

August 31, 2018

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Intelligence Committee  
United States Senate  
211 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Burr,

In anticipation of the hearings with Facebook and Twitter representatives next week, I would like to bring to your attention some important details to consider. According to a recent poll commissioned by the Media Research Center:

- 65% of self-described conservatives believe social media companies like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are purposely censoring conservatives and conservative ideas from their sites.
- Two-thirds (66%) of self-described conservatives do not trust Facebook to treat all of its users equally regardless of their political beliefs.
- Two-thirds (67%) of self-described conservatives have less trust in Facebook than they did one year ago.
- 32% of self-described conservative Facebook users have left or are considering leaving the platform because of its censorship of conservatives.

Why are these poll numbers so important for your hearing on Wednesday with representatives from Facebook and Twitter? Tens of millions of Americans who describe themselves as conservatives do not trust these social media platforms which have the potential to sway elections and influence society.

According to Statista, in the last reported quarter,

- “[T]he number of monthly active U.S. Twitter users amounted to 68 million. With more than 336 million monthly active users worldwide as of the first quarter of 2018, Twitter is one of the biggest social networks worldwide. The number of U.S. Twitter users is projected to surpass 70 million in 2020.”
- In 2018, the number of Facebook users in the United States is expected to reach 207.36 million, up from 197.7 million in 2016. As of the second quarter of 2017, the social network was accessed by 2 billion users on a monthly basis, making it the most popular social network worldwide.

The influence of Twitter and Facebook by itself is not the issue. It is the influence it possesses in conjunction with its institutional bias against conservatives which is so dangerous:

- As of the release of MRC's Censorship report in April of this year, 12 of the 25 U.S. members of Twitter's Trust and Safety Council—which helps guide its policies—were liberal, and only one was conservative. Anti-conservative groups like GLAAD and the Anti-Defamation League are part of the board. As far as we know, there are no well-known conservative groups represented on this council.
- And as recently as last week, allegations of bias against conservatives at Facebook came to light from many of Facebook's own employees. Brian Amerige, a senior engineer, said: "We Have a Problem with Political Diversity. We claim to welcome all perspectives, but are quick to attack—often in mobs—anyone who presents a view that appears to be in opposition to left-leaning ideology," he wrote. "All the talk of 'openness to different perspectives' does not apply to causes of 'social justice,' immigration, 'diversity,' and 'equality.' On [these] issues, you can either keep quiet or sacrifice your reputation and career."

Americans are distrustful of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook and they have good reason to be. Their institutional bias against conservatives combined with their influence is a dangerous combination.

The American people deserve answers and transparency from social media firms like Twitter and Facebook when it comes to the influence foreign operators have on their platforms. But until Twitter and Facebook provide answer as to *how* they have addressed the censorship against conservative voices, how can you trust their answers about foreign influence on their platforms, when they themselves have such strong institutional political biases?

The Media Research Center is leading a coalition representing more than 40 conservative organizations concerned about the censorship of conservative voices on social media. The organizations in this coalition represent tens of millions of conservative Americans. These Americans expect that social media companies will do the right thing. Conservatives also expect that their political leaders will hold the leadership in these companies accountable. During such a critical political season, it is crucial that the response Congress and social media executives provide alleviate the concerns of conservative voters, and bring direction for pending changes in the policies of these companies.

Sincerely,

L. Brent Bozell III  
Founder and President