

**PROTECTING KIDS ONLINE: TESTIMONY FROM  
A FACEBOOK WHISTLEBLOWER**

---

---

**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION,  
PRODUCT SAFETY, AND DATA SECURITY

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE,  
SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION  
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

—————  
OCTOBER 5, 2021  
—————

Printed for the use of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation



Available online: <http://www.govinfo.gov>

—————  
U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

MARIA CANTWELL, Washington, *Chair*

AMY KLOBUCHAR, Minnesota	ROGER WICKER, Mississippi, <i>Ranking</i>
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, Connecticut	JOHN THUNE, South Dakota
BRIAN SCHATZ, Hawaii	ROY BLUNT, Missouri
EDWARD MARKEY, Massachusetts	TED CRUZ, Texas
GARY PETERS, Michigan	DEB FISCHER, Nebraska
TAMMY BALDWIN, Wisconsin	JERRY MORAN, Kansas
TAMMY DUCKWORTH, Illinois	DAN SULLIVAN, Alaska
JON TESTER, Montana	MARSHA BLACKBURN, Tennessee
KYRSTEN SINEMA, Arizona	TODD YOUNG, Indiana
JACKY ROSEN, Nevada	MIKE LEE, Utah
BEN RAY LUJÁN, New Mexico	RON JOHNSON, Wisconsin
JOHN HICKENLOOPER, Colorado	SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, West Virginia
RAPHAEL WARNOCK, Georgia	RICK SCOTT, Florida
	CYNTHIA LUMMIS, Wyoming

MELISSA PORTER, *Deputy Staff Director*

GEORGE GREENWELL, *Policy Coordinator and Security Manager*

JOHN KEAST, *Republican Staff Director*

CRYSTAL TULLY, *Republican Deputy Staff Director*

STEVEN WALL, *General Counsel*

---

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION, PRODUCT SAFETY,  
AND DATA SECURITY

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, Connecticut, <i>Chair</i>	MARSHA BLACKBURN, Tennessee, <i>Ranking</i>
AMY KLOBUCHAR, Minnesota	JOHN THUNE, South Dakota
BRIAN SCHATZ, Hawaii	ROY BLUNT, Missouri
EDWARD MARKEY, Massachusetts	JERRY MORAN, Kansas
TAMMY BALDWIN, Wisconsin	MIKE LEE, Utah
BEN RAY LUJÁN, New Mexico	TODD YOUNG, Indiana

## CONTENTS

	Page
Hearing held on October 5, 2021 .....	1
Statement of Senator Blumenthal .....	1
Letter dated October 4, 2021 to Chairman Blumenthal and Ranking Member Blackburn from the National Association of Attorneys General ..	4
Prepared statement from Noor Soomro, National Youth Advisory Board Member, Sandy Hook Promise Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) Promise Club .....	9
Letter dated October 6, 2021 to Hon. Richard Blumenthal and Hon. Marsha Blackburn from Philip J. Weiser, Colorado Attorney General and Josh Shapiro, Pennsylvania Attorney General .....	12
Statement of Senator Blackburn .....	14
Statement of Senator Wicker .....	16
Statement of Senator Klobuchar .....	25
Statement of Senator Thune .....	27
Statement of Senator Schatz .....	29
Statement of Senator Moran .....	31
Statement of Senator Cantwell .....	33
Statement of Senator Lee .....	36
Statement of Senator Markey .....	38
Statement of Senator Luján .....	40
Statement of Senator Hickenlooper .....	43
Statement of Senator Cruz .....	44
Statement of Senator Lummis .....	47
Statement of Senator Sullivan .....	48
Statement of Senator Scott .....	51
Statement of Senator Young .....	56
WITNESSES	
Frances Haugen, Facebook Whistleblower .....	17
Prepared statement .....	19
APPENDIX	
Response to written questions submitted to Frances Haugen by:	
Hon. Roy Blunt .....	67
Hon. John Thune .....	68
Hon. Marsha Blackburn .....	72



# **PROTECTING KIDS ONLINE: TESTIMONY FROM A FACEBOOK WHISTLEBLOWER**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2021**

U.S. SENATE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION, PRODUCT  
SAFETY, AND DATA SECURITY,  
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION,  
*Washington, DC.*

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m. in room SR-253, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Richard Blumenthal, Chairman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Blumenthal [presiding], Cantwell, Klobuchar, Schatz, Markey, Luján, Hickenlooper, Blackburn, Wicker, Thune, Cruz, Moran, Sullivan, Young, Lee, Scott, and Lummis.

## **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, U.S. SENATOR FROM CONNECTICUT**

Senator BLUMENTHAL. The meeting and hearing of the Subcommittee on Consumer Protection of the Commerce Committee will come to order.

I am very pleased to welcome my colleagues and I want to thank Ranking Member Senator Blackburn for her cooperation and collaboration. We have been working very closely, and the Ranking Member who is here, Senator Wicker, as well as our Chairwoman, Maria Cantwell, Senator Cantwell, I am sure, will be here shortly.

Most importantly, I would like to thank our witness, Frances Haugen, for being here and the two counsel who are representing her today and I want to give you my heartfelt gratitude for your courage and strength in coming forward as you have done, standing up to one of the most powerful implacable corporate giants in the history of the world without any exaggeration.

You have a compelling credible voice which we have heard already, but you are not here alone. You are armed with documents and evidence and you speak volumes as they do about how Facebook has put profits ahead of people.

Among other revelations, the information that you have provided to Congress is powerful proof that Facebook knew its products were harming teenagers. Facebook exploited teens using powerful algorithms that amplified their insecurities and abuses through what it found was an addict's narrative.

There is a question, which I hope you will discuss, as to whether there is such a thing as a safe algorithm. Facebook sought teens creating secret accounts that are often hidden from their parents as unique value proposition, in their words, a "unique value propo-

sition,” a way to drive up numbers for advertisers and shareholders at the expense of safety, and it doubled down on targeting children, pushing products on pre-teens, not just teens but pre-teens, that it knows are harmful to our kids’ mental health and well-being.

Instead of telling parents Facebook concealed the facts. It sought to stonewall and block this information from becoming public, including to this committee when Senator Blackburn and I specifically asked the company, and still even now, as of just last Thursday when a Facebook witness came before this committee, it has refused disclosure or even to tell us when it might decide whether to disclose additional documents, and they have continued their tactics even after they knew the destruction it caused.

It is not just that they made money from these practices but they continued to profit from them. Their profit was more important than the pain that they caused.

Last Thursday the message from Ms. Antigone Davis, Facebook’s Global Head of Safety, was simple, “This research is not a bombshell,” and she repeated the line, “not a bombshell.”

Well, this research is the very definition of a bombshell. Facebook and Big Tech are facing a big debacle moment, a moment of reckoning. The parallel is striking. I sued Big Tobacco as Connecticut’s Attorney General. I helped to lead the states in that legal action and I remember very, very well the moment in the course of our litigation when we learned of those files that showed not only that Big Tobacco knew that its product caused cancer but that they had done the research, they concealed the files, and now we knew and the world knew, and Big Tech now faces that Big Tobacco jaw-dropping moment of truth.

It is documented proof that Facebook knows its products can be addictive and toxic to children and it is not just that they made money. Again, it is that they valued their profit more than the pain that they caused to children and their families.

The damage to self-interest and self-worth inflicted by Facebook today will haunt a generation. Feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, rejection, and self-hatred will impact this generation for years to come. Our children are the ones who are victims. Teens today looking at themselves in the mirror feel doubt and insecurity.

Mark Zuckerberg ought to be looking at himself in the mirror today and yet rather than taking responsibility and showing leadership, Mr. Zuckerberg is going sailing.

His new *modus operandi*: no apologies, no admission, no action, nothing to see here. Mark Zuckerberg, you need to come before this committee. You need to explain to Frances Haugen, to us, to the world, and to the parents of America what you are doing and why you did it.

Instagram’s business model is pretty straightforward, more eyeballs, more dollars. Everything Facebook does is to add more users and keep them on their apps for longer. In order to hook us, Instagram uses our private information to precisely target us with content and recommendations, assessing that what will provoke a reaction will keep us scrolling.

Far too often these recommendations encourage our most destructive and dangerous behaviors. As we showed on Thursday, we created a fake account, my office and I did as a team, interested

in extreme dieting and eating disorders. Instagram latched on to that teenager's initial insecurities. It then pushed more content and recommendations glorifying eating disorders.

That's how Instagram's algorithms can push teens into darker and darker places. Facebook's own researchers called it Instagram's "perfect storm," exacerbating downward spirals. Facebook, as you have put it, Ms. Haugen, so powerfully, maximizes profits and ignores pain.

Facebook's failure to acknowledge and to act makes it morally bankrupt. Again and again, Facebook rejected reforms recommended by its own researchers. Last week Ms. Davis said, "We're looking at" no specific plans, no commitments, only vague platitudes.

