

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927  
Minority (202) 225-3641

February 23, 2021

Mark Zuckerberg  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
Facebook  
1 Hacker Way  
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

The Committee is deeply concerned about dangerous and divisive rhetoric thriving on Facebook's platform and is considering legislation to address these issues. From conspiracy theorists peddling false information to extremist voices urging and organizing violence, Facebook has become a breeding ground for polarization and discord. Accordingly, pursuant to Rules X and XI of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committee is writing to request documents and information regarding these matters.

As you know, on January 6 a violent mob attacked the U.S. Capitol with the aim of preventing Congress from certifying the results of the 2020 presidential election.<sup>1</sup> Five people died and more than 100 Capitol police officers were injured as a result of the attack.<sup>2</sup> In the days and months leading up to this tragic day, ominous threats against elected officials and police officers flooded social media, including public and private Facebook Groups and pages.<sup>3</sup> Within these Groups and pages, phrases like "lock and load" and "kill them all" were used thousands of

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<sup>1</sup> *Capitol Riots: Congress Certifies Joe Biden's Victory After Chaotic Scenes*, BBC News (Jan. 7, 2021); *How did Rioters Breach the U.S. Capitol on January 6?*, CBS News (Jan. 18, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> *What we know about the 5 Deaths in the Pro-Trump Mob that Stormed the Capitol*, CNN (Jan. 8, 2021); *'They Got a Officer!': How a Mob Dragged and Beat Police at the Capitol*, New York Times (Jan. 11, 2021); *Police Union say 140 Officers Injured in Capitol Riot*, Washington Post (Jan. 27, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> *'Burn Down DC': Violence that Erupted at Capitol was Incited by Pro-Trump Mob on Social Media*, USA Today (Jan. 6, 2021); *Thousands of Facebook Groups Buzzed with Calls for Violence Ahead of the U.S. Election*, Reuters (Nov. 6, 2020).

times.<sup>4</sup> Fueled by lies of voter fraud and rigged elections, extremist voices urged violence and called for civil war.<sup>5</sup> As was the case with a foiled plot last year to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer,<sup>6</sup> Facebook appears to have been used as an organizing tool for extremists seeking to commit violence.<sup>7</sup>

Long before the siege on the Capitol, Facebook executives reportedly received multiple warnings about the divisive nature of its platform. According to reports, a Facebook researcher warned in a 2016 presentation that extremist content was thriving in Groups on the platform, and that Facebook’s own recommendation tools were responsible for “64 percent of all the extremist group joins” (the “2016 presentation”).<sup>8</sup> Later, in a 2018 presentation, senior Facebook executives reportedly were warned that the company’s algorithms “exploit the human brains’ attractiveness to divisiveness,” and if left unchecked, Facebook’s platform would feed users “more and more divisive content in an effort to gain user attention & increase time on the platform” (the “2018 presentation”).<sup>9</sup> And just months ago, in a 2020 presentation, Facebook executives reportedly were warned that “blatant misinformation and calls to violence were filling the majority of the platform’s top ‘civic’ Groups,” and that there was a “need to do something to stop these conversations from happening and growing as quickly as they do” (the “2020 presentation”).<sup>10</sup>

Despite these warnings, reports indicate that certain Facebook executives—including Joel Kaplan, Facebook’s Vice President of Global Public Policy—regularly balked at implementing reforms.<sup>11</sup> Beginning around 2017, Facebook reportedly launched internal research on divisive content and user behavior, building a cross-functional task force of engineers and researchers, known as the “Common Ground” task force, charged with developing proposals to combat

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<sup>4</sup> *Thousands of Facebook Groups Buzzed with Calls for Violence Ahead of the U.S. Election*, Reuters (Nov. 6, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> *‘Burn Down DC’: Violence that Erupted at Capitol was Incited by Pro-Trump Mob on Social Media*, USA Today (Jan. 6, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> *Facebook and the Group that Planned to Kidnap Gretchen Whitmer*, New York Times (Oct. 8, 2020); *Facebook Continues to Host Militant Groups and Ads despite a Ban on Right-Wing Extremism*, BuzzFeed News (Oct. 19, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> *Facebook’s Sandberg Deflected Blame for Capitol Riot, but New Evidence Shows How Platform Played a Role*, Washington Post (Jan. 13, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> *Facebook Executives Shut Down Efforts to Make the Site Less Divisive*, Wall Street Journal (May 26, 2020).

