

# PALLONE REMARKS AT HEARING WITH TWITTER CEO JACK DORSEY

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Press Release

*Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Full Committee hearing on “Twitter: Transparency and Accountability:”*

Over the past few weeks, President Trump and many Republicans have peddled conspiracy theories about Twitter and other social media platforms to whip up their base and fundraise. I fear the Republicans are using this hearing for those purposes instead of addressing the serious issues raised by social media platforms that affect American’s everyday lives.

Twitter is a valuable platform for disseminating news, information, and viewpoints. It can be a tool for bringing people together and allows one to reach many. In places like Iran and Ukraine, Twitter was used to organize and give voice to the concerns of otherwise voiceless individuals. Closer to home, Twitter and hashtags like Stay Woke, Me Too, and Net Neutrality have fostered important conversations and supported larger social movements that are changing our society.

But Twitter has a darker side. Far too many Twitter users still face bullying and trolling attacks. Tweets designed to threaten, belittle, demean, and silence individuals can have devastating effects, sometimes even driving people to suicide. While Twitter has taken some steps to protect users and enable reporting, more needs to be done.

Bad actors have co-opted Twitter and other social media platforms to spread disinformation and sow divisions in our society. For example, Alex Jones used Twitter to amplify harmful and dangerous lies such as those regarding the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. Others have used the platform to deny the existence of the Holocaust, disseminate racial supremacy theories, and spread false information about terrorism, natural disasters, and more.

When questioned about this disinformation Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey said the truth will win out in the end, but there is reason to doubt that. According to a recent study published by the MIT Media Lab, false rumors on Twitter traveled “farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth” with true claims taking about six times as long to reach the same number of people. That’s dangerous.

And countries like Russia and Iran are taking advantage of this to broadly disseminate propaganda and false information. Beyond influencing elections, foreign agents are actively trying to turn groups of Americans against each other. These countries are encouraging conflict to sow division and hatred by targeting topics that generate intense feelings such as race, religion, and politics.

Unfortunately, the actions of President Trump have made the situation worse. Repeatedly, the President uses Twitter to bully and belittle people calling them names like “dog,” “clown,” “spoiled brat,” “son of a bitch,” “enemies,” and “loser.” He routinely tweets false statements designed to mislead Americans and foster discord. The President’s actions coarsen the public debate, and feed distrust within our society.

President Trump has demonstrated that the politics of division are good for fundraising and rousing his base. Sadly, Republicans are now following his lead instead of criticizing the President for behavior that would not be tolerated from a child. As reported in the news, the Trump campaign and the Republican Majority Leader have used the supposed anti-conservative bias online to fundraise. This hearing appears to be just one more mechanism to raise money and generate outrage. It appears Republicans are desperately trying to rally their base by fabricating a problem that simply does not exist.

Regardless of the Republicans’ intentions for this hearing, Twitter and other social media platforms must do more to regain and maintain the public trust. Bullying, the spread of disinformation, and malicious foreign influence continue. Twitter’s policies have been inconsistent and confusing. The company’s enforcement seems to chase the latest headline as opposed to addressing systemic problems. Twitter and other social media platforms must establish clear policies to address the problems discussed today, provide tools to users, and then swiftly and fairly enforce those policies. And those policies should apply equally to the President, politicians, Administration officials, celebrities, and the teenager down the street.

It’s long past time for Twitter and other social media companies to stop allowing their platforms to be tools of discord, of spreading false information, and of foreign government manipulation.

Thank you, I yield back.

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