

Statement for the Record of Rep. Anna G. Eshoo
House Energy and Commerce Committee
“Twitter: Transparency and Accountability”
2123 Rayburn House Office Building
September 5th, 2018

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today, and welcome to Mr. Dorsey.

In 2018, tech platforms like Twitter are the modern public forum – the most equalizing and accessible way that individual citizens can express themselves, engage with the free press, and organize movements in the 21st Century.

As these platforms have matured, serious issues have emerged that are the duty of this Committee to address – among them, freedom of expression, inconsistent and harmful content moderation, foreign disinformation campaigns, and consumer privacy concerns. As Americans grow increasingly reliant on these platforms in their daily lives, it’s our job as policymakers to engage in constructive debate about how to protect our fundamental rights in new technological environments. I welcome that debate if that’s the one we’re here to have.

However, Mr. Chairman, I have to question the motives of the Majority for calling this particular hearing, at this particular time.

This hearing now comes on the heels of a week during which conservative attacks on technology companies have reached a fever pitch. It follows months of what has been dubbed ‘Tech Lash’ against Silicon Valley by the right.

I’m concerned that Republicans are using this hearing as an opportunity to rally their base and fundraise ahead of an election by fabricating an anti-conservative ‘bias’ problem where none exists, rather than focusing this Committee’s attention on the legitimate issues that these platforms raise.

Let’s be clear: the Committee’s hearing came at the explicit direction of House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, who according to an article in the Washington Post by Tony Romm (8/28/18), has issued fundraising pitches on social media accusing Silicon Valley of anti-conservative bias.¹

These same allegations have been trumpeted by conservative commentators and lawmakers alike, including President Trump, who spent time last week, echoing unsubstantiated claims that Google, Facebook, and Twitter are negatively biased against him. His top economic adviser vowed to ‘take a look’ at how to regulate tech companies to ensure ‘fairer’ elevation of conservative voices.²

This is a dangerous road to go down, even rhetorically. I caution my fellow representatives against suggesting the government would infringe upon the speech rights of private entities,

¹ Tony Romm, “Trump’s economic adviser: ‘we’re taking a look’ at whether Google searches should be regulated,” *Washington Post* (August 28, 2018).

² *Id.*

whether tech companies or individual citizens. And I would caution the Majority against undermining these platforms for political gain.

Rather than indulging in partisan rabble-rousing, it's my hope that this Committee will use this hearing to redirect our discourse back to the many substantive issues at hand.

In particular, I remain concerned about foreign attempts to use platforms like Twitter to sow mistrust and discord among the American people. We are now a year and a half out from intelligence officials confirming with high confidence that foreign adversaries manipulated our electorate to undermine our democracy through platforms like Twitter and Facebook.

I have consistently raised concerns about what we in Congress are doing to protect our institutions from such attacks in the future. So far, I can think of no steps the Majority has taken... not even a hearing in this Committee, to address the problem of foreign interference.

Twitter has made efforts to tamp down on such activity on its site, but I remain concerned that we are at high risk of history repeating itself. I urge this Committee to prioritize efforts to protect our democracy and our citizens from foreign manipulation and disinformation as soon as possible.

Thank you again to Mr. Dorsey for coming before us today. I look forward to hearing more about Twitter's ongoing efforts to address this and other concerns, and how Congress can be most helpful in those efforts.