



October 27, 2021

The Honorable Gary Peters
Chair
Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rob Portman
Ranking Member
Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Peters and Ranking Member Porter:

On behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) Action Fund, we write to provide our insights for your hearings on “Social Media Platforms and the Amplification of Domestic Extremism & Other Harmful Content.” We appreciate the opportunity to share our expertise as you investigate the connection between tech platforms and hate and extremism and to offer several policy recommendations to address this problem. We would ask that this statement be included as part of the official hearing record.

The SPLC is the premier U.S. nonprofit advocacy organization working to serve as a catalyst for racial justice in the South and beyond. We work in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements, and advance human rights of all people. We have deep expertise in monitoring the activities of domestic hate groups and other extremists – including the Ku Klux Klan, the neo-Nazi movement, neo-Confederates, racist skinheads, anti-racist skinheads, antigovernment militias, and others. We currently track more than 1,600 extremist groups operating across the country and publish investigative reports, share key intelligence, and offer expert analysis to the media and public. SPLC employs a three-pronged strategy: litigation, public education, and policy advocacy. The organization works in the courts to win systemic reforms on behalf of victims of bigotry and discrimination. Through “Learning for Justice” the organization provides free resources to caregivers and educators to help advance human rights and inclusive democracy.

Related, the SPLC Action Fund advocates for the implementation of policies and laws to eliminate the structural racism and inequalities that fuel oppression of people of color, immigrants, young people, women, low-income people, and the LGBTQ+ community. The Action Fund is dedicated to fighting for racial justice alongside impacted communities in pursuit of equity and opportunity for all. We work primarily in the Southeast United States where we have offices in Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Washington, D.C.

Our organization has watched for years as social media companies failed to uphold their own terms and conditions, enabling the expansion and radicalization of the far right, and, also, violence. Repeatedly, we have alerted companies like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook to how far-right extremists organize on their platforms. These companies have often responded with half-measures, or in some cases, inaction, to what we flagged. Importantly, we have seen in cases

where social media companies do take steps to remove extremists from their platform, as they did in 2018 with Alex Jones and in 2020 with Canadian white supremacist Stefan Molyneux, these figures become limited in their ability to spread hateful propaganda and lies. These powerful, highly trafficked platforms have the power to reduce harm if they want to do it. To do so, they would have to choose responsibility to democracy and the public good over private profit.

Twitter and Facebook present themselves as being non-ideological resources for communication but have demonstrable ties to the far right and long histories of promoting hate to their consumers. Facebook has partnered on fact checking with a group called Check Your Fact, which is linked to far-right *The Daily Caller*.¹ Founded by FOX News' Tucker Carlson, *The Daily Caller* has in the past employed white nationalist activists,² including Jason Kessler,³ who helped stage the deadly August 2017 Unite the Right event in Charlottesville, Virginia, and Peter Brimelow, the founder of the hate group VDARE.⁴ Pro-Trump billionaire Peter Thiel, who has promoted and funded anti-immigrant political campaigns,⁵ and is aligned with anti-democratic figures like Curtis Yarvin, serves on Facebook's board.⁶ Facebook included the low-standard publication *Breitbart News* as part of its news section,⁷ despite its history of publishing racist, anti-immigrant posts⁸ and blogs authored by extremists.⁹

Facebook's role in facilitating extremist activity is well known. In advance of the deadly January 6 attack on the Capitol, anti-government militia activists organized openly on social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter. In charging documents¹⁰ for January 6th rioters, Kelly and Connie Meggs, leaders of the Florida Oath Keepers chapter, prosecutors say the militia group used Facebook to discuss forming an "alliance" and coordinating plans with another extremist group, the Proud Boys, ahead of the riot at the Capitol. However, this is not a new problem that is limited to the events exposed in the wake of the January 6th attacks. Anti-government militia organizations were well documented by watchdog organizations and federal investigators organizing a "Call to Action" on Facebook for the armed stand-offs led by Cliven and Ammon Bundy and their associates at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon in 2016 and in Nevada in 2014. Hundreds of thousands of Facebook posts and messages were revealed in the trial for the 41-day occupation in Burns, Oregon. By the fall of 2020 Bundy's People's Rights had amassed some

¹ Scott Waldman, *Science Insider*, "Facebook fact checker has ties to news outlet that promotes climate doubt" <https://www.science.org/content/article/facebook-fact-checker-has-ties-news-outlet-promotes-climate-doubt>, April 25, 2019.

