

**HEARING BEFORE
THE UNITED STATES SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION**

April 10, 2019

Testimony of Neil Potts
Public Policy Director, Facebook

I. Introduction

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Hirono, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Neil Potts, and I am a Director at Facebook with oversight of the development and implementation of Facebook's Community Standards, which serve as Facebook's rules for what types of content are allowed on our platform. I am a graduate of the United States Naval Academy and the University of Virginia School of Law. Prior to joining Facebook, I served as a ground intelligence officer in the United States Marine Corps and was deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Facebook's mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. Over two billion people come to our platform every month to connect with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, to build their businesses, to volunteer or donate to organizations they care about, and to help those in need. Our users share billions of pictures, stories, and videos about their lives and their beliefs each day.

The diversity of viewpoints, expression, and experiences on our platform highlights much of what is best about Facebook. But it also presents challenges when deciding what content should and should not be allowed on our platform.

Facebook's most important responsibility is keeping people safe, both online and off. But we also strive to foster a diversity of viewpoints and experiences on our platform. To create a place that is safe for such a variety of people, we have to make hard decisions about what can and cannot be allowed on our platform.

We created our Community Standards to standardize our content removal decisions. Our Standards outline publicly and transparently what content is permissible. They apply around the world to all types of content and are designed to be applied consistently and fairly to a community that transcends regions, cultures, religions, and languages. At our scale, we are not always going to get the enforcement decision right. But I would like to state unequivocally that Facebook does not favor one political viewpoint over another, nor does Facebook suppress conservative speech. Our Community Standards have been carefully designed to ensure that content is reviewed in a neutral way, focused on what is necessary to keep our users safe. Our systems and human reviewers work in concert to identify and remove violent, hateful, or dangerous content.

But these decisions can be both far-reaching and novel: how to improve the quality of the discourse on a site as voluminous and varied as ours, how to keep hateful content off that site, and how to do so without hampering free expression. As Mark Zuckerberg noted in his recent op-ed, we should not make so many important decisions about speech on our own and everyone in the social media space should strive to do everything they can to keep the amount of harmful content to a minimum.

For our part, Facebook is creating an independent body so people can appeal our decisions. And we are working with governments on ensuring the effectiveness of our content review systems. But we need a standardized, industry-wide approach for determining the guidelines by which potentially harmful content is reviewed, and by which we assess issues as critical as election integrity, privacy, and data portability.

The rules of the Internet should reflect our society's values for a safe and open Internet. We care about updating these rules because we believe that technology should serve everyone, whatever their background, whatever their politics. Conversations like the ones we will have here today are an important part of making that belief a reality, and we appreciate the opportunity to take part in it.

I would like to begin by telling you more about our efforts to ensure that our content moderation policies are viewpoint neutral and designed to encourage dialogue and the free flow of ideas.

II. Content Moderation and Neutrality

Our content policies are the centerpiece of our efforts to keep people safe. Our Community Standards and related policies work to balance our goals of giving people a place to express themselves genuinely while also promoting a welcoming and safe environment.

At the same time, we believe in embracing diverse views. Indeed, one of Facebook's foundational principles is to be a platform for diverse ideas. Suppressing content on the basis of political viewpoint or preventing people from seeing what matters most to them is directly contrary to Facebook's mission. We want Facebook to be a place where people can discover a greater diversity of news and information than they could otherwise. Therefore, unless we are confronted with a specific potential harm, we tend to err on the side of allowing content, even when some people find it objectionable or offensive.

Research shows that social media platforms provide more information diversity than traditional media ever has. A 2017 Reuters digital news report concluded that, on average, people who use social media, aggregators, and search engines experience more information diversity than non-users. Similarly, a Pew Research Center survey found that more than half of Facebook users report that there are a range of political beliefs among their Facebook friends.

Our Community Standards do not prohibit users from discussing controversial topics or supporting a debated point of view. Nor do they favor opinions on one end of the

political spectrum or the other. We believe that such discussion is critical to promoting greater understanding among members of our community.

But given the amount of content on our platform, content reviewers must respond to millions of reports each week from all over the world, and we do not always get it right. 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 Subcommittee and others.

We want to make sure our community understands the systems and processes that lead to our content removal decisions. Transparency is the key to fostering that understanding, and as part of our annual Transparency Report, we publish a Community Standards Enforcement Report describing the amount and types of content we have taken action against, as well as the amount of content that we have proactively flagged for review. We currently publish our report every six months, but we soon expect to do so every quarter. In addition, we publish comprehensive guidelines to provide more clarity around where we draw lines on these complex and evolving issues. We hope that by sharing this information, we can encourage all stakeholders to contribute to an ongoing dialogue around our decisionmaking processes and help us improve our efforts to develop and enforce our standards.