These documents that you have revealed provided this company with a blueprint for providing specific recommendations that could have made Facebook and Instagram safe for the company repeatedly ignored those recommendations from its own researchers that would have made Facebook and Instagram safer. Facebook researchers have suggested changing their recommendations to stop promoting accounts known to encourage dangerous body comparison.

Instead of making meaningful changes, Facebook simply pays lip service and if they won't act and if Big Tech won't act, Congress has to intervene. Privacy protection is long overdue.

Senator Markey and I have introduced The KIDS Act, which would ban addictive tactics that Facebook uses to exploit children. Parents deserve better tools to protect their children.

I am also a firm supporter of reforming Section 230. We should consider narrowing the sweeping immunity when platforms' algorithms amplify illegal conduct. You've commented on this in your testimony and perhaps you'll expand on it.

We have also heard compelling recommendations about requiring disclosures of research and independent reviews of these platforms' algorithms and I plan to pursue these ideas.

The Securities and Exchange Commission should investigate your contentions and claims, Ms. Haugen, and so should the Federal Trade Commission. Facebook appears to have misled the public and investors and if that's correct, it ought to face real penalties as a result of that misleading and deceptive misrepresentation.

I want to thank all my colleagues who are here today because what we have is a bipartisan congressional roadmap for reform that will safeguard and protect children from Big Tech. That will be a focus of our subcommittee moving forward, and it will continue to be bipartisan.

And finally, I'll just end on this note. In the past weeks and days, parents have contacted me with their stories, heartbreaking and spine-chilling stories about children pushed into eating disorders, bullying online, self-injury of the most disturbing kind, and sometimes even taking their lives because of social media.

Parents are holding Facebook accountable because of your bravery, Ms. Haugen, and we need to hold accountable Facebook and all Big Tech, as well.

Again, my thanks to you. I am going to enter into the record a letter from 52 State Attorneys General and from two members of

the Youth Advisory Board of Sandy Hook Promise, as long as there's no objection.

[The information referred to follows:]



PRESIDENT  
**Karl A. Racine**  
District of Columbia  
Attorney General

PRESIDENT-ELECT  
**Tom Miller**  
Iowa  
Attorney General

VICE PRESIDENT  
**Josh Stein**  
North Carolina  
Attorney General

IMMEDIATE PAST  
PRESIDENT  
**Jeff Landry**  
Louisiana  
Attorney General

**Chris Toth**  
Executive Director

1850 M Street NW  
12th Floor  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 326-6000  
[www.naag.org](http://www.naag.org)

October 4, 2021

United States Senate  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and  
Data Security  
Russell Senate Office Building, 254  
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: "Protecting Kids Online: Facebook, Instagram, and Mental  
Health Harms"

Dear Chairman Blumenthal and Ranking Member Blackburn:

The undersigned state Attorneys General write to express our strong support for the hearings being conducted by the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation's Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security regarding "Protecting Kids Online: Facebook, Instagram, and Mental Health Harms." As enforcers of our jurisdictions' consumer protection laws, we find it deeply troubling that Facebook and other social media platforms seek to increase user engagement by conscripting our nation's youth despite known harms to children and adolescents.

We are incensed by recent reports in the Wall Street Journal ("WSJ") and other media outlets, which, if accurate, detail how Facebook has designed its algorithms to attract greater youth engagement. Perhaps more disturbing is the fact that Facebook is doing all of this knowing its own internal studies show the resulting harm – increased mental distress, bullying, contemplation of suicide, and other self-harm – on a significant number of children, with a particularly negative impact on young girls. And Facebook is not alone. WSJ also described how TikTok allows its algorithms to direct young users to pornographic websites depicting violence against women. We are already on



record calling for Facebook to stop (not suspend) its plans to establish an Instagram platform for young children. The WSJ reports only substantiate that position and frankly, call for further efforts.

Facebook and other social media platforms understand that their business models necessitate increasing the amount of time that kids engage with their platforms to maximize monetization. More engagement by the user equals more data to leverage for advertising, which equals greater profit. This prompts social media companies to design their algorithms to psychologically manipulate young users into a state of addiction to their cell phone screens. Parents and children seeking a sense of balance and well-being are forced to combat these sophisticated methods seemingly alone. This is simply not a fair fight. When our young people's health becomes mere collateral damage of greater profits for social media companies, it is time for the government to intervene. These hearings are an important start.

We are confident that your hearings will uncover critical information about the business practices that social media companies are using to gain the attention of more young people on their platforms. The matter is urgent. Both the current and future well-being of our nation's youth is at stake. We cannot cede such an important interest to the bottom line of social media companies.

Sincerely,



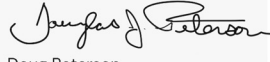
Rob Bonta  
California Attorney General



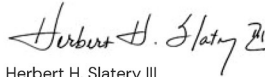
Ashley Moody  
Florida Attorney General



Maura Healey  
Massachusetts Attorney General



Doug Peterson  
Nebraska Attorney General



Herbert H. Slatery III  
Tennessee Attorney General



T.J. Donovan  
Vermont Attorney General



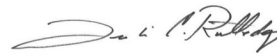
Steve Marshall  
Alabama Attorney General



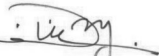
Treg R. Taylor  
Alaska Attorney General



Mark Brnovich  
Arizona Attorney General



Leslie Rutledge  
Arkansas Attorney General



William Tong  
Connecticut Attorney General



Kathleen Jennings  
Delaware Attorney General



Karl A. Racine  
District of Columbia Attorney General



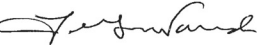
Christopher M. Carr  
Georgia Attorney General



Leevin Taitano Camacho  
Guam Attorney General



Clare E. Connors  
Hawaii Attorney General



Lawrence Wasden  
Idaho Attorney General



Kwame Raoul  
Illinois Attorney General



Todd Rokita  
Indiana Attorney General



Tom Miller  
Iowa Attorney General



Derek Schmidt  
Kansas Attorney General



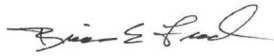
Daniel Cameron  
Kentucky Attorney General



Jeff Landry  
Louisiana Attorney General



Aaron M. Frey  
Maine Attorney General



Brian Frosh  
Maryland Attorney General



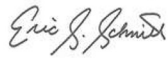
Dana Nessel  
Michigan Attorney General



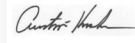
Keith Ellison  
Minnesota Attorney General



Lynn Fitch  
Mississippi Attorney General



Eric S. Schmitt  
Missouri Attorney General



Austin Knudsen  
Montana Attorney General



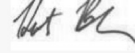
Aaron D. Ford  
Nevada Attorney General



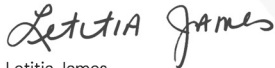
John M. Formella  
New Hampshire Attorney General



Andrew Bruck  
Acting New Jersey Attorney General



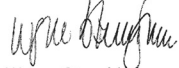
Hector Balderas  
New Mexico Attorney General



Letitia James  
New York Attorney General



Josh Stein  
North Carolina Attorney General



Wayne Stenehjem  
North Dakota Attorney General



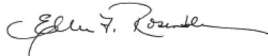
Edward Manibusan  
Northern Mariana Islands Attorney General



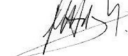
Dave Yost  
Ohio Attorney General



John O'Connor  
Oklahoma Attorney General



Ellen F. Rosenblum  
Oregon Attorney General



Domingo Emanuelli-Hernández  
Puerto Rico Attorney General



Peter F. Neronha  
Rhode Island Attorney General



Alan Wilson  
South Carolina Attorney General



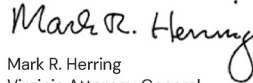
Jason R. Ravnsborg  
South Dakota Attorney General



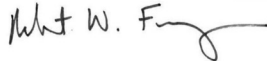
Ken Paxton  
Texas Attorney General



Sean D. Reyes  
Utah Attorney General



Mark R. Herring  
Virginia Attorney General



Robert W. Ferguson  
Washington Attorney General



Patrick Morrissey  
West Virginia Attorney General



Joshua L. Kaul  
Wisconsin Attorney General



Bridget Hill  
Wyoming Attorney General



**TESTIMONY OF**

**Noor Soomro,**  
**National Youth Advisory Board Member, Sandy Hook Promise Students Against Violence**  
**Everywhere (SAVE) Promise Club**

**HEARING ON October 5, 2021**

**“Protecting Kids Online”**

**Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security Hearing**  
**United States Senate**

Good morning, and thank you to Subcommittee Chair Blumenthal, Ranking Member Blackburn, and all the members of the Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security for your consideration of this statement.

My name is Noor Soomro, and I am a 17-year-old senior at Lawrence E. Elkins High School in Missouri City, Texas. I am in my first year serving as one of only 13 youth advisory board members on Sandy Hook Promise’s Students Against Violence Everywhere, also known as SAVE, Promise Clubs. SAVE Promise Clubs were formed in 1989 after the death of a 17-year-old named Alex Orange who died from gun violence. Today there are over 3,500 Clubs across the nation in all 50 states.

