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House Committee on the Judiciary
United States House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Statements in Interim Report and Witness Testimony about NewsGuard

Dear Members of the Committee,

During the Judiciary Committee’s recent hearings titled, “How the World’s Biggest Brands Seek to Control Online Speech,” several false and misleading statements were made on the record and in the Committee’s interim report about our company, NewsGuard. We are writing to correct the record.

First, some background: In contrast to how NewsGuard was described in the hearing, NewsGuard is an apolitical and nonpartisan media organization run by journalists with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints. Gordon Crovitz, our Co-CEO, is a lifelong conservative who was publisher and a longtime conservative opinion columnist for The Wall Street Journal and has edited or contributed to books published by the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute. Steven Brill, our other Co-CEO, is an award-winning journalist and best-selling author whose work has included reporting critical of teachers’ unions, big pharmaceutical companies, and the rollout of Obamacare.

Contrary to claims during the hearing and in the interim report, NewsGuard was founded to be the apolitical provider of information about news sources. When the company launched in 2018, the entities that rated news sources were the Silicon Valley platforms, with their secret algorithms and criteria, and a left-wing advocacy group, the Global Disinformation Index. NewsGuard operates apolitically, with full transparency and disclosed criteria and publicly available ratings.

Our journalists produce ratings and reviews of more than 10,000 news and information websites using nine basic, apolitical criteria, which are posted publicly with thousands of words of explanation and definition on our website. Many different entities use our ratings, including in the advertising industry, where some advertisers use our data to help them make decisions about where to place their ads. Such decisions are up to each company using our data; we simply provide ratings and scores for each site, along with detailed explanations of our rationale for each rating.



As a private company selling to other private companies, we have always operated on the bedrock principle that the free market should be the judge of the quality and fairness of our work. In particular, we launched NewsGuard as an alternative to government censorship or continued reliance on the digital platforms and a left-wing advocacy group.

Among the false claims made about NewsGuard and our work during the hearing and in the report are the following:

1) Claims NewsGuard is biased against conservatives. The Committee’s report cited an inaccurate media report to claim that “NewsGuard regularly targets conservative media” and that NewsGuard’s ratings are “biased” against conservative outlets. One of the Committee’s witnesses even claimed to have asked many times whether there are any major conservative media outlets that NewsGuard deems brand safe, and that NewsGuard could not answer.

In fact, NewsGuard’s ratings are based on apolitical criteria of journalistic practice, leading many left- and right-leaning outlets to receive high and low scores from NewsGuard. Among outlets with scores above 60 out of 100 from NewsGuard—the threshold most commonly used by advertisers to target ad placements on news sites—are the conservative or libertarian websites of Fox News, the New York Post, the Washington Examiner, the Daily Caller, the National Review, Reason, the Spectator, Commentary, the Western Journal, the Post Millennial, the Heritage Foundation, and the Cato Institute. Among websites with low ratings from NewsGuard, leading some advertisers to avoid placing ads, are MSNBC, the Daily Kos, the Palmer Report, and the World Socialist Website.

And, of course, there are many examples of the reverse: left-leaning sites with high scores and right-leaning sites with low scores. This is because our rating system does not evaluate a site’s political leaning; instead, it evaluates the site’s adherence to a set of nine, journalistic standards, such as whether the site has a corrections policy, discloses its ownership, labels news and opinion responsibly, and the like.

In fact, there are slightly *more* conservative news outlets than liberal outlets with scores above 60 from NewsGuard and on our advertising inclusion list—meaning they are generally viewed as brand-safe by advertisers—further contradicting any claims that we are biased against conservatives.

2) Claims that NewsGuard coordinated with the Global Alliance for Responsible Media and the Global Disinformation Index to set brand-safety standards. A witness claimed without evidence that the Global Alliance for Responsible Media (GARM) “worked in conjunction” with NewsGuard and the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) to set biased brand-safety standards for news, a claim the Committee’s report repeated, relying on false reporting by a media outlet.

In fact, NewsGuard’s standards for rating news website reliability were developed in 2018, before GARM had any standards for misinformation. NewsGuard’s standards differ from GARM’s. NewsGuard is not a partner of or member of GARM, and we have never been involved in developing any of GARM’s standards. Nor has GARM licensed our ratings, contrary to claims that GARM used our ratings.