² Matt Gertz, *Media Matters*, "The Daily Caller has published white supremacists, anti-Semites, and bigots. Here are the ones we know about," <https://www.mediamatters.org/maga-trolls/daily-caller-has-published-white-supremacists-anti-semites-and-bigots-here-are-ones-we>, September 5, 2018.

³ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/peter-brimelow>

⁴ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/jason-kessler>

⁵ Hannah Gais, *SPLC Hatchwatch*, "White Nationalist Who Met With Peter Thiel Admired Terroristic Literature," <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/03/18/white-nationalist-who-met-peter-thiel-admired-terroristic-literature>, March 18, 2021.

⁶ Benjamin Wallace-Wells, *The New Yorker*, "The Rise of the Thielists: Has the Republican Party found its post-Trump ideology?" <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-populism/the-rise-of-the-thielists>, May 13, 2021.

⁷ Francis Augustin, *Business Insider*, "Facebook chose to keep Breitbart on News Tab and gave it special treatment — even after employees warned of its embellished and hyper-partisan coverage of events like the George Floyd protests," <https://www.businessinsider.com/facebook-files-breitbart-news-tab-employee-objections-2021-10>

⁸ *SPLC Hatewatch*, "Stephen Miller: The Breitbart Emails," <https://www.splcenter.org/stephen-miller-breitbart-emails>, October 24, 2021.

⁹ Joseph Bernstein, *Buzzfeed News*, "Here's How Breitbart And Milo Smuggled White Nationalism Into The Mainstream," <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/josephbernstein/heres-how-breitbart-and-milo-smuggled-white-nationalism>, October 5, 2017.

¹⁰ *United States of America v. Kelly Meggs and Connie Meggs*, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/20527411-supplemental-meggs-motion>

20,000 members in sixteen states, primarily through organizing on Facebook, before the removal of many pages by the company.

Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey has acknowledged a connection to Ali Alexander, the extremist who led the “Stop the Steal” movement.¹¹ He “follows” on his own website far-right figures including Mike Cernovich, who is known primarily for spreading disinformation on it, including “Pizzagate,” as well as lies about the outcome of the 2020 presidential election.¹² Dorsey also follows Tim Pool, a Pro-Trump YouTube performer, who claims to chat with the tech mogul.¹³ Election Integrity Partnership, a non-partisan group that includes researchers from Stanford University and the University of Washington, listed Pool among a group of verified Twitter “superspreaders” who pushed disinformation to Twitter following the 2020 election.¹⁴ Pool told us in an interview that Dorsey “seems very adamant that far-right figures be given unrestrained platforms,” based upon his private conversations with him.

Although news outlets have focused acutely on Facebook in recent weeks and the way its business model transports right-leaning people into more extreme spaces, the site hardly stands alone in its capacity to feed consumers a diet of radical, far-right propaganda.¹⁵ In July, our organization published a longform analysis demonstrating how Twitter enabled the attack on the U.S. Capitol by “verifying” extremists with no discernible credentials as public figures and allowing them to amass huge platforms on the back of spreading politically-charged disinformation and hate.¹⁶ Extremists first started pushing the #StoptheSteal hashtag on Twitter during the 2016 election, and for over five years, made it synonymous with discrediting the votes of people who live in predominantly Black neighborhoods of swing states. In the aftermath of the 2020 election, Twitter allowed many of the same extremists who pushed the hashtag in previous years to do so again. In the aftermath of the election, right-wing users sometimes shared the #StoptheSteal hashtag dozens of times per minute.¹⁷