The SAVE Promise Club in my community is a student led organization that encourages young people to take charge in keeping their friends, school, and communities safe, through the implementation of school-wide activities that promote diversity and inclusion. Through SAVE, we are empowered to protect our friends, schools, and communities from all forms of violence, including suicide. We do this by promoting student mental health and wellness, including training students to recognize warning signs of violence and how to seek help.

For example, Elkins High School recently participated in Start with Hello Week, where we had school-wide participation in our activities. This included wearing name tags for students to demonstrate their willingness to be open and make new friends to ensure that every student received a kind word through peer interaction. We also placed conversation starters at lunch in an effort to reduce social isolation and



withdrawal by ensuring that students could effortlessly start a conversation without the fear of rejection. Additionally, we left encouraging messages and welcoming words on the sidewalks in order to foster a community of kindness and compassion within the student body by reassuring all students to that know they are welcome.

As a student, I know that mental health and well-being are more important now than ever before. Since 2010, suicide has been the second-leading cause of death for young Americans ages 10-24. Particularly disturbing is the number of suicides of young kids aged 10-14, which has nearly tripled since 2007.<sup>1</sup> From 2007 to 2015, the number of children and teens visiting the emergency room for suicide-related injuries doubled.<sup>2</sup> In 2017, 517 Americans aged 10-14 and 6,252 aged 15-24 died by suicide.<sup>3</sup> A study by Trust for America's Health and Well Being Trust published in October 2019 found that suicide rates for people ages 12-19 increased by 87% from 2007 to 2017.<sup>4</sup>

COVID-19 has only exacerbated our mental health and suicide crisis. Mental Health America's 2021 State of Mental Health Report showed kids ages 11-17 who accessed the screening were more likely than any other age group to score for moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety and depression, and 77,470 youth reported experiencing frequent suicidal ideations, with over one third identifying as LGBTQ+.<sup>5</sup>

Students spend an increasing amount of time interacting with each other in the world of social media. Even during our recent Start with Hello week, social media was one of the big ways we shared our successes and spread positivity.

We know that social media has an incredible power over youth today. It is readily available, and an increasing amount of students choose to spend a considerable amount of their time scrolling through apps or watching videos. Social media has the power to increase awareness regarding social issues and uniting large groups of people, but it also perpetuates unrealistic standards onto people our age and younger. Every aspect of social media is glamorized and intended for its audience to fall into its trap of

<sup>1</sup> Ten Leading Causes of Death and Injury Charts, Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/LeadingCauses.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ashley Welch, ER visits for suicidal thoughts/attempts doubled among youth in recent years, study finds, CBS News, April 9, 2019. Available at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/er-visits-for-suicidal-thoughts-attempts-doubled-among-youths-in-recent-years-studyfinds/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid (1)

<sup>4</sup> Olson, G., De Biasi, A., Ilakkuvan, V., & Auerbach, J. (2019). Addressing a Crisis: Cross-Sector Strategies to Prevent Adolescent Substance Use and Suicide. Available at [https://www.fda.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FAH2019TeensPainRptFINAL10\\_24.pdf](https://www.fda.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FAH2019TeensPainRptFINAL10_24.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Mental Health America. (2021). *The State Of Mental Health In America*. MHA. Retrieved from <https://mhanational.org/get-involved/download-2021-state-mental-health-america-report>



perfectionism, while it only increases one's need for validation from strangers and peers. In today's society, social media use has only increased due to lack of face-to-face interaction during quarantine which subsequently increased youth engagement. Often, social media takes a mental toll on youth, as it actively promotes the comparison between others, increasing the gap between reality and idea of reality created by social media.

As young people, we already know the ups and downs of social media. We see the good and the bad amongst our classmates every day. That's why we talk about solutions to protect us from the negative impacts of social media. We should encourage adults and students to communicate openly about the time spent on social media apps and website. We should talk about how to identify the difference between posed photos and actual reality. It's important that young people know their boundaries and are not actively spending substantial parts of their day on social media. We do all of this to protect ourselves, trusting and assuming that adults are doing the same for us.

We trust adults and social media companies to do the right thing to protect us, so it's difficult to imagine that they knowingly acted in a way that hurts us. Students already bear the burden of looking out for each other and taking care of one another. Social media companies and responsible adults should help us stay safe, not actively endanger us.

The effects of COVID on our mental health are real. Social Media has a powerful role to play in supporting our social connections and mental wellbeing and should be careful not to exacerbate or cause mental harm to young people. Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

October 6, 2021

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection,  
Product Safety, and Data Security  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection,  
Product Safety, and Data Security  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blumenthal and Ranking Member Blackburn:

We write to express our appreciation for the recent hearings held by the Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security (“Subcommittee”) regarding social media and risks to children. The Subcommittee’s work on protecting kids from online risks has provided important information regarding the hazards posed by social media to our nation’s youth.

The issue of social media risks to children, as revealed in the recent investigative reporting, is further compounded by reports that social media platforms were used to coordinate attacks on our democracy and exacerbate social divisions. These developments underscore the need for further unbiased research and the creation of a comprehensive framework to oversee and police the conduct of major social media companies.

It is clear—from your hearings, academic research, and recent investigative reporting—that social media companies and their platforms have a unique ability to harm both the mental health of youth and the stability of our democratic institutions. I was particularly alarmed at recent reports in *The Wall Street Journal*, as well as information discussed in your hearing, that recounted how Facebook designed its algorithms to attract greater youth engagement at the expense of mental health and wellness of young people, disregarding known and foreseeable harms. Similarly, the *60 Minutes* and *New York Times* reporting that Facebook had notice of how its platform was used to organize and encourage individuals to storm the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 and failed to take action was alarming.

These emerging risks require new solutions from Congress. As such, we encourage the Subcommittee and the Congress to evaluate the following priorities in working to establish responsible oversight of social media platforms.

First, we need to develop a comprehensive and unbiased understanding of the problems and hazards caused by social media platforms. Research by social media companies themselves, subject to no oversight or transparency, provides little or no assurance that social media products are designed and managed in a way that protects children and safeguards our democracy.

One critical question that merits further research and discussion is how algorithms are used. Notably, algorithms used by social media companies can lead to foreseeable harm—such as when algorithms connect searches on weight loss with videos promoting self-harm. Better



understanding how algorithms operate and impact people is an important public policy priority.

Second, Congress should enact a regulatory framework to address risks posed by social media. Such regulation would be consistent with prior congressional acts that protect citizens and consumers. Consider, for example, that television political advertisements are subject to comprehensive regulatory oversight, including strong transparency requirements. Yet no such oversight exists over major Internet advertising platforms like Facebook and Google. This issue warrants Congressional action. In the area of protecting children, any governmental oversight involving the regulation of speech must withstand constitutional scrutiny. But there are options—such as ensuring age verification and parental consent—that are both responsible and constitutionally sound.

The importance of overseeing the actions of social media companies is not limited to the impact on kids and our democracy. The protection of consumer privacy and competition in the online world also would benefit from a regulatory agency with the necessary authority to take appropriate action, as would strengthening tools to limit disinformation and combat online hate speech that is fueling an increase in hate crimes nationwide. To be sure, state enforcers have undertaken and are taking important actions in these areas, but optimal and effective oversight will ultimately require a federal regulatory framework and federal action. Such a framework should embrace state authority as a partner in any such regime—as the federal antitrust laws do, for example—and not preempt or undermine the States' traditional police powers to protect our citizenry.

Thank you for your considering these concepts and working to address these important issues. Protecting our children, our democracy, our privacy, and competition are critical priorities and are worthy of congressional action. We are committed to this issue and are willing and able to assist the Subcommittee in such an effort.

Sincerely,



PHILIP J. WEISER  
*Colorado Attorney General*  
 1300 Broadway, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor  
 Denver, CO 80203  
 (720) 508-6000



JOSH SHAPIRO  
*Pennsylvania Attorney General*  
 Strawberry Square  
 Harrisburg, PA 17120  
 (717) 787-3391

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And I will now turn to the Ranking Member Senator Blackburn.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MARSHA BLACKBURN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM TENNESSEE**

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for entering that letter in the record that we have from our States Attorneys General.

Good morning to everyone. It is nice to see people in this hearing room and to be here for the hearing today. Ms. Haugen, we thank you for your appearance before us today and for giving the opportunity, not only for Congress, but for the American people to hear from you in this setting and we appreciate that.

Mr. Chairman, I think also thanks to you and your staff that have worked with our team to make certain that we had this hearing and this opportunity today so that we can get more insight into what Facebook is actually doing as they invade the privacy not only of adults but of children and look at the ways that they are in violation of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, which is Federal law, and looking at how they are evading that law and working around it.