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

<sup>10</sup> *Facebook Knew Calls for Violence Plagued ‘Groups,’ Now Plans Overhaul*, Wall Street Journal (Jan. 31, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> *E.g., Facebook’s Lonely Conservative Takes on a Power Position*, Wall Street Journal (Dec. 23, 2018).

polarization on the platform.<sup>12</sup> Facebook also reportedly formed employee teams of engineers and data scientists, called “Integrity Teams,” tasked with combating fake news, clickbait, inauthentic users, and similar issues.<sup>13</sup> Any significant new integrity-ranking initiative advanced by these teams, however, first had to clear an internal vetting process, known as “Eat Your Veggies,” that reportedly consisted of representatives from Facebook’s public policy, marketing, and public relations teams, among others.<sup>14</sup>

While the Common Ground task force and Integrity Teams made several recommendations for improving the platform—accompanied at times by caveats that some proposals may require Facebook to “take a moral stand” or could be “antigrowth”—certain Facebook executives, including Mr. Kaplan, reportedly blocked or weakened multiple proposed changes during the internal vetting process.<sup>15</sup> In the lead up to the 2020 presidential election, concerned Facebook integrity staffers reportedly sent daily analyses to senior executives, including Facebook Vice President of Integrity Guy Rosen, showing how Facebook’s methods for policing major Groups were not catching clear violations of the company’s community standards (the “Daily Analyses”).<sup>16</sup> On January 6, 2021, following a rally organized by the creators of a Facebook Group called “Stop the Steal,” rioters stormed the Capitol.<sup>17</sup>

This deadly attack on the Capitol laid bare the dire consequences of hyperpolarization and extremism in our current political discourse—much of which is occurring on your platform. With more than 3 billion monthly users across different services, Facebook must play a leading role in lessening the divide and lowering the temperature.<sup>18</sup>

To that end, the Committee is interested in understanding more about Facebook’s research on divisive content and user behavior, the reported presentations and recommendations made to Facebook executives and their actions in response, and the steps Facebook leadership has taken to reduce polarization on its platform. The Committee, therefore, requests you provide the following information to the Committee as soon as possible, but no later than March 9, 2021:

1. Please describe when and why Facebook first began conducting research into divisive content and behavior on its platform. In your response, please specify each factor that prompted Facebook to engage in this research.

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<sup>12</sup> See note 8.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> See note 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *The Four Latest Contenders to Facebook’s Social Media Throne*, CNBC (Nov. 14, 2020).

2. In the course of any internal study or analysis, did Facebook uncover any evidence or reach any findings that would confirm or suggest its platform, algorithms, or other tools exacerbate divisiveness or polarization? If yes, please provide a detailed explanation of what was found and how that information was used.
3. Please describe in detail the Common Ground task force and the Integrity Teams discussed above, including, but not limited to, date(s) established, roles and missions (as originally stated and including any amendments thereto), date(s) and reason(s) for disbandment (if applicable), and all findings and recommendations made by the Common Ground task force and/or Integrity Teams regarding divisiveness, polarization, or user behavior, including details on whether and how Facebook addressed or adopted such findings and recommendations, in whole or in part.
4. Please provide a complete description of the Eat Your Veggies process, including its relationship to and any interactions with the Common Ground task force and/or Integrity Teams; the name and role of each person involved in the process, including Mr. Kaplan; and the divisions and offices involved. In your response, please indicate if Facebook continues to follow this process today.

