

HEARING BEFORE THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

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I. INTRODUCTION

Chairman Goodlatte, Ranking Member Nadler, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss social media content filtering practices. My name is Monika Bickert, and I am the Vice President for Global Policy Management at Facebook, heading our efforts related to Product Policy and Counterterrorism.

Facebook's mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. More than two billion people come to our platform each month to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, to build their businesses, and to share and express what matters most to them.

Freedom of expression is one of our core values, and we believe that the Facebook community is richer and stronger when a broad range of viewpoints is represented. We are committed to encouraging dialogue and the free flow of ideas by designing our products to give people a voice and by implementing standards to ensure fair and transparent processes for removing content that doesn't belong on Facebook.

People share billions of pictures, stories, and videos on Facebook daily. Being at the forefront of such a high volume of content sharing means that we are also at the forefront of new and challenging legal and policy questions, including questions around how to keep our community safe and the dialogue on our platform healthy. Assessing whether a specific piece of content belongs on Facebook often requires making a nuanced determination, and while we won't get it right every time, we learn from our mistakes and are always working to improve. Conversations like the one we're having here today are part of that process.

We know that there have been a number of high-profile content removal incidents affecting individuals across the political spectrum, and we are taking a variety of steps to respond to the concerns raised by this Committee and others. Among other things, we have engaged an outside advisor, former Senator Jon Kyl, to advise the company on potential bias against conservative voices. Laura Murphy, a national civil liberties and civil rights leader also is getting feedback directly from civil rights groups to help advise Facebook on the best path forward. We already partner with over 100 groups across the political spectrum, and we believe this external feedback will help us improve over time and ensure we can most effectively serve our diverse community. And we are continuing

to expand our list of outside partner organizations to ensure we receive feedback on our content policies from a diverse set of viewpoints.

We also are instituting additional controls and oversight around our content review team, including robust escalation procedures and updated reviewer training materials, and have launched an appeals process to enable people to contest content decisions with which they disagree. In addition, we constantly work to refine and enhance the quality of our machine learning, which is a first line of defense for content assessment on our platform. We hope that these improvements and safeguards will help ensure that Facebook remains a platform for a wide range of ideas and enables the broadest spectrum of free expression possible.

These recent efforts dovetail with our broader long-term efforts to foster conversations among diverse voices and create a safe community, which I'd like to turn to next.

II. NEWS FEED AND COMMUNITY STANDARDS

When people come to Facebook, they see a personalized homepage we call News Feed. News Feed is a highly individualized and constantly updating list of stories and content, including status updates, photos, videos, links, and activity from the people and things you're connected to on Facebook. The goal of News Feed is to show people the stories that are most relevant to them. The average person has thousands of things on any given day that they could read in their News Feed, so we use personalized ranking to determine the order of stories we show them. Each person's News Feed is unique. It's shaped by the friends they add; the people, topics, and news sources they follow; the groups they join; and other signals like their past interactions. On average, a person in the U.S. is served roughly 220 stories in News Feed each day.

Our Community Standards are at the core of our efforts to ensure that News Feed remains a safe environment that is conducive to dialogue and the exchange of ideas. We base these standards on input from our community and from experts in fields such as technology and public safety. They are rooted in the following principles:

1. **Safety.** People need to feel safe in order to build community. We are committed to removing content that encourages real-world harm, including (but not limited to) physical, financial, and emotional injury.
2. **Voice:** Our mission is all about embracing diverse views. We err on the side of allowing content, even when some find it objectionable, unless removing that content can prevent a specific harm. Moreover, at times we will allow content that might otherwise violate our standards if we feel that it is newsworthy, significant, or important to the public interest. We do this only after weighing the public interest value of the content against the risk of real-world harm.
3. **Equity:** Our community is global and diverse. Our policies may seem broad,

but that is because we aim to apply them consistently and fairly to a community that transcends regions, cultures, and languages. As a result, our Community Standards can sometimes appear less nuanced than we would like, leading to an outcome that is at odds with their underlying purpose. For that reason, in some cases, and when we are provided with additional context, we make a decision based on the spirit, rather than the letter, of the policy.