As the Chairman said, privacy and online privacy, passing a Federal privacy standard has been long in the works. I filed my first privacy bill when I was in the House back in 2012 and I think that it will be this Congress and this subcommittee that is going to lead the way to online privacy, data security, Section 230 reforms, and, of course, Senator Klobuchar always wants to talk about antitrust, and I have to give a nod. Senator Markey is down there.

When we were in the House, we were probably two of the only ones who were talking about the need to have a Federal privacy standard. Now as the Chairman mentioned, last week we heard from Ms. Davis, who heads Global Safety for Facebook, and it was surprising to us that what she tried to do was to minimize the information that was in these documents, to minimize the research and to minimize the knowledge that Facebook had.

At one point I even reminded her the research was not third party research, the research was theirs, Facebook's internal research. So they knew what they were doing. They knew where the violations were, and they know they are guilty. They know this. Their research tells them this.

Last week in advance of our hearing, Facebook released two studies and said that the *Wall Street Journal* was all wrong, that they had just gotten it wrong, as if the *Wall Street Journal* did not know how to read these documents and how to work through this research.

Having seen the data that you've presented and the other studies that Facebook did not publicly share, I feel pretty confident that it's Facebook who has done the misrepresenting to this committee.

Here are some of the numbers that Facebook chose not to share and, Mr. Chairman, I think it's important that we look at these as we talk about the setting for this hearing, what we learned last week, what you and I've been learning over the past 3 years about Big Tech and Facebook, and here you go.

Sixty-six percent of teen girls on Instagram and 40 percent of teen boys experience negative social comparisons. This is Facebook's research. Fifty-two percent of teen girls who experience negative social comparison on Instagram said it was caused by images related to beauty. Social comparison is worse on Instagram because it is perceived as real life but based on celebrity standards. Social comparison mimics the grief cycle and includes a downward emotional spiral encompassing the range of emotions, from jealousy to self-proclaimed body dysmorphia.

Facebook addiction, which Facebook conveniently calls problematic use, is most severe in teens peaking at age 14.

Here's what else we know. Facebook is not interested in making significant changes to improve kids' safety on their platforms, at least not when that would result in losing eyeballs on posts or decreasing their ad revenues. In fact, Facebook is running sacred as they know that in their own words, young adults are less active and less engaged on Facebook and that they are running out of teens to add to Instagram.

So teens are looking at other platforms, like TikTok, and Facebook is only making those changes that add to its user numbers and ultimately its profits. Follow the money.

So what are these changes? Allowing users to create multiple accounts that Facebook does not delete and encouraging teens to create second accounts they can hide from their parents. They are also studying younger and younger children, as young as eight, so that they can market to them, and while Ms. Davis says that kids below 13 are not allowed on Facebook or Instagram, we know that they are because she told us that they recently had deleted 600,000 accounts from children under age 13.

So how do you get that many underage accounts if you aren't turning a blind eye to them in the first place? And then in order to try to clean it up, you go to delete it and then you say, oh, by the way, we just in the last month deleted 600,000 underage accounts.

And speaking of turning a blind eye, Facebook turns a blind eye to user privacy. News broke yesterday that the private data of over 1.5 billion, that's right, 1.5 billion Facebook users are being sold on a hacking forum. That's its biggest data breach to date.

Examples like this underscore my strong concerns about Facebook collecting the data of kids and teens and what they are doing with it.

Facebook also turns a blind eye toward blatant human exploitation taking place on its platform, trafficking, forced labor, cartels, the worst possible things one can imagine.

Big Tech companies have gotten away with abusing consumers for too long. It is clear that Facebook prioritizes profit over the well-being of children and all users.

So as a mother and a grandmother, this is an issue that is of particular concern to me. So we thank you for being here today, Ms. Haugen, and we look forward to getting to the truth about what Facebook is doing with users' data and how they are abusing their privacy and how they show a lack of respect for the individuals that are on their network. We look forward to the testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Senator Blackburn.  
I don't know whether Ranking Member Wicker would like to make a statement.

**STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER WICKER,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM MISSISSIPPI**

Senator WICKER. If you don't mind, thank you, Chairman Blumenthal, and I will just take a moment or two, and I do appreciate being able to speak as Ranking Member of the Full Committee.

Ms. Haugen, this is a subcommittee hearing. You see some vacant seats. This is pretty good attendance for a subcommittee. There are also a lot of things going on. So people will be coming and going, but I'm willing to predict that this will have almost 100 percent attendance by members of the Subcommittee because of the importance of this subject matter.

So thanks for coming forward to share concerns about Facebook's business practices, particularly with respect to children and teens, and, of course, that is the main topic of the title of our hearing today, Protecting Kids Online.

The recent revelations about Facebook's mental health effects on children and its plan to target younger audiences are indeed disturbing, and I think you're going to see a lot of bipartisan concern about this today and in future hearings.

They show how urgent it is for Congress to act against powerful tech companies on behalf of children and the broader public, and I say powerful tech companies. They are possessive of immense, immense power. Their product is addictive and people on both sides of this dais are concerned about this.

I talked to an opinion-maker just down the hall a few moments before this hearing and this person said, "The tech gods have been demystified now," and I think this hearing today, Mr. Chair, is a part of the process of demystifying Big Tech.

The children of America are hooked on their product. It is often destructive and harmful and there is a cynical knowledge on behalf of the leadership of these Big Tech companies that that is true.

Ms. Haugen, I hope you will have a chance to talk about your work experience at Facebook and perhaps compare it to other social media companies.

I also look forward to hearing your thoughts on how this committee and how this Congress can ensure greater accountability and transparency, especially with regard to children.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ms. Haugen, for being here today.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Senator Wicker.

Our witness this morning is Frances Haugen. She was the Lead Product Manager on Facebook's Civic Misinformation Team. She holds a degree in Electrical and Computer Engineering from Olin College and an MBA from Harvard.

She made the courageous decision, as all of us here and many others around the world know, to leave Facebook and reveal the terrible truths about the company. She learned during her tenure there and I think we are all in agreement here in expressing our gratitude and our admiration for your bravery in coming forward.

Thank you, Ms. Haugen. Please proceed.

**STATEMENT OF FRANCES HAUGEN, FACEBOOK  
WHISTLEBLOWER**

Ms. HAUGEN. Good afternoon, Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Blackburn, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you.

My name is Frances Haugen. I used to work at Facebook. I joined Facebook because I think Facebook has the potential to bring out the best in us, but I'm here today because I believe Facebook's products harm children, stoke division, and weaken our democracy.

The company's leadership knows how to make Facebook and Instagram safer but won't make the necessary changes because they have put their astronomical profits before people.

Congressional action is needed. They won't solve this crisis without your help.

Yesterday we saw Facebook get taken off the internet. I don't know why it went down, but I know that for more than 5 hours Facebook wasn't used to deepen divides, destabilize democracies, and make young girls and women feel bad about their bodies.

It also means that millions of small businesses weren't able to reach potential customers and countless photos of new babies weren't joyously celebrated by family and friends around the world.

I believe in the potential of Facebook. We can have social media we enjoy, that connects us without tearing apart our democracy, putting our children in danger, and sowing ethnic violence around the world. We can do better.

I have worked as a product manager at large tech companies since 2006, including Google, Pinterest, Yelp, and Facebook. My job has largely focused on algorithmic products like Google+ Search and recommendation systems like the one that powers the Facebook News Feed.

Having worked on four different types of social networks, I understand how complex and nuanced these problems are. However, the choices being made inside of Facebook are disastrous for our children, for our public safety, for our privacy, and for our democracy, and that is why we must demand Facebook make changes.

During my time at Facebook, first working as the Lead Product Manager for Civic Misinformation and later on Counterespionage, I saw Facebook repeatedly encounter conflicts between its own profits and our safety. Facebook consistently resolved these conflicts in favor of its own profits. The result has been more division, more harm, more lies, more threats, and more combat. In some cases, this dangerous online talk has led to actual violence that harms and even kills people.

This is not simply a matter of certain social media users being angry or unstable or that one side being radicalized against the other. It is about Facebook choosing to grow at all costs, becoming an almost trillion dollar company by buying its profits with our safety.

During my time at Facebook, I came to realize the devastating truth. Almost no one outside of Facebook knows what happens inside of Facebook. The company intentionally hides vital informa-

tion from the public, from the U.S. Government, and from governments around the world.

The documents I have provided to Congress prove that Facebook has repeatedly misled the public about what its own research reveals about the safety of children, the efficacy of its artificial intelligence systems, and its role in spreading divisive and extreme messages.

I came forward because I believe that every human being deserves the dignity of the truth.

The severity of this crisis demands that we break out of our previous regulatory frames. Facebook wants to trick you into thinking that privacy protections or changes to Section 230 alone will be sufficient.

While important, these will not get to the core of the issue, which is that no one truly understands the destructive choices made by Facebook, except Facebook.

