

Opening Statement of Republican Leader Robert E. Latta
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Fanning the Flames: Disinformation and Extremism in the Media”
February 24, 2020

As Prepared for Delivery

Good afternoon, and welcome to all of our witnesses here today for a hearing focused on disinformation and extremism in the media.

While disinformation, misinformation, and extremism in the media are all serious issues this committee should be examining in a bipartisan way, unfortunately, today’s hearing is not about that.

Earlier this week, several of my colleagues sent a disturbing letter to private companies asking them questions that imply that these companies should stop carrying certain news content.

[Mr. Chairman, I ask for unanimous consent to enter this letter into the record sent by Representatives Eshoo and McNerney.]

As the title of the hearing indicates, the Majority’s intent behind today’s hearing is to fan the flames of silencing certain viewpoints in America by trying to suppress and censor speech, a concept that has the potential to destroy our Democracy. This is **deeply** troubling and should be deeply troubling to everyone here today. With this goal at hand, we are embarking upon a

dangerous path of using this Committee to attack the foundation of fact and further diminish trust in journalism.

The antidote to bad speech is more speech. Rather than suppressing speech and viewpoints we don't agree with, we should be encouraging more speech and conversations between one another. Sadly, it appears we are doubling down on encouraging the cancel culture of the left instead of identifying bipartisan solutions to encourage and support factual local and national news.

We are all facing unprecedented challenges in this country, which includes work to combat a once in a century pandemic. There has never been a more important time for journalism to be accurate and reliable. Having reliable news sources that report factual content can even be a matter of life and death.

The damage done to our Democracy by further dividing our nation and ignoring the patently false and inaccurate information coming from media outlets cannot be understated.

Before I close, I'd like to bring to light just one of the most recent examples we have seen in the press concerning the attacks on the Capitol and Capitol grounds on January 6th: Republicans and Democrats, including myself, have condemned the events of January 6th. It is disturbing, to say the least, to insinuate responsibility for the mob violence that took place that day lies **only** with media, but not with the individuals who carried out those actions and committed crimes. That is flat out wrong.

We should be here today to discuss ways to combat disinformation, and the responsibility media outlets have when real-world violence occurs as a result of rhetoric.

We should also recognize that local journalism – which is trusted by the American people more than every other type of media – is the only real antidote to disinformation and extremism. If the Majority were interested in having a thoughtful conversation about policies that would support local broadcasters and their ability to report real, honest news, perhaps that would be a better use of time.

But despite making bipartisan progress last Congress for breaking down these barriers, my colleagues have made the following very clear: instead of continuing those bipartisan efforts to improve media diversity and restore trust in journalism, they would rather use their official positions to silence opposing views and settle political scores, all because they disdain President Trump.

I find it hard to believe, Chairman Doyle, that you would consider legislating in this space. While the letters sent and hearings held on this topic flirt with the First Amendment, certainly I cannot imagine any legislative remedy that would not implicate the First Amendment. I would urge caution before going further down this dangerous path and return to the principles we have long shared on ensuring a free press.