

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 7, 2020

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
CEO
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

As the election approaches, it is incredibly important that the American people receive accurate information with respect to voting. I am concerned by reports of a coordinated domestic campaign involving teenagers, including minors, who are being paid to share misleading or false information on Facebook.¹ Although this paid campaign has been active since at least June, Facebook did not take any enforcement action until September; at least three months after the beginning of the activity and more than a month after it was publicized. To date, the campaign continues despite clear violations of Facebook's community standards. Enforcement failures like this threaten the integrity of our election as well as American consumers' trust in Facebook.

Thousands of posts were identified by the Washington Post with nearly identical language. These posts were sent at the direction of Turning Point Action, an arm of Turning Point USA, by teenagers paid for their participation. According to reports, some of the teenagers, including minors, worked as independent contractors from an office in Phoenix, Arizona, and were paid an hourly rate. However, the teenagers never disclosed their paid relationship with Turning Point Action or Rally Forge, the company running the campaign for Turning Point.

The Washington Post reported that Turning Point's disinformation campaign used subterfuge to violate Facebook's community standards. The teenagers were instructed on how to avoid detection by Facebook's automated systems, including by changing a few words from the shared source document. Some of the individuals used multiple accounts to fool Facebook's systems. These efforts to hide posters' association with Turning Point, intentionally evade detection, and spread disinformation are clear violations of Facebook's community guidelines.²

Facebook has tools for combatting the viral spread of disinformation campaigns, including its third-party fact-checking program, and tracking repeated violations by noting strikes on publishers when a violation is noted. While these tools should be Facebook's first line of defense against disinformation, they are not achieving that goal.

I am also concerned by reports of unequal or preferential treatment of certain publishers. Facebook employees reportedly have interceded with third-party fact checkers on behalf of

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/turning-point-teens-disinformation-trump/2020/09/15/c84091ae-f20a-11ea-b796-2dd09962649c_story.html

² https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/inauthentic_behavior;
<https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/misrepresentation>

certain right-wing pages.³ Such actions are not consistent with Facebook's official fact-checking program policy, which provides that independent fact-checkers—not Facebook—should resolve disputes over their ratings.⁴ Additionally, Facebook employees have intervened to remove misinformation strikes—used to track repeated violations—against some publishers, allowing them to avoid enforcement actions or be removed from the platform.

Facebook says that its policies apply evenly across the political and ideological spectrum. I applaud this and urge you to make sure Facebook employees do not give preferential treatment to publishers based on their political views. Moreover, interventions by Facebook employees in appeals of fact-checking decisions and the removal of strikes against publishers threaten the integrity of the entire fact-checking program. For example, Joel Kaplan, VP of Global Public Policy, reportedly escalated the appeal of fact-checking decisions for Instagram posts by Charlie Kirk, the founder of Turning Point USA.⁵

To ensure the integrity of Facebook's fact-checking procedures, I respectfully request a response to the following questions:

- Have you, Mr. Kaplan, or any other Facebook employee intervened in appeals by or enforcement actions against Turning Point USA, Turning Point Action, or Rally Forge, for violations of Facebook's community guidelines?
- What actions have been taken by Facebook against the disinformation campaign by Turning Point Action and Rally Forge to remedy violations of Facebook's community guidelines?
- Why were no actions taken for more than three months against this disinformation campaign for its violations of Facebook's community guidelines?
- During those three months, how many posts were shared by accounts that have since been found to be in violation, how many times were those posts viewed, and how many users saw them?
- How many accounts related to the disinformation campaign by Turning Point Action remain on Facebook, and how many posts have they shared in the last week?
- What, if any, direct conversations have you or Mr. Kaplan had with Turning Point USA, Turning Point Action, or Rally Forge with respect to their violations of Facebook's community guidelines?
- When were accounts associated with Turning Point USA, Turning Point Action, or Rally Forge informed of their violations of Facebook's community guidelines?

³ <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/facebook-zuckerberg-what-if-trump-disputes-election-results>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/business/help/2593586717571940?id=673052479947730>

⁵ <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/facebook-zuckerberg-what-if-trump-disputes-election-results>

Consumers must trust the information they see on the Facebook platform if Facebook is to continue providing them value and if we are to protect the integrity of our elections. Facebook must respond to egregious violations of its community guidelines in a timely manner. And all publishers must be treated equally in enforcement against repeat offenders. Facebook should enforce its policies that prohibit employees, particularly senior executives, from intervening in fact-checking decisions or disputes. Prompt execution of these steps will increase consumer trust and protect the upcoming election.

I respectfully request a response to the questions above no later than October 21st, 2020.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jan Schakowsky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Jan Schakowsky
Chair

Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
Committee on Energy and Commerce