We can afford nothing less than full transparency. As long as Facebook is operating in the shadows, hiding its research from public scrutiny, it is unaccountable. Until the incentives change, Facebook will not change.

Left alone, Facebook will continue to make choices that go against the common good, our common good. When we realized Big Tobacco was hiding the harms it caused, the government took action. When we figured out cars were safer with seatbelts, the government took action, and when our government learned that opioids were taking lives, the government took action. I implore you to do the same here.

Today, Facebook shapes our perception of the world by choosing the information we see. Even those who don't use Facebook are impacted by the majority who do. A company with such frightening influence over so many people, over their deepest thoughts, feelings, and behavior needs real oversight.

But Facebook's closed design means it has no real oversight. Only Facebook knows how it personalizes your feed for you. At other large tech companies, like Google, any independent researcher can download from the Internet the company's search results and write papers about what they find and they do, but Facebook hides behind walls that keeps researchers and regulators from understanding the true dynamics of their system.

Facebook will tell you privacy means they can't give you data. This is not true. When tobacco companies claimed that filtered cigarettes were safer for consumers, scientists could independently invalidate these marketing messages and confirm that, in fact, they posed a greater threat to human health. The public cannot do the same with Facebook. We are given no other option than to take their marketing messages on blind faith. Not only does the company hide most of its own data, my disclosure has proved that when Facebook is directly asked questions as important as how do you impact the health and safety of our children, they choose to mislead and misdirect.

Facebook has not earned our blind faith. This inability to see into Facebook's actual systems and confirm that they work as communicated is like the Department of Transportation regulating cars but only watching them drive down the highway.

Today, no regulator has a menu of solutions for how to fix Facebook because Facebook didn't want them to know enough about what's causing the problems. Otherwise, there wouldn't have been need for a whistleblower.

How is the public supposed to assess if Facebook is resolving conflicts of interest in a way that is aligned with the public good if the public has no visibility into how Facebook operates? This must change.

Facebook wants you to believe that the problems we're talking about are unsolvable. They want you to believe in false choices. They want you to believe you must choose between a Facebook full of divisive and extreme content or losing one of the most important values our country was founded upon, free speech, that you must choose between public oversight of Facebook's choices and your personal privacy, that to be able to share fun photos of your kids with old friends, you must also be inundated with anger-driven virility. They want you to believe that this is just part of the deal.

I am here today to tell you that's not true. These problems are solvable. A safer, free speech-respecting, more enjoyable social media is possible, but there's one thing that I hope everyone takes away from these disclosures. It is that Facebook can change but it's clearly not going to do so on its own.

My fear is that without action, divisive and extremist behaviors we see today are only the beginning. What we saw in Myanmar and are now seeing in Ethiopia are only the opening chapters of a story so terrifying no one wants to read the end of it.

Congress can change the rules that Facebook plays by and stop the many harms it is now causing. We now know the truth about Facebook's destructive impact. I really appreciate the seriousness which the Members of Congress and the Securities and Exchange Commission are approaching these issues.

I came forward at great personal risk because I believe we still have time to act but we must act now. I'm asking you, our elected representatives, to act.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Haugen follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF FRANCES HAUGEN, FACEBOOK WHISTLEBLOWER

Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Blackburn, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and for your interest in confronting one of the most urgent threats to the American people, to our children and our country's well-being, as well as to people and nations across the globe.

My name is Frances Haugen. I used to work at Facebook and joined because I think Facebook has the potential to bring out the best in us. But I am here today because I believe that Facebook's products harm children, stoke division, weaken our democracy and much more. The company's leadership knows ways to make Facebook and Instagram safer and won't make the necessary changes because they have put their immense profits before people. Congressional action is needed. They cannot solve this crisis without your help.

I believe that social media has the potential to enrich our lives and our society. We can have social media we enjoy—one that brings out the best in humanity. The Internet has enabled people around the world to receive and share information and ideas in ways never conceived of before. And while the Internet has the power to connect an increasingly globalized society, without careful and responsible development, the Internet can harm as much as it helps.

I have worked as a product manager at large tech companies since 2006, including Google, Pinterest, Yelp and Facebook. My job has largely focused on algorithmic products like Google+ Search and recommendation systems like the one that powers

the Facebook News Feed. Working at four major tech companies that operate different types of social networks, I have been able to compare and contrast how each company approaches and deals with different challenges. The choices being made by Facebook's leadership are a huge problem—for children, for public safety, for democracy—that is why I came forward. And let's be clear: it doesn't have to be this way. We are here today because of deliberate choices Facebook has made.

I joined Facebook in 2019 because someone close to me was radicalized online. I felt compelled to take an active role in creating a better, less toxic Facebook. During my time at Facebook, first working as the lead product manager for Civic Misinformation and later on Counter-Espionage, I saw that Facebook repeatedly encountered conflicts between its own profits and our safety. *Facebook consistently resolved those conflicts in favor of its own profits.* The result has been a system that amplifies division, extremism, and polarization—and undermining societies around the world. In some cases, this dangerous online talk has led to actual violence that harms and even kills people. In other cases, their profit optimizing machine is generating self-harm and self-hate—especially for vulnerable groups, like teenage girls. These problems have been confirmed repeatedly by Facebook's own internal research.

This is not simply a matter of some social media users being angry or unstable. Facebook became a \$1 trillion company by *paying for its profits with our safety, including the safety of our children.* And that is unacceptable.

I believe what I did was right and necessary for the common good—but I know Facebook has infinite resources, which it could use to destroy me. I came forward because I recognized a frightening truth: almost no one outside of Facebook knows what happens inside Facebook. The company's leadership keeps vital information from the public, the U.S. government, its shareholders, and governments around the world. The documents I have provided prove that Facebook has repeatedly misled us about what its own research reveals about the safety of children, its role in spreading hateful and polarizing messages, and so much more. I appreciate the seriousness with which Members of Congress and the Securities and Exchange Commission are approaching these issues.

The severity of this crisis demands that we break out of previous regulatory frames. Tweaks to outdated privacy protections or changes to Section 230 will not be sufficient. The core of the issue is that no one can understand Facebook's destructive choices better than Facebook, because only Facebook gets to look under the hood. A critical starting point for effective regulation is transparency: full access to data for research not directed by Facebook. On this foundation, we can build sensible rules and standards to address consumer harms, illegal content, data protection, anticompetitive practices, algorithmic systems and more.

As long as Facebook is operating in the dark, it is accountable to no one. And it will continue to make choices that go against the common good. *Our common good.*

When we realized tobacco companies were hiding the harms it caused, the government took action. When we figured out cars were safer with seat belts, the government took action. And today, the government is taking action against companies that hid evidence on opioids.

I implore you to do the same here.

Right now, Facebook chooses what information billions of people see, shaping their perception of reality. Even those who don't use Facebook are impacted by the radicalization of people who do. A company with control over our deepest thoughts, feelings and behaviors needs real oversight.

*But Facebook's closed design means it has no oversight—even from its own Oversight Board, which is as blind as the public.* Only Facebook knows how it personalizes your feed for you. It hides behind walls that keep the eyes of researchers and regulators from understanding the true dynamics of the system. When the tobacco companies claimed that filtered cigarettes were safer for consumers, it was possible for scientists to independently invalidate that marketing message and confirm that in fact they posed a greater threat to human health.<sup>1</sup> But today we can't make this kind of independent assessment of Facebook. We have to just trust what Facebook says is true—and they have repeatedly proved that they do not deserve our blind faith.

This inability to see into the actual systems of Facebook and confirm that Facebook's systems work like they say is like the Department of Transportation regulating cars by watching them drive down the highway. Imagine if no regulator

<sup>1</sup>James Hamblin. "If My Friend Smokes Sometimes, Should the Cigarettes Have Filters? An honest question." *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/07/cigarette-filters/533379/>



could ride in a car, pump up its wheels, crash test a car, or *even know that seat belts could exist.*

Facebook's regulators can see some of the problems—but they are kept blind to what is causing them and thus can't craft specific solutions. They cannot even access the company's own data on product safety, much less conduct an independent audit. How is the public supposed to assess if Facebook is resolving conflicts of interest in a way that is aligned with the public good if it has no visibility and no context into how Facebook really operates?

This must change.

Facebook wants you to believe that the problems we're talking about are unsolvable. They want you to believe in false choices. They want you to believe you must choose between connecting with those you love online and your personal privacy. That in order to share fun photos of your kids with old friends, you must also be inundated with misinformation. They want you to believe that this is just part of the deal. *I am here to tell you today that's not true. These problems are solvable. A safer, more enjoyable social media is possible.* But if there is one thing that I hope everyone takes away from these disclosures it is that Facebook chooses profit over safety every day—and without action, this will continue.

Congress can change the rules Facebook plays by and stop the harm it is causing.