In addition, please provide the following:

1. Complete copies of:
  - a. The 2016 presentation;
  - b. The 2018 presentation;
  - c. The 2020 presentation; and
  - d. All Daily Analyses.
2. From January 1, 2016 to present, all documents or communications referring or relating to:
  - a. Any document requested in the above document Request 1;
  - b. Any recommendations, suggestions, or proposals by the Common Ground task force or any Integrity Teams regarding divisiveness, polarization, or user behavior; and
  - c. The Eat Your Veggies process.
3. From January 1, 2020 to present, all documents or communications referring or relating to Facebook's efforts to restrict, limit, adjust, regulate, or monitor Facebook Groups.

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg

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Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. Should you have any questions about this request, please contact Mohammad Aslami, Lisa Goldman, and Gerald Leverich with the Majority staff at (202) 225-2927.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Chairman



Mike Doyle  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Communications  
and Technology



Diana DeGette  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Oversight  
and Investigations



Jan Schakowsky  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection  
and Commerce

## **Responding to Document Requests from the Committee on Energy and Commerce**

In responding to the document request from the Committee on Energy and Commerce, please apply the instructions and definitions set forth below.

### **Instructions**

1. In complying with the request, you should produce all responsive documents in your possession, custody, or control.
2. Documents responsive to the request should not be destroyed, modified, removed, transferred, or otherwise made inaccessible to the Committee.
3. In the event that any entity, organization, or individual denoted in the request has been, or is currently, known by any other name than that herein denoted, the request should be read also to include them under that alternative identification.
4. The Committee's preference is to receive documents in electronic form (i.e., CD, memory stick, or thumb drive) in lieu of paper productions.
5. Documents produced in electronic format should also be organized, identified, and indexed electronically. Documents produced in an electronic format should also be produced in a searchable format.
6. Documents produced to the Committee should include an index describing the contents of the production. To the extent more than one CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, box or folder is produced, each CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, box or folder should contain an index describing its contents.
7. When you produce documents, you should identify the paragraph or clause in the Committee's request to which the documents respond.
8. Documents produced in response to this request should be produced together with copies of file labels, dividers, or identifying markers with which they were associated when this request was issued. To the extent that documents were not stored with file labels, dividers, or identifying markers, they should be organized into separate folders by subject matter prior to production.
9. Each folder and box should be numbered, and a description of the contents of each folder and box, including the paragraph or clause of the request to which the documents are responsive, should be provided in an accompanying index.
10. It is not a proper basis to refuse to produce a document because another person or entity possesses a nonidentical or identical copy of the same document.

11. If any of the requested information is available in machine-readable or electronic form (such as on a computer server, hard drive, CD, DVD, memory stick, or computer backup tape), you should consult with Committee staff to determine the appropriate format in which to produce the information. Documents produced in electronic format should be organized, identified, and indexed electronically in a manner comparable to the organizational structure called for in (8) and (9) above.
12. In the event that a responsive document is withheld on any basis, you should provide the following information concerning the document: (a) the reason the document is not being produced; (b) the type of document; (c) the general subject matter; (d) the date, author, and addressee; and (e) the relationship of the author and addressee to each other.
13. If any document responsive to this request was, but no longer is, in your possession, custody, or control, you should identify the document (stating its date, author, subject and recipients) and explain the circumstances by which the document ceased to be in your possession, custody, or control.
14. If a date or other descriptive detail set forth in this request referring to a document is inaccurate, but the actual date or other descriptive detail is known to you or is otherwise apparent from the context of the request, you should produce all documents which would be responsive as if the date or other descriptive detail were correct.
15. Unless otherwise specified, the time period covered by this request is from January 1, 2017 to the present.
16. This request is continuing in nature and applies to any newly discovered document. Any document not produced because it has not been located or discovered by the return date should be produced immediately upon location or discovery subsequent thereto.
17. If compliance with the request cannot be made in full by the specified return date, compliance shall be made to the extent possible by that date. An explanation of why full compliance is not possible shall be provided along with any partial production.
18. All documents should be bates-stamped sequentially and produced sequentially.
19. Two sets of documents should be delivered, one set to the majority staff and one set to the minority staff. The majority set should be delivered to the majority staff in Room 316 of the Ford House Office Building, and the minority set should be delivered to the minority staff in Room 564 of the Ford House Office Building. You should consult with Committee staff regarding the method of delivery prior to sending any materials.
20. Upon completion of the document production, you should submit a written certification, signed by you or your counsel, stating that: (1) a diligent search has been completed of all documents in your possession, custody, or control which reasonably could contain responsive documents; and (2) all documents located during the search that are