The Southern Poverty Law Center has repeatedly flagged to Twitter the account of Jack Posobiec, a “Stop the Steal” extremist who they verified in April 2017, at a time when the public primarily knew him for promoting Pizzagate¹⁸ and other disinformation campaigns.¹⁹ In the months leading up to Twitter verifying Posobiec’s account, he labeled himself as a “fmr CBS News Journalist” in his bio on the site, even though CBS News told the Southern Poverty Law Center that he never

¹¹ Jesselyn Cook, “Jack Dorsey Thinks Fringe Figure Ali Akbar Makes ‘Interesting Points,’” https://www.huffpost.com/entry/ali-akbar-jack-dorsey-twitter_n_5c40cb9ce4b027c3bbbf3a0c, January 18, 2019.

¹² Michael Edison Hayden, “‘We Make Mistakes’: Twitter’s Embrace of the Extreme Far Right,” <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/07/07/we-make-mistakes-twitters-embrace-extreme-far-right>, July 7, 2021.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kari Paul, *The Guardian*, “A few rightwing ‘super-spreaders’ fueled bulk of election falsehoods, study says,” <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/05/election-misinformation-trump-rightwing-super-spreader-study>, March 5, 2021.

¹⁵ Brandy Zadrozny, *NBC News*, “‘Carol’s Journey’: What Facebook knew about how it radicalized users,” <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/facebook-knew-radicalized-users-rcna3581>, October 22, 2021.

¹⁶ Michael Edison Hayden, *SPLC Hatewatch*, “‘We Make Mistakes’: Twitter’s Embrace of the Extreme Far Right,” <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/07/07/we-make-mistakes-twitters-embrace-extreme-far-right>, July 7, 2021.

¹⁷ Michael Edison Hayden, *SPLC Hatewatch*, “Far Right Resurrects Roger Stone’s #StopTheSteal During Vote Count,” <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/11/06/far-right-resurrects-roger-stones-stopthesteal-during-vote-count>, November 6, 2021.

¹⁸ Michael Edison Hayden, *SPLC Hatewatch*, “SPLC Investigation: Far-Right OANN Anchor Jack Posobiec’s Rise Tied to White Supremacist Movement,” <https://www.splcenter.org/splc-investigation-far-right-oann-anchor-jack-posobiecs-rise-tied-white-supremacist-movement>, July 8, 2020.

¹⁹ Joseph Bernstein, *Buzzfeed News*, “Inside The Alt-Right’s Campaign To Smear Trump Protesters As Anarchists,” <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/josephbernstein/inside-the-alt-rights-campaign-to-smear-trump-protesters-as>, January 11, 2017.

worked for them.²⁰ He has targeted Jewish journalists with hate,²¹ hyped to his followers a Polish neofascist group that during the 1930s bombed Jewish homes,²² and repeatedly promoted politically charged lies on his way to reaching over one million followers.²³ Posobiec has also promoted to Twitter multiple Russian military intelligence-led social media operations,²⁴ including Macron Leaks, which sought to disrupt the results of the 2017 elections in France. Multiple analysts have pointed out the likelihood that automation stemming from Russia buoyed his account during that campaign.²⁵ Posobiec posted to his followers about “Stop the Steal” as early as September 7, 2020 – nearly two months before election day.²⁶

Twitter has also verified other extremists involved in pushing Pizzagate,²⁷ including Cernovich and Gateway Pundit blogger Cassandra Fairbanks,²⁸ who has read excerpts from the Unabomber manifesto to her followers on that site and misled them to believe “antifa” attacked her while raising \$25,000 in handouts off of that lie.²⁹ Like Posobiec, both extremists also pushed lies about the 2020 election four years after Pizzagate, suggesting that if Twitter had removed them in 2016, the company may have reduced the spread of additional lies that inspired violence on January 6. Other verified “Stop the Steal” extremists, including Brandon Straka and Scott Presler, built followings in the hundreds of thousands after being promoted by the company’s business model.³⁰ Neither man had any claim to being a public figure outside of the popularity they gained through their verified Twitter handles. The FBI notes in their indictment of Straka, relative to his actions on January 6, over a dozen different references to his Twitter account.³¹ Analysts previously noted the degree to which automated account or “bots” appear to have buoyed his tweets, making him more visible on the site.³²