I came forward, at great personal risk, because I believe we still have time to act. But we must act now.

Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Ms. Haugen. Thank you for taking that personal risk and we will do anything and everything to protect and stop any retaliation against you and any legal action that the company may bring to bear or anyone else and we've made that, I think, very clear in the course of these proceedings.

I want to ask you about this idea of disclosure. You have talked about looking in effect at a car going down the road and were going to have 5-minute rounds of questions, maybe a second round if you are willing to do it.

We are here today to look under the hood and that is what we need to do more. In August, Senator Blackburn and I wrote to Mark Zuckerberg and we asked him pretty straightforward questions about how the company works and safeguards for children and teens on Instagram. Facebook dodged, ducked, sidetracked, in effect, misled us.

So I'm going to ask you a few straightforward questions to break down some of what you have said and if you can answer them yes or no that would be great.

Has Facebook's research, its own research, ever found that its platforms can have a negative effect on children and teens' mental health or well-being?

Ms. HAUGEN. Many of Facebook's internal research reports indicate that Facebook has a serious negative harm on a significant portion of teenagers and children.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And has Facebook ever offered features that it knew had a negative effect on children's and teens' mental health?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook knows that its amplification algorithms, things like engagement-based ranking on Instagram, can lead children from very innocuous topics, like healthy recipes, I think all of us could eat a little more healthy, all the way from just something innocent like healthy recipes to anorexia-promoting content over a very short period of time.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And has Facebook ever found, again in its research, that kids show signs of addiction on Instagram?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook has studied a pattern that they call “problematic use,” what we might more commonly call “addiction.” It has a very high bar for what it believes it is. It says you self-identify that you don’t have control over your usage and that it is materially harming your health, your schoolwork, or your physical health.

Five to 6 percent of 14-year-olds have the self-awareness to admit both those questions. It is likely that far more than five to 6 percent of 14-year-olds are addicted to Instagram.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Last Thursday, my colleagues and I asked Ms. Davis, who was representing Facebook, about how the decision would be made whether to pause permanently Instagram for Kids and she said, “There’s no one person who makes a decision like that. We think about that collaboratively.” It is as though she could not mention Mark Zuckerberg’s name.

Isn’t he the one who will be making this decision from your experience in the company?

Ms. HAUGEN. Mark holds a very unique role in the tech industry in that he holds over 55 percent of all the voting shares for Facebook. There are no similarly powerful companies that are as unilaterally controlled. In the end, the buck stops with Mark. There is no one currently holding Mark accountable but himself.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And Mark Zuckerberg in effect is the algorithm designer-in-chief, correct?

Ms. HAUGEN. I received an MBA from Harvard and they emphasize to us that we are responsible for the organizations that we build. Mark has built an organization that is very metrics-driven. It is intended to be flat. There is no unilateral responsibility. The metrics make the decision.

Unfortunately, that itself is a decision and in the end, if he is the CEO and the Chairman of Facebook, he is responsible for those decisions.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. The buck stops with him.

Ms. HAUGEN. The buck stops with him.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And speaking of the buck stopping, you have said that Facebook should declare moral bankruptcy. I agree.

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I think its actions and its failure to acknowledge its responsibility indicate moral bankruptcy.

Ms. HAUGEN. There is a cycle occurring inside the company where Facebook has struggled for a long time to recruit and retain the number of employees it needs to tackle the large scope of projects that it has chosen to take on.

Facebook is stuck in a cycle where it struggles to hire. That causes it to understaff projects, which causes scandals, which then makes it harder to hire. Part of why Facebook needs to come out and say we did something wrong, we made some choices that we regret is the only way we can move forward and heal Facebook is we first have to admit the truth. The way we will have reconciliation and we can move forward is by first being honest and declaring moral bankruptcy.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Being honest and acknowledging that Facebook has caused and aggravated a lot of pain simply to make more money and it has profited off spreading disinformation and

misinformation and sowing hate. Facebook's answers to Facebook's destructive impact always seems to be more Facebook. We need more Facebook, which means more pain and more money for Facebook. Would you agree?

Ms. HAUGEN. I don't think at any point Facebook set out to make a destructive platform. I think it is a challenge that Facebook has set up an organization where the parts of the organization responsible for growing and expanding the organization are separate and not regularly cross-pollinated with the parts of the company that focus on harms that the company is causing and as a result, regularly integrity actions, projects that were hard fought by the teams trying to keep us safe are undone by new growth projects that counteract those same remedies.

So I do think it is a thing of there are organizational problems that need oversight and Facebook needs help in order to move forward to a more healthy place.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And whether it is teens bullied into suicidal thoughts or the genocide of ethnic minorities in Myanmar, or fanning the flames of division within our own country or in Europe, they are ultimately responsible to the immorality of the pain that is caused.

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook needs to take responsibility for the consequences of its choices. It needs to be willing to accept small tradeoffs on profit, and I think just that act of being able to admit that it's a mixed bag is important, and I think that what we saw from Antigone last week is an example of the kind of behavior we need to support Facebook in growing out of which is instead of just focusing on all the good they do, admit they have responsibilities to also remedy the harm.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. But Mark Zuckerberg's new policy is no apologies, no admissions, no acknowledgement, nothing to see here. We are going to deflect it and go sailing.

I turn to the Ranking Member.

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your testimony.

I want to stay with Ms. Davis and some of her comments because I had asked her last week about the underage users and she had made the comment, I'm going to quote from her testimony, "If we find an account of someone who's under 13, we remove them. In the last 3 months, we removed 600,000 accounts of under 13-year-olds."

And I have to tell you, it seems to me that there's a problem if you have 600,000 accounts from children who ought not to be there in the first place.

So what did Mark Zuckerberg know about Facebook's plans to bring kids on as new users and advertise to them?

Ms. HAUGEN. There are reports within Facebook that show cohort analyses where they examine out what ages do people join Facebook and Instagram, and based on those cohort analyses, so Facebook likes to say children lie about their ages to get on to the platform.

The reality is enough kids tell the truth that you can work backward to figure out what are approximately the real ages of anyone who's on the platform. When Facebook does cohort analyses and

looks back retrospectively, it discovers things like, you know, up to 10 to 15 percent of even 10-year-olds in a given cohort may be on Facebook or Instagram.

Senator BLACKBURN. OK. So this is why Adam Mosseri, who's the CEO of Instagram, would have replied to JoJo Siwa when she said to him, "Oh, I've been on Instagram since I was eight," he said he didn't want to know that. So it would be for this reason, correct?

Ms. HAUGEN. A pattern of behavior that I saw at Facebook was that often problems were so understaffed that there was kind of an implicit discouragement from having better detection systems. So, for example, my last team at Facebook was on the Counterespionage Team within the Threat Intelligence Org, and at any given time our team could only handle a third of the cases that we knew about. We knew that if we built even a basic detector, we would likely have many more cases.

Senator BLACKBURN. OK. Then let me ask you this. So you look at the way that they have the data but they're choosing to keep that data and advertise from it, right?

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes.

Senator BLACKBURN. Sell it to third parties. So what does Facebook do? You've got these 600,000 accounts that ought not to be on there and—

Ms. HAUGEN. Probably more.

Senator BLACKBURN. Right. But then you delete those accounts, but what happens to that data? Does Facebook keep that data? Do they keep it until those children go to age 13 since you're saying they can work backward and figure out the true age of a user? So what do they do with it? Do they delete it? Do they store it? Do they keep it? How do they process that?

Ms. HAUGEN. My understanding of Facebook's scatter retention policies—let me be really clear. I didn't work directly on that—is that they delete—when they delete an account, they delete all the data I believe within 90 days in compliance with the GDPR.

With regard to children underage on the platform, Facebook does substantially more to detect more of those children and they should have to publish for Congress those processes because there are lots of subtleties in those things and they could be much more effective than probably what they're doing today.

Senator BLACKBURN. Got it. Now staying with this underage children since this hearing is all about kids and about online privacy, I want you to tell me how Facebook is able to do market research on these children that are underage 13 because Ms. Davis was really—she didn't deny this last week.

So how are they doing this? Do they bring kids into focus groups with their parents? How do they get that permission? She said they got permission from parents. Is there a permission slip or a form that gets signed and then how do they know which kids to target?

Ms. HAUGEN. A bunch to unpack there.

Senator BLACKBURN. Well, start with maybe how do they recruit children for focus groups or recruit teenagers?

Ms. HAUGEN. Most tech companies have systems where they can analyze the data that is on their servers. So most of the focus groups I read or that I saw analysis of were around Messenger Kids which has children on it and those focus groups appear to be

children interacting in person. Often large tech companies use either sourcing agencies that will go and identify people who meet certain demographic criteria or they will reach out directly based on data on the platform.

So, for example, in the case of Messenger Kids, maybe you would want to study a child that was an active user and one that was a less active user. You might reach out to some that came from each population.

Senator BLACKBURN. And so these are children that are under age 13?

