

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

May 27, 2021

Mr. Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Google
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai:

Pursuant to Rules X and XI of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committee is investigating the response to the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. As part of this inquiry, we are continuing to examine false and misleading information regarding COVID-19 on platforms such as yours. The Committee is writing in follow-up to our July 2020 and February 2021 letters requesting further information regarding reports of rampant COVID-19 disinformation on Google's platforms and others, as well as your recent testimony at our Joint Subcommittee Hearing entitled "Disinformation Nation: Social Media's Role in Promoting Extremism and Misinformation" on March 25, 2021.¹

¹ Letter from Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Chairman, Rep. Diana DeGette, Chair, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation, Rep. Michael F. Doyle, Chairman, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, and Rep. Janice D. Schakowsky, Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, to Sundar Pichai, Chief Executive Officer, Google (July 8, 2020); Letter from Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Chairman, Rep. Diana DeGette, Chair, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation, Rep. Michael F. Doyle, Chairman, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, and Rep. Janice D. Schakowsky, Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, to Sundar Pichai, Chief Executive Officer, Google (Feb. 23, 2021); House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittees on Communications and Technology and Consumer Protection and Commerce, Testimony of Sundar Pichai, Chief Executive Officer, Google, *Hearing on Disinformation Nation: Social Media's Role in Promoting Extremism and Misinformation*, 117th Cong. (Mar. 25, 2021).

The Committee has repeatedly raised concerns regarding the role your company plays in the spread of COVID-19 misinformation, including during our Committee hearing yesterday in which the effects of COVID-19 misinformation on vaccine confidence were discussed.² Earlier this year, during our March 25 hearing, Members referenced a report identifying 12 superspreaders of vaccine disinformation online.³ The report found that the “Disinformation Dozen” was responsible for 65 percent of the publicly available anti-vaccine content on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.⁴

Throughout the hearing and in Google’s prior submissions to the Committee, you have referenced Google’s “long-standing policies prohibiting harmful and misleading medical or health-related content.”⁵ Your testimony further noted how Google and its platforms, such as YouTube, have been planning for new threats related to COVID-19 vaccines. Specifically, you touted an October 2020 expansion of YouTube’s COVID-19 medical misinformation policy, which allows removal of “content about vaccines that contradicts consensus from health authorities, such as the Centers for Disease Control or the World Health Organization.”⁶

We were pleased to see a recent news report noting YouTube’s removal of a channel by Ty and Charlene Bollinger, members of CCDH’s Disinformation Dozen.⁷ However, that same article indicates that videos containing disinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines created by the Bollingers continue to be available through other YouTube channels.⁸ Similarly, a quick

² *Id.*; House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *Hearing on A Shot at Normalcy: Building Vaccine COVID-19 Confidence*, 117th Cong. (May 26, 2021).

³ House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittees on Communications and Technology and Consumer Protection and Commerce, *Hearing on Disinformation Nation: Social Media’s Role in Promoting Extremism and Misinformation*, 117th Cong. (Mar. 25, 2021); Center for Countering Digital Hate, *The Disinformation Dozen: Why Platforms Must Act on Twelve Leading Online Anti-Vaxxers* (Mar. 24, 2021).

⁴ Center for Countering Digital Hate, *The Disinformation Dozen: Why Platforms Must Act on Twelve Leading Online Anti-Vaxxers* (Mar. 24, 2021).

⁵ House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittees on Communications and Technology and Consumer Protection and Commerce, Testimony of Sundar Pichai, Chief Executive Officer, Google, *Hearing on Disinformation Nation: Social Media’s Role in Promoting Extremism and Misinformation*, 117th Cong. (Mar. 25, 2021).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Seller of vaccine disinformation has YouTube channel removed*, Associated Press (May 19, 2021). (www.apnews.com/article/tn-state-wire-coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-c17c288880f980c280e74545be740fde#:~:text=A%20major%20online%20seller%20of,false%20information%20to%20make%20money).

⁸ *Id.*

search of YouTube for other members of the Disinformation Dozen and “covid vaccine” leads to videos that may also contain misinformation regarding COVID-19 and vaccines.⁹

Accordingly, the Committee requests a briefing from your company by June 10, 2021, regarding the actions it has taken to monitor and review the content posted by the Disinformation Dozen on its platforms, and whether such content violates the terms of service.

In addition, to better understand Google’s actions to curb vaccine misinformation and disinformation, the Committee requests you provide the following information by June 10, 2021:

1. Updated responses to the requests in our February 2, 2021 letter to account for any actions, policy updates, or other relevant activities undertaken by Google since your February 23, 2020 response to the Committee.
2. A description of the actions taken by Google since publication of the CCDH and Anti-Vax Watch’s March 24, 2021 report entitled *The Disinformation Dozen*¹⁰ to:
 - a. Identify all accounts controlled by the Disinformation Dozen across its platforms; and
 - b. Review the content posted by such accounts to ensure it is in compliance with Google’s policies against COVID-19 and vaccine misinformation.
3. A summary of enforcement-related actions taken, and determinations made, by Google across its platforms in relation to content posted by the Disinformation Dozen.


⁹ See, e.g., Theo Von Clips, The Problem With the COVID Vaccine | Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Explains to Theo Von (www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sW0OmzcmL0) (accessed May 25, 2021); Mark Bell’s Power Project, Mark Bell's Power Project EP. 360 - Dr. Buttar and the Truth About Covid-19 (www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZrkXRz0CCc) (accessed May 25, 2021).


¹⁰ See note 4.

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Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. If you have any questions, and to schedule the briefing, please contact Rebekah Jones, Lisa Goldman, and Gerald Leverich with the Majority staff at (202) 225-2927.

Sincerely,


Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman

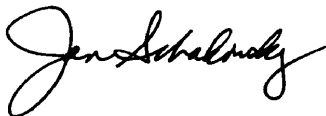


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