



CITIZENS FOR  
RESPONSIBILITY &  
ETHICS IN WASHINGTON

February 8, 2023

The Honorable James Comer  
Chair, House Oversight and Accountability Committee  
Room 2240, Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jamie Raskin  
Ranking Member, House Oversight and Accountability Committee  
Room 2242, Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Comer and Ranking Member Raskin,

The mission of the House Oversight and Accountability Committee includes a duty to “identify problems, shine light on the situation, and propose reforms to prevent abuses from being repeated.”<sup>1</sup> This is a solemn responsibility. Yet, in your upcoming hearing entitled “Protecting Speech from Government Interference and Social Media Bias,” your committee has decided to focus on right-wing tropes rather than the legitimate crises currently facing our democracy. My organization, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), is writing to urge your committee to reconsider its oversight agenda. While you have executives from technology companies appearing before you, we highly encourage you to focus on the role of misinformation in destabilizing democracies, including the role of former President Trump in spreading misinformation and fomenting violence on social media.

The Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack investigated the role social media played in fomenting, condoning, and encouraging violence in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election. A leaked draft report from the Select Committee demonstrates that baseless claims of election fraud were circulating online and amplified by Trump and his allies in the leadup to the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol.<sup>2</sup> We also know that on the day of the Capitol attack, the mob closely monitored Trump’s Twitter account, looking for instructions from him. In one tweet posted during the attack, Trump said that “Mike Pence didn’t have the courage to do what should have been done” -- a tweet that was sent while rioters chanted “Hang Mike Pence” and came within a minute of reaching the then-vice president.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the attack on the Capitol went on for hours until

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<sup>1</sup> House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, <https://oversight.house.gov/about/>.

<sup>2</sup> Jessica J. González, *Opinion: Meta’s big mistake on Trump*, CNN, Jan. 28, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/28/opinions/meta-facebook-donald-trump-gonzalez/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Restuccia and Siobhan Hughes, *Trump’s Tweet About Pence Seen as Critical Moment During Riot*, The Wall Street Journal, Jul. 21, 2022, <http://bitly.ws/zKvB>.

Trump finally instructed the mob via Twitter and Facebook to “go home”.<sup>4</sup> The Committee’s evidence shows that the mob began to disperse almost immediately after he sent that message.<sup>5</sup>

In the two days following the insurrection Donald Trump was barred from Facebook and Twitter. Recognizing that the platform had been used “to incite violent insurrection against a democratically elected government,” Mark Zuckerberg, in announcing Trump’s suspension from Facebook, argued that the “risks” of allowing Donald Trump to use their platform were simply too great.<sup>6</sup> Twitter made a similar determination, concluding that the “risk of further incitement of violence” was too great<sup>7</sup>.

Since his suspension from Facebook and Twitter, Trump has continued to proliferate misleading narratives on his new social media platform, Truth Social, and has refused to take responsibility for his role in inciting the insurrection.<sup>8</sup> Just last week Trump “reTruthed” a post on Truth Social encouraging physical violence in the event that he is disqualified from office.<sup>9</sup> The original tweet asserted that “people...will physically fight for him this time...we Are Locked and LOADED.”<sup>10</sup> The potential for violence coming from activity like this on social media platforms is unmistakable. As three former Twitter executives prepare to appear before you for your upcoming oversight hearing, we urge you to probe how social media platforms plan to protect their sites from misinformation and invocations of violence and why Donald Trump was allowed to return to these platforms.

A recent Department of Homeland Security advisory on terrorism threats to the U.S. warned that “widespread online proliferation of false or misleading narratives regarding unsubstantiated widespread election fraud” constitutes a decisive factor “contributing to the current heightened threat environment” across the country.<sup>11</sup> Yet now, as Donald Trump runs for president again in 2024, these platforms have moved to reinstate his accounts seemingly without considering the risks that he and his misinformation and violent rhetoric still pose for our democracy.<sup>12</sup>

At its core, our democracy depends on access to the accurate information needed “to participate in government, civic, and corporate decision-making.”<sup>13</sup> Unchecked threats to reliable information and invocations of violence like those broadcast by Donald Trump imperil our civic institutions, social stability, and democratic norms. As a nonpartisan

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Naylor, *Trump Downplays Insurrection But Tells Supporters To ‘Go Home’*, National Public Radio, Jan. 6, 2021, <http://bitly.ws/zKwZ>.

<sup>5</sup> See H. R. Rep. No. 117-663 (2022).

<sup>6</sup> Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook (Jan. 7, 2021), <https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10112681480907401>.

<sup>7</sup> Twitter Inc. (@Twitter), Twitter (Jan. 8 2021), [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2020/suspension](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/suspension).

<sup>8</sup> Aaron Blake, *Two years after Jan. 6, Trump is still promoting violent rhetoric*, The Washington Post, Feb. 2, 2023, <http://bitly.ws/zKy9>.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> Department of Homeland Security, *Summary of Terrorism Threat to the U.S. Homeland*, Feb. 7, 2022, <https://www.dhs.gov/ntas/advisory/national-terrorism-advisory-system-bulletin-february-07-2022>.

<sup>12</sup> Shannon Bond, *Meta allows Donald Trump back on Facebook and Instagram*, National Public Radio, Jan. 25, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/01/25/1146961818/trump-meta-facebook-instagram-ban-ends>.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Rosenbach and Katherine Mansted, *Can Democracy Survive in the Information Age?*, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Oct. 2018, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/can-democracy-survive-information-age>.

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nonprofit committed to ensuring transparency and accountability, we respectfully urge the Committee to focus its oversight agenda not on partisan tropes, but instead on how we can rebuild the guardrails of our democracy and ensure that social media platforms do not become agents of violence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Noah Bookbinder". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Noah Bookbinder  
President and Chief Executive Officer