

Opening Statement
The Honorable Mike Doyle
Subcommittee on Communications And Technology and
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
“Fostering A Healthier Internet To Protect Consumers”

October 16, 2019

Online content moderation has largely enabled the Internet experience we know today. Whether it's looking up restaurant reviews on Yelp, catching up on S-N-L on YouTube, or checking in on a friend or loved one on social media, these are all experiences we have come to rely on.

And the platforms we go to do these things have been enabled by user-generated content, as well as the ability of these companies to moderate that content and create communities.

Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act has enabled that ecosystem to evolve.

By giving online companies the ability to moderate content without equating them to the publisher or speaker of that content, we've enabled the creation of massive online communities of millions and billions of people who can come together and interact.

Today, this Committee will be examining the world that Section 230 has enabled -- both the good and the bad.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for appearing before us today. Each of you represents important perspectives related to content moderation in the online ecosystem. Many of you bring up complex concerns in your testimony, and I agree that this is a complicated issue.

I know some of you have argued that Congress should amend 230 to address things such as online criminal activity, disinformation, and hate speech; and I agree that these are serious issues.

Like too many other communities, my hometown of Pittsburgh has seen what unchecked hate can lead to.

Almost a year ago, our community suffered the most deadly attack on Jewish Americans in our nation's history; the shooter did so after posting a series of anti-Semitic remarks on a fringe site before finally posting that he was “going in.”

A similar attack occurred in New Zealand, and the gunman streamed his despicable acts on social media sites. And while some of these sites moved to quell the spread of this content, many didn't move fast enough. And the algorithms meant to help sports highlights and celebrity selfies go viral helped amplify a heinous act.

In 2016, we saw similar issues, when foreign adversaries used the power of these platforms against us to disseminate disinformation and foment doubt in order to sow division and instill distrust in our leaders and institutions.

Clearly, we all need to do better, and I would strongly encourage the witnesses before us, who represent online platforms and other major platforms, to step up.

The other witnesses on the panel bring up serious concerns with the kinds of content available on your platforms and the impact that content is having on our society. And as they point out, some of those impacts are very disturbing. You must do more to address these concerns.

That being said, Section 230 doesn't just protect the largest platforms or the most fringe websites.

It enables comment sections on individual blogs, honest and open reviews of goods and services, and free and open discussion about controversial topics.

It has enabled the kind of ecosystem that, by producing more open online discussions, has enriched our lives and our democracy.

The ability of individuals to have their voices heard, particularly marginalized communities, cannot be understated.

The ability of people to post content that speaks truth to power has created political movements in this country and others that have changed the world we live in.

We all need to recognize the incredible power this technology has had for good, as well as the risks we face when it's misused.

Thank you all again for being here and I look forward to our discussion.

I yield 1 minute to my good friend Ms. Matsui.

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