To be clear, discussing controversial topics or espousing a debated point of view is not at odds with our Community Standards. We believe that such discussion is important in helping bridge division and promoting greater understanding among members of our community.

To help the Facebook community better understand our efforts to enforce these standards, we recently published a Community Standards Enforcement Preliminary Report describing the amount and types of content we take action against, as well as the amount of content that we flag for review proactively. We also published comprehensive guidelines in an effort to increase transparency and provide more clarity around where we draw lines on complex and evolving issues. We hope that sharing this information will contribute to an ongoing dialogue around our decisionmaking processes and help us improve our efforts to develop and enforce our standards.

We recognize that our standards are only as good as the strength and accuracy of our enforcement—and our enforcement is not perfect. Our community of users helps us by reporting accounts or content that may violate our policies, and our content reviewers respond to millions of reports each week from people all over the world. We know that our reviewers won't get it right each time. When we're made aware of incorrect content removals, we review them with team members so as to prevent similar mistakes in the future. We also audit the accuracy of reviewer decisions on an ongoing basis to coach them and follow up where errors are being made.

In April 2018, we announced the launch of an appeals process for content that was removed from the platform as hate speech. We recognize that we make enforcement errors on both sides of the equation—what to allow, and what to remove—and that our mistakes cause a great deal of concern for people, which is why we now allow the option in certain cases to request review of the decision. We are working to extend this process further, by supporting more violation types, giving people the opportunity to provide more context that could help us make the right decision, and making appeals available not just for content that was taken down, but also for content that was reported and left up. This type of feedback will allow us to continue improving our systems and processes so we can prevent similar mistakes in the future.

III. FALSE NEWS AND NEWS FEED QUALITY

As part of Facebook's broader efforts to ensure that time spent on our platform is time well-spent, we are taking steps to reduce the spread of false news. False news is an issue

that negatively impacts the quality of discourse on both the right and the left, and we are committed to reducing it. One of the best ways to do this is to require people to use the names they are known by, and we've gotten increasingly better at finding and disabling fake accounts. We have disabled thousands of accounts tied to organized, financially motivated fake news spammers. These investigations have been used to improve our automated systems that find fake accounts. We now block millions of fake accounts each day as people try to create them—and before they've done any harm. We are investing heavily in new technology and hiring thousands more people to tackle the problem of inauthenticity on the platform.

This year, we announced major changes to News Feed that are designed to help bring people closer together by encouraging more meaningful connections on Facebook. Because space in News Feed is limited, showing more posts from friends and family and updates that spark conversation means we'll show less public content, including videos and other posts from publishers or businesses. We've also taken steps to make sure the news people see, while less overall, is high quality. People tell us they don't like stories that are misleading, sensational or spammy. That includes clickbait headlines that withhold key information in order to get attention and lure visitors into clicking on a link. In 2017, we worked hard to reduce fake news and clickbait, and to destroy the economic incentives for spammers to generate these articles in the first place. In 2018, we are working to prioritize news from publications that the community rates as trustworthy, news that people find informative, and news that is relevant to people's local community.

We have partnered with third-party fact checking organizations to limit the reach of false news and to let people know when they are sharing news stories (excluding opinion and satire) that have been disputed or debunked. Third-party fact-checkers on Facebook are signatories to the non-partisan International Fact-Checking Network Code of Principles. In the United States, Facebook's third-party fact-checking is conducted by the Associated Press, Factcheck.org, PolitiFact, Snopes, and the Weekly Standard Fact Check.

We recognize that some people may ask whether, in today's world, is it possible to have a set of fact-checkers that are widely recognized as objective. While we work with the International Fact-Checking Network to make sure all our partners have high standards of accuracy, fairness, and transparency, we know that this is still not a perfect process.