Especially absurd were claims during the hearing that the supposed coordination involved GARM, NewsGuard, and the Global Disinformation Index (GDI). NewsGuard and GDI are competitors. We and GDI disagree strongly about the best approach to rating media outlets. Again, we operate apolitically and with full transparency, which is the opposite of how GDI conducts itself. We have been publicly critical of GDI's ratings—for example, in this article by our Co-CEO in the Washington Examiner: <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/1777030/only-transparent-apolitical-ratings-for-news-publishers-can-be-trusted/>

The Committee's report cites as evidence of GDI's bias a report GDI put out listing the 10 "Riskiest Sites," meaning those with the most "disinformation risk" — all of which were conservative or libertarian sites. What it does not mention is that of the ten sites on GDI's list, NewsGuard rates half of them as reliable, some with rare perfect scores—meaning that advertisers using NewsGuard would be likely to target ads toward these sites rather than block ad placements on the sites.

Indeed, so far as we know, GDI's ratings do not actually address whether a site contains misinformation at all—at least not insofar as the term is defined by GARM. In the rare instance where GDI has disclosed anything about its rating system it has said that it is based on the presence of "adversarial narratives," which need not be false at all. NewsGuard instead includes many journalistic standards among its criteria, but the criterion with the highest impact on a site's score assesses whether the site "regularly publishes false or egregiously misleading information," which in practice means that on any given day a reader must be highly likely to encounter clearly false or egregiously misleading claims on the site. (For example, one site rated that way claims that colloidal silver can cure cancer.)

If GARM, GDI, and NewsGuard were conspiring to create biased standards targeting conservatives, why would our ratings and standards for assessing misinformation differ so greatly, and why would GDI and NewsGuard disagree so significantly on their assessments of specific websites? And, still more obviously, why wouldn't GARM be using NewsGuard's ratings?

3) Claims that NewsGuard has penalized the Daily Wire for being conservative.

The testimony from one witness who appeared before the Committee claimed that NewsGuard has "penalized [The Daily Wire] openly for being a conservative site." This is false. As noted, NewsGuard rates websites based on nine basic journalistic criteria, all of which are posted and [defined in detail](#) on our website. One of these standards addresses how we handle news sites that have a point of view—the requirements being that sites that "advance a particular point of view disclose that point of view."

In our written report explaining our rating of The Daily Wire, we write, "The Daily Wire discloses its political perspective on its About page," and thus, we do not deduct points for the site's point of view.

The site instead fails our criterion relating to handling the "difference between news and opinion responsibly because it regularly labels opinionated content as "news" rather than as opinion or analysis.

In fact, in our report explaining the site's rating, its editor-in-chief acknowledged that NewsGuard was correct about examples we identified of the site mislabeling opinion content as "news." He agreed with

our assessment, saying: “This article should not have been published under our ‘News’ label. It has clearly opinionated language and does not meet our standards for straight news coverage. It has been relabeled to better reflect its approach and content, and an editor’s note has been added to document that change.” (NewsGuard analysts regularly update ratings of news websites and will review how the website now handles this issue; more than one-quarter of the websites NewsGuard has rated have taken steps to improve their score.)

4) Claims that NewsGuard inaccurately flagged true stories as misinformation. The Committee’s report included this inaccurate statement: “NewsGuard has also come under scrutiny for using incorrect fact checking in its work—for example, flagging accurate stories about the COVID-19 lab leak theory and a Gaza hospital explosion from a misfired Hamas rocket as misinformation.” Here again, the Committee was apparently misled by false claims in media coverage (by news outlets that had received low scores from NewsGuard).

In fact, NewsGuard has never considered the claim that COVID-19 leaked from a lab to be false, nor have we used such a claim as an example of false content in any of our ratings of news sites.

Similarly, we have never labeled the claim that a Gaza hospital explosion could have resulted from a misfired Palestinian rocket as misinformation. Indeed, the *opposite* is true: We classify claims that there is conclusive evidence that an Israeli missile caused the explosion as misinformation. For example, in our rating of the Dubai-based website Al Arabiya, we cite articles with headlines such as “Israeli strike on Gaza hospital leaves at least 500 dead” as examples of the site’s publication of false or misleading content, causing the site to get a score of 39.5 out of 100. Our analysts wrote: “NewsGuard found that Al Arabiya published several articles unequivocally blaming Israel for the Oct. 17, 2023, blast at Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza, despite mounting evidence that Israel was not responsible.”

We hope this information is helpful to the Committee in ensuring that the record is accurate and fair.

Best regards,



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Co-CEOs
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