²⁰ Michael Edison Hayden, *SPLC Hatewatch*, “Jack Posobiec’s Rise Tied to White Supremacist Movement,” <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/07/08/jack-posobiecs-rise-tied-white-supremacist-movement>, July 8, 2020.

²¹ Michael Edison Hayden, *SPLC Hatewatch*, “Twitter Gave Free Rein for Jack Posobiec To Publish Antisemitic Hate and Disinformation,” <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/07/08/twitter-gave-free-rein-jack-posobiec-publish-antisemitic-hate-and-disinformation>, July 8, 2020.

²² Michael Edison Hayden, *SPLC Hatewatch*, “OANN’s Posobiec Met With Polish Neo-Fascists and Amplified Their Messages Online,” <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/07/22/oanns-posobiec-met-polish-neo-fascists-and-amplified-their-messages-online>, July 22, 2020.

²³ Michael Edison Hayden, *SPLC Hatewatch*, “Neo-Nazi Collaborator Jack Posobiec Crosses One Million Twitter Followers,” <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/09/09/neo-nazi-collaborator-jack-posobiec-crosses-one-million-twitter-followers>, September 9, 2020.

²⁴ Michael Edison Hayden, *SPLC Hatewatch*, “Jack Posobiec Links to Russian Intelligence-Backed Website,” <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/04/28/jack-posobiec-links-russian-intelligence-backed-website>, April 28, 2021.

²⁵ Michael Edison Hayden, *SPLC Hatewatch*, “Jack Posobiec Central in Spreading Russian Intelligence-Led #MacronLeaks Hack,” <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/01/29/jack-posobiec-central-spreading-russian-intelligence-led-macronleaks-hack>, January 29, 2021.

²⁶ Atlantic Council’s DFRDLab, *Just Security*, “#StopTheSteal: Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities Leading to 1/6 Insurrection,” <https://www.justsecurity.org/74622/stopthesteal-timeline-of-social-media-and-extremist-activities-leading-to-1-6-insurrection/>, February 10, 2021.

²⁷ Michael Edison Hayden, *SPLC Hatewatch*, “There’s nothing you can do’: The Legacy of #PizzaGate,” <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/07/07/theres-nothing-you-can-do-legacy-pizzagate>, July 7, 2021.

²⁸ Jared Holt, *Right Wing Watch*, “Gateway Pundit Reporter Lavishes Praise on Unabomber: ‘A Brilliant Man’,” <https://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/gateway-pundit-reporter-lavishes-praise-on-unabomber-a-brilliant-man/>, May 6, 2020.

²⁹ Jared Holt, *Right Wing Watch*, “Cassandra Fairbanks Claims Antifa Attacked Her. Police Reports and Neighbors Say Otherwise,” <https://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/cassandra-fairbanks-%e2%80%8bclaims-antifa-attacked-her-%e2%80%8b-police-reports-and-neighbors-say-otherwise/>, June 17, 2020.

³⁰ Michael Edison Hayden, “We Make Mistakes’: Twitter’s Embrace of the Extreme Far Right,” <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/07/07/we-make-mistakes-twitters-embrace-extreme-far-right>, July 7, 2021

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Tim Fitzsimons, *NBC News*, “Meet Brandon Straka, a gay former liberal encouraging others to #WalkAway from Democrats,” <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/meet-brandon-straka-gay-former-liberal-encouraging-others-walkaway-democrats-n902316>, August 21, 2018.