responsive have been produced to the Committee or identified in a privilege log provided to the Committee.

## Definitions

1. The term "document" means any written, recorded, or graphic matter of any nature whatsoever, regardless of how recorded, and whether original or copy, including, but not limited to, the following: memoranda, reports, expense reports, books, manuals, instructions, financial reports, working papers, records notes, letters, notices, confirmations, telegrams, receipts, appraisals, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, prospectuses, interoffice and intra-office communications, electronic mail (email), contracts, cables, notations of any type of conversation, telephone calls, meetings or other communications, bulletins, printed matter, computer printouts, teletypes, invoices, transcripts, diaries, analyses, returns, summaries, minutes, bills, accounts, estimates, projections, comparisons, messages, correspondence, press releases, circulars, financial statements, reviews, opinions, offers, studies and investigations, questionnaires and surveys, and work sheets (and all drafts, preliminary versions, alterations, modifications, revisions, changes, and amendments of any of the foregoing, as well as any attachments or appendices thereto). The term also means any graphic or oral records or representations of any kind (including without limitation, photographs, charts, graphs, voice mails, microfiche, microfilm, videotape, recordings and motion pictures), electronic and mechanical records or representations of any kind (including, without limitation, tapes, cassettes, disks, computer server files, computer hard drive files, CDs, DVDs, memory sticks, and recordings), and other written, printed, typed, or other graphic or recorded matter of any kind or nature, however produced or reproduced, and whether preserved in writing, film, tape, disk, videotape or otherwise. A document bearing any notation not a part of the original text is to be considered a separate document. A draft or non-identical copy is a separate document within the meaning of this term.
2. The term "documents in your possession, custody, or control" means (a) documents that are in your possession, custody, or control, whether held by you or your past or present agents, employees, or representatives acting on your behalf; (b) documents that you have a legal right to obtain, that you have a right to copy, or to which you have access; and (c) documents that you have placed in the temporary possession, custody, or control of any third party.
3. The term "communication" means each manner or means of disclosure or exchange of information, regardless of means utilized, whether oral, electronic, by document or otherwise, and whether face-to-face, in a meeting, by telephone, mail, telexes, discussions, releases, personal delivery, email (desktop or mobile device), text message, instant message, MMS or SMS message, or otherwise.
4. The terms "and" and "or" shall be construed broadly and either conjunctively or disjunctively to bring within the scope of the request any information which might otherwise be construed to be outside its scope. The singular includes plural number, and vice versa. The masculine includes the feminine and neuter genders.

5. The terms "person" or "persons" means natural persons, firms, partnerships, associations, corporations, subsidiaries, divisions, departments, joint ventures, proprietorships, syndicates, or other legal, business or government entities, and all subsidiaries, affiliates, divisions, departments, branches, and other units thereof.
6. The term "identify," when used in a question about individuals, means to provide the following information: (a) the individual's complete name and title; and (b) the individual's business address and phone number.
7. The terms "referring" or "relating," with respect to any given subject, means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, reflects, identifies, states, refers to, deals with, or is in any manner whatsoever pertinent to that subject.
8. The term "employee" means agent, borrowed employee, casual employee, consultant, contractor, de facto employee, independent contractor, joint adventurer, loaned employee, part-time employee, permanent employee, provisional employee, subcontractor, or any other type of service provider.