

**Opening Statement of Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.  
House Energy and Commerce Committee  
Subcommittees on Communication and Technology and  
Consumer Protection and Commerce  
Joint Hearing on “A Country in Crisis: How Disinformation  
Online Is Dividing the Nation”**

*June 24, 2020*

This year has been a test of our country’s resilience and promise. We are facing a devastating health pandemic that has resulted in a severe economic downturn. At the same time, we must as a nation confront the staggering racial inequality in this country, sown by centuries of racism. This should be a time of national mourning, unity, healing, and action. Instead, online disinformation, among other things, is being used to further divide us.

In March, the President declared COVID-19 a national emergency. States like New York and New Jersey were among the hardest hit and early on took strict mitigation measures.

Yet, if you were on social media, you may have thought the severity of the virus was simply being made up, leading to confusion over the need for social distancing, masks, or other mitigation measures. Or that the virus could be cured by bleach or hydroxychloroquine. Some of this disinformation was being promoted by President Trump himself. Now some states, such as Texas, Florida, and Arizona, are seeing a surge in cases while disinformation and misinformation flourishes online.

And then last month, our country sat horrified as it watched the murder of George Floyd over a painful eight minutes and forty-six seconds. This needless killing, following so many others over the

years, has forced our country to reckon with a long history of racial inequity, that our fellow Black Americans deal with every day.

People of all races have taken to the streets to show solidarity and raise awareness of racial inequity and to call for action. But some people have taken to their social media accounts to spread disinformation with outlandish claims such as George Floyd's murder was staged or that the anti-racism protests are using paid protesters. Even the President has amplified false claims about protesters on social media. Rather than using social media for social good, disinformation is being used to sow social unrest.

President Trump is politicizing our country's health and social crises to cause division among us and inflame racial tensions. The Administration's woefully inadequate response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been made worse by President Trump spreading

disinformation. And instead of healing and uniting our country during these troubled times, the President is fueling culture wars.

Over the past few years, social media platforms have simply not done enough to eliminate disinformation. As a result, the situation has gotten worse. Facebook refuses to take action against Trump's spread of misinformation. Twitter has taken baby steps, yet equal enforcement of its policies has drawn acts of political retribution from the Administration.

We can and should expect more from social media platforms because, unfortunately, we all know the President is not going to change. In fact, his actions are likely to become even more egregious in the upcoming months and that's why the social media platforms must do more. I will work with my colleagues to make platforms more accountable to the people.

With that, I yield one minute to Rep. Butterfield and the remainder of my time to Rep. Blunt Rochester.