Beyond these figures, Twitter provides the only mainstream social media home for white nationalist leaders like Peter Brimelow,³³ Richard Spencer,³⁴ and Jason Kessler,³⁵ who operate on the site under their own names and faces. Pseudonymous white supremacists and serial harassers also commonly cycle through handles on Twitter after the site suspends them, suggesting that ban evasion represents a pervasive problem for the company.³⁶ Twitter's algorithm frequently recommends that users follow white supremacists, sometimes in groups of five or more accounts at one time.³⁷ Suspended U.S. State Department official Matt Gebert, who started posting to Twitter in more conventional right-wing circles during the Obama era, began sharing overt white supremacist material only a few years after joining the site, we found in a review of his accounts.³⁸ By the Trump era, Gebert hosted clandestine meetings of white supremacists at his home. He obtained a security clearance, and the State Department briefed the Senate Foreign Relations committee about our findings about him in August 2019.³⁹

In recent years, we have seen the emergence of a disturbing new trend of voter suppression against Black and Latinx people through the use of targeted mis/disinformation campaigns spread on social media platforms by both foreign and domestic sources. These efforts involve outside groups posing as Black or Latinx community leaders and influencers, building large followings, and then spreading false information about how, when, and where to vote.⁴⁰ A Brennan Center report revealed that most online voter suppression campaigns were targeted at "specific segments of the population in terms of race, gender, and income, potentially leading to discriminatory effects."⁴¹ That report also documented that these campaigns were most often sponsored by undisclosed groups. While it may be unclear who is funding these misleading and intentionally polarizing campaigns, the intent is unmistakable: "to depress turnout among people of color by fueling cynicism and distrust in the political process."⁴²

One example, documented by an October 2019 Senate Select Committee on Intelligence report,⁴³ revealed Russian interference in the 2016 presidential campaign. According to the report, Russian operatives, under the direction of the Kremlin-backed Internet Research Agency, worked to manipulate and distort facts, create and expand racial divisions, and discourage Black and Latinx voters from showing up at the polls.

³³ https://twitter.com/peterbrimelow?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

³⁴ <https://twitter.com/RichardBSpencer>

³⁵ <https://twitter.com/TheMadDimension>

³⁶ Michael Edison Hayden, *SPLC Hatewatch*, "Spectre Unmasked: Racist 'Alt-Right' Podcaster Used To Be Local Reporter," <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/01/18/spectre-unmasked-racist-alt-right-podcaster-used-be-local-reporter>, January 18, 2019.

³⁷ <https://twitter.com/MichaelEHayden/status/1441556029926428673?s=20>

³⁸ Michael Edison Hayden, *SPLC Hatewatch*, "U.S. State Department Official Involved in White Nationalist Movement, Hatewatch Determines," <https://www.splcenter.org/gebert>, August 7, 2019.

³⁹ Jennifer Hansler, *CNN News*, "State Department official on leave after civil rights group accuses him of being involved in white nationalist movement, source says," <https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/09/politics/matthew-gebert-splc/index.html>, August 9, 2019.

⁴⁰ Ashley Bryant, *Campaigns and Elections*, "Combating the Disinformation Campaign Targeting Black and Latinx Voters," <https://campaignsandelections.com/industry-news/combating-the-disinformation-campaign-targeting-black-and-latinx-voters/>, July 20, 2020

⁴¹ Young Mie Kim, Brennan Center, "Voter Suppression Has Gone Digital"

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/voter-suppression-has-gone-digital>, November 20, 2018

⁴² Shannon Bond, *National Public Radio*, "Black And Latino Voters Flooded With Disinformation In Election's Final Days," <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/30/929248146/black-and-latino-voters-flooded-with-disinformation-in-elections-final-days>, October 30, 2020

⁴³ Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, "Russian Active Measures: Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 Elections, Volume 2, Russia's Use of Social Media,"

https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report_Volume2.pdf, October 8, 2019