If questions are raised around a fact-checker's rating of a specific story, publishers may reach out directly to the third-party fact-checking organizations and indicate that (1) they believe the fact-checker's rating is inaccurate, or (2) they have corrected the rated content. To dispute a rating, the publisher must indicate why the original rating was inaccurate. To issue a correction, the publisher must correct the false content and clearly state that a correction was made directly on the story. If a rating is successfully corrected or disputed, the demotion on the content will be lifted and the strike against the domain or Page will be removed. Fact-checkers are asked to respond to requests in a reasonable time period—ideally one business day for a simple correction, and up to a few business days for more complex disputes.

We've also made some changes to how we let people know that a story is disputed so that they can learn more and come to their own conclusions. And we are continually working with publishers, fact-checking organizations, and other members of our community to refine these processes and to ensure that people can have confidence in the news that they read and share on Facebook.

IV. ADVERTISING ON FACEBOOK

Similar to our Community Standards, we have Advertising Policies that outline which ads are and are not allowed on Facebook. Unlike posts from friends or Pages, ads receive paid distribution, which means we have an even higher standard for what is allowed. Our publicly-available Advertising Policies outline our standards; among other things, we do not permit ads that violate our Community Standards, ads for illegal products and services, ads with adult content, or ads that are misleading or false.

We are continually working to improve our efforts to enforce our advertising policies. We review many ads proactively using automated and manual tools, and reactively when people hide, block, or mark ads as offensive. We are taking concrete steps to strengthen both our automated and our manual review, and we are expanding our global ads review teams. We also are investing more in machine learning to better understand when to flag and take down ads. Enforcement is never perfect, but we are working on getting better at finding and removing improper ads.

We recently announced changes designed to bring more transparency and accountability to ads and Pages on Facebook. These changes are designed to prevent future abuse in elections and to help ensure that people on Facebook have the information that they need to assess political and issue ads, as well as content on Pages. Our goal is transparency, and we will continue to strive to find the right balance that is not over- or under-inclusive.

As part of these changes, now all election-related and issue ads on Facebook and Instagram in the U.S. must be clearly labeled—including a “paid for by” disclosure from the advertiser at the top of the ad. This will help ensure that people can see who is paying for the ad. When people click on the label, they’ll be taken to an archive with more information, such as the campaign budget associated with an individual ad and how many people saw it. That same archive can be reached at <https://www.facebook.com/politicalcontentads>. People on Facebook visiting the archive can see and search ads with political or issue content that an advertiser has run in the U.S. for up to seven years. Advertisers wanting to run ads with political content in the U.S. will need to verify their identity and location. This creates greater transparency around ads across the political spectrum, and allows people to easily understand why they are seeing ads, who paid for them, and what other ads those advertisers are running.

V. LEARNING FROM PAST MISTAKES

I know that the Committee recently had the opportunity to hear from Ms. Hardaway and Ms. Richardson, the video bloggers better known as Diamond & Silk, who use the Facebook platform to communicate with their many supporters. We understand their frustrations over some past communications with our team, and we recognize that we mishandled their concerns. We apologized to them at the time, and I'd like to extend my own personal apology to them again today. While they were never banned from the platform, the message they received on April 5, 2018 that characterized their Page as "dangerous" was incorrect and is not reflective of the way we seek to communicate with our community and the people who run Pages on our platform. We recognize that we've incorrectly removed content on the other end of the political spectrum as well, and we know these incidents often garner significant public attention. We have learned from these experiences, and although we will never reduce the number of errors to zero, we are committed to improving further in this area.

VI. CONCLUSION

In closing, I want to reiterate our deep commitment to building a community that encourages and fosters free expression. We want Facebook to be a place where individuals with diverse viewpoints can connect and exchange ideas. We recognize that people have questions about our efforts to achieve these goals, and we are committed to working with the members of this Committee, our regulators, and others in the tech industry and civil society to continue the dialogue around these issues. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today, and I look forward to your questions.