

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce Chair Janice D. Schakowsky
Hearing on “Holding Big Tech Accountable: Legislation to Build a Safer Internet”

December 9, 2021

Bottom line, the internet is not living up to its promise. At its birth in the previous century, the internet promised more social connections, new communities and experiences, and more economic opportunities. But these benefits have come with steep costs. Today’s internet is harming our children, our society, and our democracy.

Five years ago, at age 13, Anastasia Vlasova joined Instagram which quickly flooded her account with images of perfect bodies and perfect lives. She soon was spending three hours a day on the app and developed an eating disorder.

Despite public outcry, reporting yesterday confirmed that Instagram is still promoting pro-anorexia accounts to teens. Ms. Vlasova eventually quit using Instagram, but millions of children and teens remain powerless against its addictive and manipulative algorithms and ads.

On January 6th, DC Police officer Michael Fanone was grabbed, beaten, and tased—all while being called a traitor to his country. The deadly insurrection was coordinated on platforms like Facebook and exacerbated by election disinformation they amplified.

For too long Big Tech has acted without any real accountability. Instead, they give us apologies and denials. But the time for self-regulation is over!

Today, we discuss a number of proposals intended to build a safer internet. Last week I introduced the “FTC Whistleblower Act” with my colleague Representative Trahan. This bill protects from retaliation current and former employees who blow the whistle to the Federal Trade Commission, and it incentivizes the disclosure of unlawful activity.

It’s a critical step forward to restore trust online. The “Algorithmic Justice and Online Platform Transparency Act” from Representative Matsui prohibits algorithms that discriminate against certain consumers.

The “KIDS Act” from Representatives Castor, Clarke, Trahan, and Wexton bans online practices that exploit young people. The “Social Media DATA Act” from Representatives Trahan and Castor provides transparency into how digital ads target consumers.

The bipartisan “DETOUR Act” from Representatives Blunt-Rochester and Gonzalez prohibits large online platforms from using “dark patterns” to trick consumers.

We can create an internet that is better and safer—an internet that protects our children, is transparent, and holds bad actors accountable.

December 9, 2021

Page 2

Each of these proposals takes important steps toward that goal.

Thank you to the witnesses for joining us today.