We have also solicited external feedback on our content moderation policies from sources across the political spectrum. We have partnered with over 100 groups across the political spectrum, 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. The input we receive from these groups will help us to improve over time and ensure we can most effectively serve our diverse community.

For example, former Senator Kyl is gathering insights from members of Congress and a number of conservative groups and is assessing whether the company is unintentionally biased against conservative points of view. Senator Kyl and his team at Covington & Burling have talked to over 130 groups and individuals to understand how our policies and enforcement are affecting different people and communities. Having wrapped up the first phase of the project, which was focused on this external engagement, Senator Kyl and his team are now reviewing our external and internal policies. While conducting this review, Senator Kyl and his team have also been engaged in reviewing and providing insights into future policy changes under consideration. After Senator Kyl has reviewed our policies and internal guidelines, he and his team will share feedback and suggestions for improvements.

Another example of external feedback we have solicited is that of Laura Murphy, a national civil liberties and civil rights leader, who, as part of an independent civil rights audit, is coordinating with civil rights groups to help advise Facebook on how to empower users with a diversity of opinions while encouraging civil discourse. And Relman, Dane & Colfax, a respected civil rights law firm, is in the process of carrying out a comprehensive civil rights assessment of Facebook's services and internal operations.

We also created an appeals process for content that was removed from our platform as hate speech because we recognize that we sometimes make enforcement errors. We are working to extend this process further, by making appeals available not just for content that was taken down, but also for content that was reported and nonetheless left up, and by creating an independent oversight board of experts on free speech and safety to render binding and transparent decisions on these appeals. Through efforts like these, we will continue improving our systems and processes to correct for and minimize mistakes in the future.

And we are continuing our 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, while still keeping our space welcoming and safe for our entire community.

While we will continue to take steps on our own to improve, we hope that we have a broader discussion with the industry regarding decisions about what speech is harmful. People should be able to expect that companies will address these issues in a consistent way. We should have a broader debate about what we want as a society and how regulation can help. We believe Facebook has a responsibility to help address these issues, and we are looking forward to discussing them with lawmakers around the world, including during our discussion here today.

III. Terrorism, Violence, and Hate Speech

While I know that we are here today to discuss our efforts to encourage a diversity of views and to ensure we remain politically neutral in our efforts to create a safe and welcoming environment for our community, I would also appreciate the opportunity to discuss our efforts to stamp out the use of our platform by terrorists and other extremists, particularly in light of the despicable acts perpetrated recently in Christchurch.

Since the terrorist attack, Facebook has been working closely with the New Zealand Police. At the same time, we have been working to understand how we can prevent such use in the future. Those efforts include exploring restrictions on who can go Live depending on factors such as prior Community Standards violations, working to improve our matching technology to detect and stop the spread of horrific viral videos, and developing methods to react faster when harmful content is video live-streamed.

More broadly, Facebook employs over 30,000 people across the country and around the world focused on safety and security, including those that block and remove terrorist and extremist accounts and their content. That group includes engineers who every day are building new, automated systems to identify and remove this material—often at upload, before it can be viewed by our community. And we have specific protocols in place to pass on threats of imminent harm to law enforcement as soon as we become aware of them.

We are also expanding our industry collaboration through the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), which we co-launched more than two years ago to help fight terrorism and extremism online alongside our peers at other technology companies, including Google, YouTube, Microsoft, and Twitter. The information made available through GIFCT allows smaller companies the ability to take advantage of our technology and tactics, even with fewer people and resources.

But hate can take many forms and none of it is permitted in our community. We disallow hate speech because it creates an environment of intimidation and exclusion that limits people's willingness to communicate and share with one another. In fact, Facebook rejects not just hate *speech*, but all hateful ideologies. That means that white supremacists are not allowed on our platform under any circumstances, and we have recently announced a ban on white nationalism and white separatism as well. We will therefore now use our Dangerous Organizations policy to remove from our platform praise, support, or representation of white supremacy, as well as of white nationalism or white separatism, because both ideologies are inextricably linked with white supremacy and with violence more generally. We have already banned more than 200 white supremacist groups because of our Dangerous Organizations policy.

We recognize the serious harm that hateful content can inflict in any community, including ours, and we continue to be committed to finding new and better ways to combat hate on Facebook.

V. Conclusion

In closing, I want to reiterate our deep commitment to building a community that encourages and fosters free expression, as well as to stopping terrorists, extremists, and hate groups from using our platform to promote abhorrent ideologies. We want Facebook to be a place where individuals with diverse viewpoints can connect and exchange ideas. There is a lot more to do, but we are proud of the significant progress we have made over the last few years. Still, we know that people have questions about what we are doing to continue that progress, and we are looking forward to working with the members of this Committee, other policymakers, 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.