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes.

Senator BLACKBURN. And they know it?

Ms. HAUGEN. For some of these studies, and I assume they get permission but I don't work on that.

Senator BLACKBURN. OK. Well, we're still waiting to get a copy of that parental consent form that would involve children.

My time is expired. Mr. Chairman, I'll save my other questions for our second round, if we're able to get those. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Great. Thank you, Senator Blackburn.

Senator Klobuchar.

**STATEMENT OF HON. AMY KLOBUCHAR,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM MINNESOTA**

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you so much, Ms. Haugen, for shedding a light on how Facebook time and time again has put profit over people.

When their own research found that more than 13 percent of teen girls say that Instagram made their thoughts of suicide worse, what did they do? They proposed Instagram for Kids, which has now been put on pause because of public pressure.

When they found out that their algorithms are fostering polarization, misinformation, and hate that they allowed 99 percent of their violent content to remain unchecked on their platform, including lead-up to the January 6th insurrection, what did they do? They now, as we know, Mark Zuckerberg's going sailing and saying no apologies.

I think the time has come for action and I think you are the catalyst for that action. You have said privacy legislation is not enough. I completely agree with you. I think you know we have not done anything to update our privacy laws in this country, our Federal privacy laws, nothing, zilch in any major way. Why? Because there are lobbyists around every single corner of this building that have been hired by the tech industry.

We have done nothing when it comes to making the algorithms more transparent, allowing for the universe of research that you referred to. Why? Because Facebook and the other tech companies are throwing a bunch of money around this town and people are listening to them.

We have done nothing significantly passed, although we are in a bipartisan basis working in the Antitrust Subcommittee to get something done on consolidation which you understand allows the dominant platforms to control all this, like the bullies in the neighborhood, buy out the companies that maybe could have competed with them and added the bells and whistles.

So the time for action is now. So I'll start with something that I asked Facebook's Head of Safety when she testified before us last week. I asked her how they estimate the lifetime value of a user for kids who start using their products before they turn 13. She evaded the question and said that's not the way we think about it.

Is that right or is it your experience that Facebook estimates and puts a value on how much money they get from users in general? I'll get to kids in a second. Is that a motivating force for them?

Ms. HAUGEN. Based on what I saw in terms of allocation of Integrity's funding, so one of the things disclosed in the *Wall Street Journal* was that I believe it's like 87 percent of all the misinformation spending is spent on English but only about like 9 percent of the users are English speakers.

It seems that Facebook invests more in users who make the more money, even though the danger may not be evenly distributed based on profitability.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Does it make sense that having a younger person get hooked on social media at a young age makes them more profitable over the long term as they have a life ahead of them?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook's internal documents talk about the importance of getting younger users, for example, tweens, on to Instagram, like Instagram Kids, because they need to have—like they know that children bring their parents online and things like that and so they understand the value of younger users for the long-term success of Facebook.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Facebook reported advertising revenue to be \$51.58 per user—

Ms. HAUGEN. Oh, wow.

Senator KLOBUCHAR.—last quarter in the U.S. and Canada. When I asked Ms. Davis how much of that came from Instagram users under 18, she wouldn't say.

Do you think that teens are profitable for their company?

Ms. HAUGEN. I would assume so, based on advertising for things like television. You get substantially higher advertising rates for customers who don't yet have preferences or habits and so I'm sure they are some of the more profitable users on Facebook, but I did not work directly on that.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Now there's a major issue that's come out of this, eating disorders. Studies have found that eating disorders actually have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness for women, and I led a bill on this with Senators Capito and Baldwin that we passed into law, and I'm concerned that these algorithms that they have pushes outrageous content promoting anorexia and the like.

I know it's personal to you. Do you think that their algorithms push some of this content to young girls?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook knows that the engagement-based ranking, the way that they pick the content in Instagram for young users, for all users, amplifies preferences, and they have done something called a "proactive incident response" where they take things that occur, for example, like can you be led by the algorithms to anorexia content, and they have literally recreated that experiment themselves and confirmed yes, this happens to people.

So Facebook knows that they are leading young users to anorexia content.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Do you think they are deliberately designing their product to be addictive beyond even that content?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook has a long history of having a successful and very effective growth division where they take little tiny tweaks and they constantly, constantly, constantly are trying to optimize it to grow. Those kinds of stickiness could be construed as things that facilitate addiction.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Right. The last thing I want to ask is we've seen this same kind of content in the political world. You brought up other countries and what's been happening there.

On *60 Minutes* you said that Facebook implemented safeguards to reduce misinformation ahead of the 2020 election but turned off those safeguards right after the election and you know that the insurrection occurred January 6.

Do you think that Facebook turned off the safeguards because they were costing the company money, because it was reducing profits?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook has been emphasizing a false choice. They've said the safeguards that were in place before the election implicated free speech.

The choices that were happening on the platform were really about how reactive and twitchy was the platform, right, like how viral was the platform, and Facebook changed those safety defaults in the run-up to the election because they knew they were dangerous and because they wanted that growth back. They wanted the acceleration of the platform back after the election. They returned to their original defaults and the fact that they had to break the glass on January 6th and turn them back on, I think that's deeply problematic.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Agree. Thank you very much for your bravery in coming forward.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Senator Thune.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN THUNE,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM SOUTH DAKOTA**

Senator THUNE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Ranking Member Blackburn.

I've been arguing for some time that it is time for Congress to act, and I think the question is always what is the correct way to do it? The right way to do it consistent with our First Amendment right to free speech?

This committee doesn't have jurisdiction over the antitrust issue. That's the Judiciary Committee. I'm not averse to looking at the monopolistic nature of Facebook honestly. I think that's a real issue that needs to be examined and perhaps addressed, as well.

But at least under this committee's jurisdiction, there are a couple of things I think we can do, and I have a piece of legislation and Senators Blackburn and Blumenthal are both co-sponsors called The Filter Bubble Transparency Act and essentially what it would do is give users the options to engage with social media platforms without being manipulated by these secret formulas that es-

entially dictate the content that you see when you open up an app or log on to a website.

We also, I think, need to hold Big Tech accountable by reforming Section 230 and one of the best opportunities, I think, to do that, at least in a bipartisan way, is the Platform Accountability and Consumer Transparency or the PACT Act and that's legislation that I've co-sponsored with Senator Schatz, which, in addition to stripping Section 230 protections for content that a court determines to be illegal, the PACT Act would also increase transparency and due process for users around the content moderation process.

Importantly, in the context we're talking about today with this hearing with a major Big Tech whistleblower, the PACT Act would explore the viability of a Federal program for Big Tech employees to blow the whistle on wrong-doing inside the companies where they work.

In my view, we should encourage employees in the tech sector like you to speak up about questionable practices of Big Tech companies so we can, among other things, ensure that Americans are fully aware of how social media platforms are using artificial intelligence and opaque algorithms to keep them hooked on the platform.

So let me, Ms. Haugen, just ask you. We've learned from the information that you've provided that Facebook conducts what's called "engagement-based ranking," which you've described as very dangerous.

Could you talk more about why engagement-based ranking is dangerous and do you think Congress should seek to pass legislation like the Filter Bubble Transparency Act that would give users the ability to avoid engagement-based ranking all together?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook is going to say you don't want to give up engagement-based ranking. You're not going to like Facebook as much if we're not picking out the content for you. That's just not true. There are a lot of—Facebook likes to present things as false choices, like you have to choose between having lots of spam. Like let's imagine we ordered our feeds by time. Like on I Message or on their other forms of social media that are chronologically based. They're going to say you're going to get spammed, like you're not going to enjoy your feed.

The reality is that those experiences have a lot of permutations. There are ways that we can make those experiences where computers don't regulate what we see. We together socially regulate what we see, but they don't want us to have that conversation because Facebook knows that when they pick out the content, we focus on using computers, we spend more time on their platform, they make more money.

The dangers of engagement-based ranking are that Facebook knows that content that elicits an extreme reaction from you is more likely to get a click, a comment, a reshare, and it's interesting because those clicks and comments and reshares aren't even necessarily for your benefit. It's because they know that other people will produce more content if they get the likes and comments and reshares.

They prioritize content in your feed so that you will give little hits of dopamine to your friends so they will create more content



and they have run experiments on people, producer side experiments where they have confirmed this.

Senator THUNE. So you and part of the information you provided the *Wall Street Journal*, it has been found that Facebook altered its algorithm in an attempt to boost these meaningful social interactions or MSI but rather than strengthening bonds between family and friends on the platform, the algorithm instead rewarded more outrage and sensationalism, and I think Facebook would say that its algorithms are used to connect individuals with other friends and family that are largely positive.

Do you believe that Facebook's algorithms make its platform a better place for most users and should consumers have the option to use Facebook and Instagram without being manipulated by algorithms designed to keep them engaged on that platform?

