I want to be thankful to her for her bravery, for her  
3341 coming to the Capitol during the joint address, sitting next  
3342 to the First lady of the United States of America, thankful  
3343 to the President for recognizing her in the gallery in front  
3344 of millions of Americans. And it is bravery like hers, it is  
3345 bravery like yours coming forward telling your stories. The  
3346 reason we are here today is \_ and I see some of the families  
3347 out there in the audience, and I see photos. Can you hold  
3348 those up?

3349 This is the reason we are here today. This is the  
3350 reason we are here today, members.

3351 Thank you for being here. Thank you for your bravery.

3352 Thank you for telling your story. This is what we need to  
3353 hear because it is about the safety of the children of  
3354 America. That is the reason we are here, and that is why we  
3355 have the TAKE IT DOWN Act. That is why I am proud to be a  
3356 cosponsor and I look forward to its passage.

3357 I don't have any questions for you all. By the time it  
3358 gets to me, all the questions pretty much have been asked  
3359 that I wanted to ask. I just wanted to thank you all very  
3360 much for being here, for telling your story, for your  
3361 bravery. And I look forward to the passage.

3362 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back the rest of my  
3363 time.

3364 \*Mr. Bilirakis. I appreciate that very much. So I  
3365 believe that is the last presenter. We don't have anyone  
3366 else, any other members on either side.

3367 So I do want to tell you \_ a very productive hearing,  
3368 and I want to thank Ms. Hawkins in particular, but all of the  
3369 witnesses today for obvious reasons, but all the witnesses  
3370 here today, and very informative. And we all agree on the  
3371 issues, the subject matter of this hearing and the  
3372 legislation put forward.

3373 And you know that Brett and I \_ or Chairman Guthrie \_  
3374 will make this a priority. The fact that we have had an  
3375 early educational hearing shows that these bills are very,  
3376 very important to all of us.

3377 I appreciate the audience being here today and all the  
3378 advocates that are advocating on behalf of our children. We  
3379 appreciate you all, and let's work together.

3380 And, you know, like I said before, if there are any  
3381 concerns with these bills, let's get them done early. And  
3382 then, if you have any issues with the Senate, what have you,  
3383 let's hash them out early so we can get this on the  
3384 President's desk as soon as possible, these particular bills.  
3385 The multiple bills, not just one bill.

3386 So I want to thank you all, and I want to thank my  
3387 ranking member, as well.

3388 \*Ms. Schakowsky. I want to say something.

3389 \*Mr. Bilirakis. Yes, she would like to say something,  
3390 as well.

3391 But \_ and then for those members that have stuck to the  
3392 subject matter of the hearing today, I appreciate them, as  
3393 well.

3394 So I will yield back to \_ I will yield back my time, and  
3395 then also the ranking member will have an opportunity.

3396 You are recognized.

3397 \*Ms. Schakowsky. Thank you, Mr. \_ where are we?

3398 \*Mr. Bilirakis. Yes.

3399 \*Ms. Schakowsky. Sorry. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I  
3400 want to thank the witnesses.

3401 I really appreciate each and every one of you, but I

3402 also do want to acknowledge the people that are in the  
3403 audience.

3404         If you are in the audience, and you had some connection  
3405 to a problem with abuse of children, can you stand? If you  
3406 are in any way connected to your concern about this issue I  
3407 would like to see you. Is there anybody here who actually  
3408 has lost someone? Can you raise your hand? Yes, I see the  
3409 one. Yes. Thank you very much for being here, for taking on  
3410 this challenge.

3411         I do want to say that, particularly to Commissioner  
3412 Slaughter, that while all of these particular issues that we  
3413 want to deal with \_ I think will be best served if it is in  
3414 the context of what the Federal Trade Commission does, that  
3415 we will be able to really get down to who are the people who  
3416 \_ the people \_ the \_ that are \_ hold on one second. There is  
3417 a phone ringing in my ear. My belief is that we need to make  
3418 sure that we have the protection that we need. We can't take  
3419 it for granted. And that is why it is very important that we  
3420 actually pass the legislation that the FTC had done. So I am  
3421 very, very grateful.

3422         I think we are, Mr. Chairman, unanimous in our concern  
3423 of the urgency of addressing the needs of our children and  
3424 protecting them. That is what this was about today. So  
3425 thank you very much for all of your good work.

3426         \*Mr. Bilirakis. Okay. Very, very good.

3427 I ask unanimous consent that the documents on the staff  
3428 document list be submitted for the record.

3429 Without objection, so ordered.

3430 [The information follows:]

3431

3432 \*\*\*\*\*COMMITTEE INSERT\*\*\*\*\*

3433

3434           \*Mr. Bilirakis. I remind members that they have 10  
3435 business days to submit questions for the record, and I ask  
3436 the witnesses to respond to the questions promptly. Members  
3437 should submit their questions by the close of business on  
3438 April 9.

3439           So without objection \_ again, thank you for being here \_  
3440 without objection, the subcommittee is adjourned.

3441           [Whereupon, at 1:08 p.m., the subcommittee was  
3442 adjourned.]