

Congress of the United States

October 29, 2021

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
CEO
Facebook
1601 Willow Rd.
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We write with significant concerns related to Facebook’s censorship of information on your platform. These have been done from Facebook’s internal teams combatting what they consider to be “misinformation”, and also by third-party, so-called “independent fact-checkers”.

On February 8, 2021, Facebook announced it would remove “debunked claims about the coronavirus” which included claims that “COVID-19 is man-made or manufactured.”¹ However, the origins of COVID-19 remain unknown and no theory to date has been “debunked.” In fact, there has long been known evidence that suggests COVID-19 may have leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, despite the original, mainstream media-accepted story of its zoonotic origins. While the investigation into the origins of COVID-19 is ongoing, the disappearance of numerous scientists from the Wuhan lab, statements from numerous U.S. government officials citing intelligence sources, and a range of diverse opinions from the scientific community have long made the lab origination theory a viable and highly plausible answer to how this outbreak first began.²

Unfortunately, your company, through its internal policies and use of “independent fact-checkers,” chose to not only ignore that plentiful evidence but quash any debate of it. Choosing to silence dissent and succumb to a dangerous form of “group-think” that stifles one of the most important global public policy debates calls into question the legitimacy of your “independent fact-checkers.” Additionally, there’s reason to believe that many in the media were politically motivated (either consciously or not) to outright dismiss the lab origin theory simply because it was supported by the Trump Administration, and that bias seems to have influenced the decision-making of both your company and the “fact-checkers” you employ.³

This is not how science is supposed to work. Science is based on robust debate, which includes free flows of information that is questioned and tested so that truth can prevail as

¹ Guy Rosen, VP Integrity, An Update on Our Work to Keep People Informed and Limit Misinformation About COVID-19, Facebook (Feb. 8, 2021), *available at* <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/04/covid-19-misinfo-update/#removing-more-false-claims>

² Fox News “New GOP Wuhan lab report discredits Facebook ‘fact checkers’ that censored COVID origin claims (May 24, 2021), *available at* <https://www.foxbusiness.com/media/coronavirus-origin-wuhan-lab-gop-report-facebook-fact-check>

³ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/fact-checking-facebooks-fact-checkers-11614987375>

information is discovered and uncovered. Politicizing that process based on a dislike of some of the people who hold certain opinions as to the truth of the facts does a tremendous disservice to the scientific process and political discourse of the nation.

Facebook should not be the arbiter of absolute truth, and neither should the fact-checkers you employ. You operate the largest public square in the world and have an enormous responsibility to protect robust debate and free speech by upholding the principle and spirit of the First Amendment. Unfortunately, it appears that you have instead stifled debate on your platform that does not fit certain mainstream narratives, as you did with the origins of COVID-19.

The “independent fact-checkers” are themselves coming under scrutiny for left-wing bias. Recent reporting has focused on the bias of “Politifact,” which has a long history of pushing liberal bias by attempting to marginalize conservative speech. The Media Research Center recently sent a letter to the “International Fact Checking Network,” demanding the removal of Politifact.⁴

Facebook’s censorship of information related to COVID origins is just one of the many examples of Facebook attempting to operate as an arbiter of truth, and many of your “independent fact-checkers” are responsible for making those decisions. Accordingly, please make arrangements for a briefing to discuss the following by no later than November 19, 2021:

1. What process does Facebook undertake to determine who qualifies as an independent fact-checker?
2. What proportion of fact-checkers are in-source versus out-sourced? Specific to the handling of the COVID origin issue, was it done by Facebook employees, and if, not what third party handled this matter?
3. What process does Facebook undertake to determine whether certain fact-checkers have conflicts of interests related to content posted on Facebook that they fact check?
4. Many of the facts we know today about the origins of COVID-19 have been known long before Facebook determined to censor related content. What specific facts did Facebook rely on for its February 8, 2021 decision?
5. Under your COVID misinformation policy, which scientists, health experts, or national security experts, did Facebook talk to prior to making the February 8, 2021 decision? For such individuals, did Facebook review whether they had any conflict of interest on COVID-19 origins? If so, please itemize such conflicts of interest. If not, why not?
6. Some have suggested Facebook reversed its earlier erroneous decision to censor content suggesting COVID-19 may have leaked from a lab solely because Democrat

⁴ <https://cnsnews.com/blog/staff/free-speech-alliance-conservative-leaders-implore-fact-checking-network-remove>

politicians now view it as plausible. In light of that, what specific facts changed that Facebook relied on to reverse its decision?

7. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki announced in July that the White House was “flagging problematic posts for Facebook...” What specific “flags” has the White House provided to Facebook? What has Facebook done with that information?
8. The White House Press Secretary also stated that the White House has a “robust enforcement strategy” across social media platforms. Has Facebook worked with other social media platforms on the White House’s “enforcement strategy”?

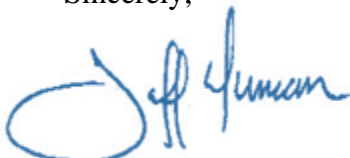
The COVID origin issue is just one of the many issues where your corporate penchant for attempting to operate as the arbiters of truth presents problems. The latest, cutting edge research into COVID and the efficacy or side effects of the vaccines are just some of the points being squelched or labeled on your site, to the potential detriment of your users, doing harm to the quality of community conversations on these issues.

All of this has done serious damage to your credibility. In a speech on the importance of free expression to Georgetown University in October of 2019, you said the following: “...giving everyone a voice empowers the powerless and pushes society to be better over time... most progress in our lives come from regular people having more of a voice... The most repressive societies have always restricted speech the most... Pulling back on free expression wasn’t the answer and, in fact, it often ended up hurting the minority views we seek to protect...I don’t think it’s right for a private company to censor politicians or the news in a democracy.”

You were right – it isn’t right for a private company to censor politicians or the news – anywhere, not just in a Republic like ours. Yet now, through the use of these “independent fact-checkers”, that is exactly what you’re doing. In so doing, you have become the very repressive society you warned of, two short years ago, marginalizing the voices of powerless and harming the minority views you used to seek to protect. In the process, your credibility on the issue of free speech is in shambles. Please reconsider your desire to be the arbiters of truth, especially as it relates to the use of “independent fact-checkers.”

We eagerly await your response.

Sincerely,



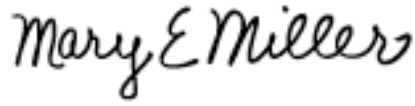
Jeff Duncan
Member of Congress



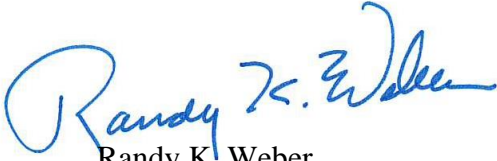
Bill Posey
Member of Congress



Ralph Norman
Member of Congress



Mary E. Miller
Member of Congress



Randy K. Weber
Member of Congress



Lauren Boebert
Member of Congress



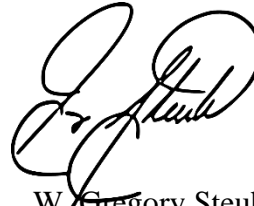
Ted Budd
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Jody Hice
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Andy Biggs
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