Finally, video-sharing websites like YouTube and TikTok also show how a manipulative business model mixed with extreme far-right content can intensify the radicalization of users. YouTube's recommendation algorithm has nudged consumers of more mainstream content toward increasingly radical material, according to multiple analysts and the statements of former far-right extremists who have left behind that movement. Researcher Becca Lewis posited in her 2018 report "Alternative Influence," that YouTube's creators "built [it] to incentivize the behavior of [far-right] political influencers."⁴⁴ In a report, commissioned by the New Zealand government in the aftermath of the March 2019 terrorist attack in Christchurch, the man who gunned down 51 Muslims, Brenton Tarrant, told authorities that YouTube provided a "significant source of information and inspiration" for his racist views. Researchers have flagged that TikTok has had a similar impact⁴⁵ – driving right-leaning consumers to QAnon content and videos promoting violent extremist groups like the Oath Keepers.⁴⁶

Policy Recommendation

Recommendations for tech companies

- Most tech companies have their own Terms of Service, essentially rules of the road. The SPLC encourages corporations to create – and enforce – policies and terms of service to ensure that social media platforms, payment service providers, and other internet-based services do not provide platforms where hateful activities and extremism can grow. When tech companies do decide to act against hate, it is too often only after a violent attack has occurred. They need to proactively address the problem of extremist content on their platforms rather than simply react after people have been killed.
- Tech companies of all sizes should coordinate to understand how the impact of one company's actions affects others. If a right-wing extremist loses their platform at Facebook and YouTube, but remains on Twitter, they can continue to reach a wide audience. Companies must coordinate to anticipate and measure this phenomenon as it happens.
- Tech companies must understand and appreciate their unique position as the single largest storehouses of human knowledge about complex socio-technical problems. Tech companies store vast quantities of invaluable, irreplaceable data, and currently they are the sole arbiters of who gets to use that data and for what purpose. Instead of locking out researchers, tech companies should proactively engage outside partners to put their vast quantities of data to work. These efforts must go beyond just providing pre-curated data sets. Furthermore, companies should not limit researcher access to individuals associated with a university. Journalists, lawyers, Congressional staff, and other interested parties should be allowed access to data without such unnecessary gatekeeping measures.
- Tech companies must redesign their "Trust and Safety" systems to reward people who want to do the right thing. At the same time, services must not solely rely on users to report content. Small companies should be financially rewarded for building powerful, proactive teams that keep their services safe and abuse-free.

⁴⁴ Rebecca Lewis, *Data & Society*, "Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube," https://datasociety.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DS_Alternative_Influence.pdf, September 18, 2018.

⁴⁵ New Zealand Royal Commission of Inquiry, "Report: Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019," <https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/the-report/firearms-licensing/general-life-in-new-zealand/>, December 21, 2020.

⁴⁶ Matt Binder, *Mashable*, "TikTok's algorithm is sending users down a far-right extremist rabbit hole," <https://mashable.com/article/tiktok-recommendations-far-right-wing>, March 28, 2020.

- Tech companies must not treat white supremacist or anti-government militias groups with a light touch out of fear of appearing to be politically biased. As a recent leak of Facebook’s Dangerous Individuals and Organizations list⁴⁷ revealed, Facebook’s tiered approach to handling groups engaged in promoting violence and hateful views online places looser prohibitions on predominantly white anti-government militias than on groups and individuals listed as terrorists or as violent criminal enterprises, the majority of whom are non-white. Social media companies must protect their most vulnerable users, rather than perpetuate the injustices leveled against Muslim communities in particular through America’s “war on terror.”

Recommendations for the Biden administration and Congress

- Require public transparency and accountability with respect to the harmful content proliferated on media platforms.
- Require disclosure about who is paying for specific online political advertisements.
- Require regular, mandatory reporting by technology service providers to document abuse of their systems including financial support of violence, harassment, and terrorism.
- Invest in basic and applied research. Many thorny issues involving these social media platforms – such as how financial exploitation can be tracked on encrypted platforms, for example, or how cryptocurrency transactions can be tracked at scale – may have technology-based solutions.
 - Prioritize funding programs for research into technologies that can be used to detect and prevent online financial harms while preserving human rights. This is especially critical as we anticipate extremists’ gradual move to a more decentralized technology landscape.
 - Ensure improved training at the state and local levels to better enable detection of fraud that could have federal implications.
- Promote anti-bias education and resilience programs that help steer individuals away from hate and extremism. The law is a blunt instrument to confront hate and extremism; it is much better to prevent these criminal acts in the first place. Since it is not possible to legislate, regulate, or tabulate racism, hatred, or extremism out of existence, we need federal and state government leadership to promote anti-bias, antihate, and democracy-building education programs – such as the SPLC’s Learning for Justice resources⁴⁸ – in our nation’s schools. Especially in these divided and polarized times, every elementary and secondary school should promote an inclusive school climate and activities that celebrate our nation’s diversity.
- Promote programs and processes that intervene ethically in the lives of individuals – often called “deradicalization” efforts. The SPLC has partnered with American University’s Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL)⁴⁹ to help parents and caregivers understand how extremists exploit online spaces by targeting children and young adults with propaganda. In our guide – “Building Resilience & Confronting Risk in

⁴⁷ Sam Biddle, *The Intercept*, “Revealed: Facebook’s Secret Blacklist of Dangerous Individuals and Organizations,” October 12, 2021.

⁴⁸ <https://www.learningforjustice.org/>

⁴⁹ Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL), American University, <https://www.american.edu/centers/university-excellence/peril.cfm>.

the COVID-19 Era”⁵⁰ – we provide tangible steps to counter the threat of online radicalization, including information on new risks, how to recognize warning signs, and how to get help and engage a radicalized child or young adult.

Conclusion

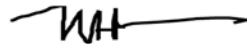
Mainstream social media companies, among the most trafficked websites on Earth – reaching billions of people – demonstrably tilt vulnerable consumers to embrace extreme far-right views.⁵¹ These billion-dollar corporations shaped the atmosphere on January 6, 2021, when Trump supporters launched an unprecedented attack on the Capitol building in Washington D.C. Twitter, which has plucked far-right disinformation posters from obscurity and turned them into celebrities through its verification system and amplification algorithm, must enforce its own terms of service. Twitter should not refrain from doing so out of fear of public blowback. Lawmakers must also encourage platforms to act and hold them accountable. Threats to profitability alone will not change things. Despite public outrage over Facebook’s failure to protect its users, the company’s profits rose seventeen percent between July and September.⁵² If we fail to adapt after a wakeup call like January 6, America risks plunging into the civil war sought by white nationalists and antigovernment extremists, threatening our democratic institutions. The future of our democracy depends upon how we meet the moment, a moment that demands both regulation and a substantial change in culture.

Thank you for holding this important hearing. We deeply appreciate the Committee’s continued leadership in working to address domestic extremism in a constitutional and effective manner. We look forward to working with you as you continue your focus on this issue. If you have questions about this statement or need additional information, please contact Michael Lieberman, SPLC Senior Policy Counsel, at Michael.Lieberman@splcenter.org.

Sincerely,

Susan Corke

Susan Corke
Director
Intelligence Project



Michael Edison Hayden
Senior Investigative Reporter/Spokesperson
Intelligence Project

⁵⁰ “Building Resilience & Confronting Risk in the COVID-19 Era: A Parents & Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization,” Southern Poverty Law Center/American University’s Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL), <https://www.splcenter.org/peril>

⁵¹ Semrush, “Top 100: The Most Visited Websites in the US,” <https://www.semrush.com/blog/most-visited-websites/>, September, 2021.

⁵² Mike Isaac, *New York Times*, “Facebook’s profit jumps 17 percent,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/25/technology/facebook-profits-earnings-q3-2021.html>, October 25, 2021.