Ms. HAUGEN. I strongly believe --like I've spent most of my career working on systems like engagement-based ranking. Like when I come to you and say these things, I'm basically damning 10 years of my own work, right.

Engagement-based ranking, Facebook says we can do it safely because we have AI. You know, the artificial intelligence will find the bad content that we know our engagement-based ranking is promoting. They've written blog posts on how they know engagement-based ranking is dangerous, but the AI will save us.

Facebook's own research says they cannot adequately identify dangerous content and as a result, those dangerous algorithms that they admit are picking up the extreme sentiments, the division, they can't protect us from the harms that they know exist in their own system and so I don't think it's just a question of saying should people have the option of choosing to not be manipulated by their algorithms.

I think if we had appropriate oversight or if we reformed 230 to make Facebook responsible for the consequences of their intentional ranking decisions, I think they would get rid of engagement-based ranking because it is causing teenagers to be exposed to more anorexia content. It is pulling families apart and in places like Ethiopia, it's literally fanning ethnic violence.

I encourage reform of these platforms, not picking and choosing individual ideas, instead making the platforms themselves safer, less twitchy, less reactive, less viral, because that's how we scalably solve these problems.

Senator THUNE. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I would simply say let's get to work. So we got some things we can do here. Thanks.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I agree. Thank you.

Senator Schatz.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BRIAN SCHATZ,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM HAWAII**

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member.

Thank you for your courage in coming forward. Was there a particular moment when you came to the conclusion that reform from the inside was impossible and that you decided to be a whistleblower?

Ms. HAUGEN. It was a long series of moments where I became aware that Facebook conflicts of interests between its own profits and the common good public safety that Facebook consistently chose to prioritize its profits.

I think the moment which I realized we needed to get help from the outside, that the only way these problems would be solved is by solving them together, not solving them alone, was when Civic Integrity was dissolved following the 2020 election.

It really felt like a betrayal of the promises that Facebook had made to people who had sacrificed a great deal to keep the election safe by basically dissolving our community and integrating into just other parts of the company.

Senator SCHATZ. And I know their response is that they sort of distributed the duties.

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes.

Senator SCHATZ. That's an excuse, right?

Ms. HAUGEN. I cannot see into the hearts of other men and I don't know what—

Senator SCHATZ. Let me say it this way. It won't work, right?

Ms. HAUGEN. I can tell you that when I left the company, so the people who I worked with were disproportionately maybe 75 percent of my pod of seven people, those are product managers, program managers, most of them come from Civic Integrity. All of us left the Inauthentic Behavior pod either for other parts of the company or the company entirely over the same 6-week period of time.

So 6 months after the reorganization, we had clearly lost faith that those changes were coming.

Senator SCHATZ. You said in your opening statement that "they know how to make Facebook and Instagram safer." So thought experiment, you are now the chief executive officer and chairman of the company. What changes would you immediately institute?

Ms. HAUGEN. I would immediately establish a policy of how to share information and research from inside the company with appropriate oversight bodies, like Congress. I would give proposed legislation to Congress, saying here's what an effective oversight agency would look like. I would actively engage with academics to make sure that people who are confirming our Facebook's marketing message is true, have the information they need to confirm these things, and I would immediately implement the "soft interventions" that were identified to protect the 2020 election. So that's things like requiring someone to click on a link before resharing it because other companies, like Twitter, have found that that significantly reduces misinformation.

No one is censored by being forced to click on a link before resharing it.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you. I want to pivot back to Instagram's targeting of kids.

We all know that they announced a pause but that reminds me of what they announced when they were going to issue a digital currency and they got beat up by the U.S. Senate Banking Committee and they said never mind and now they're coming back around hoping that nobody notices that they are going to try to issue a currency.

Now let's set aside for the moment the business model which appears to be gobble up everything, do everything, that's the growth strategy.

Do you believe that they're actually going to discontinue Instagram Kids or they're just waiting for the dust to settle?

Ms. HAUGEN. I would be sincerely surprised if they do not continue working on Instagram Kids and I would be amazed if a year from now we don't have this conversation again.

Senator SCHATZ. Why?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook understands that if they want to continue to grow, they have to find new users, they have to make sure that the next generation is just as engaged with Instagram as the current one, and the way they'll do that is by making sure that children establish habits before they have good self-regulation.

Senator SCHATZ. By hooking kids?

Ms. HAUGEN. By hooking kids. I'd like to emphasize one of the documents that we sent in on problematic use examined the rates of problematic use by age and that peaked with 14-year-olds. It's just like cigarettes. Teenagers don't have good self-regulation. They say explicitly I feel bad when I use Instagram and yet I can't stop. We need to protect the kids.

Senator SCHATZ. Just my final question. I have a long list of misstatements, misdirections, and outright lies from the company. I don't have the time to read them but you're as intimate with all of these deceptions as I am. So I will just jump to the end.

If you were a member of this panel, would you believe what Facebook is saying?

Ms. HAUGEN. I would not believe. Facebook has not earned a right to just have blind trust in them. Trust is—last week one of the most beautiful things I heard on the committee was trust is earned and Facebook has not earned our trust.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Schatz. Senator Moran, and then we've been joined by the Chair, Senator Cantwell. She'll be next.

We're going to break at about 11:30, if that's OK, because we have a vote and then we'll reconvene.

Ms. HAUGEN. OK.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JERRY MORAN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM KANSAS**

Senator MORAN. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

The conversation so far reminds me that you and I ought to resolve our differences and introduce legislation. So as Senator Thune said, let's go to work.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Our differences are very minor or they seem very minor in the face of the revelations that we've now seen. So I'm hoping we can move forward, Senator Moran.

Senator MORAN. I share that view, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Thank you very much for your testimony. What examples do you know—we've talked about particularly children, teenage girls specifically, but what other examples do you know about where Facebook or Instagram knew its decisions would be harmful to its

users but still proceeded with the plan and executed that harmful behavior?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook's internal research is aware that there are a variety of problems facing children on Instagram that are—they know that severe harm is happening to children.

For example, in the case of bullying, Facebook knows that Instagram dramatically changes the experience of high school. So when we were in high school, when I was in high school, most kids—

Senator MORAN. You looked at me and changed your words.

[Laughter.]

Ms. HAUGEN. Sorry. When I was in high school, you know, or most kids have positive home lives, like it doesn't matter how bad it is at school, kids can go home and reset for 16 hours. Kids who are bullied on Instagram, the bullying follows them home. It follows them into their bedrooms. The last thing they see before they go to bed at night is someone being cruel to them or the first thing they see in the morning is someone being cruel to them.

Kids are learning that their own friends, like people who they care about them are cruel to them. Like think about how that's going to impact their domestic relationships when they become 20-somethings or 30-somethings to believe that people who care about you are mean to you.

Facebook knows that parents today, because they didn't experience these things, they never experienced this addictive experience with a piece of technology, they give their children bad advice. They say things like "why don't you just stop using it" and so that Facebook's own research is aware that children express feelings of loneliness and struggling with these things because they can't even get support from their own parents.

I don't understand how Facebook can know all these things and not escalate it to someone like Congress for help and support in navigating these problems.

Senator MORAN. Let me ask the question in a broader way. Besides teenagers and besides girls or besides youth, are there other practices at Facebook or Instagram that are known to be harmful but yet are pursued?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook is aware that choices it made in establishing like "meaningful social interactions," so engagement-based ranking that didn't care if you bullied someone or made hate speech in the comments that was meaningful.

They know that that change directly changed publishers' behavior, that companies like BuzzFeed wrote in and said the content is most successful on our platform is some of the content we're most ashamed of. You have a problem with your ranking and they did nothing. They know that politicians are being forced to take positions they know their own constituents don't like or approve of because those are the ones that get distributed on Facebook. That's a huge, huge negative impact.

Facebook also knows that they have admitted in public that engagement-based ranking is dangerous without integrity and security systems but then not rolled out those integrity and security systems to most of the languages in the world and that's what's causing things like ethnic violence in Ethiopia.

Senator MORAN. Thank you for your answer. What is the magnitude of Facebook's revenues or profits that come from the sale of user data?

Ms. HAUGEN. Oh, I'm sorry, I've never worked on that. I'm not aware.

Senator MORAN. Thank you. What regulations or legal actions by Congress or by administrative action do you think would have the most consequence or be feared most by Facebook, Instagram, or allied companies?

Ms. HAUGEN. I strongly encourage reforming Section 230 to exempt decisions about algorithms, right. So modifying 230 around content, I think, it's very complicated because user-generated content is something that companies have less control over. They have one hundred percent control over their algorithms and Facebook should not get a free pass on choices it makes to prioritize growth and virility and reactivity over public safety. They shouldn't get a free pass on that because they're paying for their profits right now with our safety. So I strongly encourage reform of 230 in that way.

I also believe there needs to be a dedicated oversight body because right now the only people in the world who are trained to analyze these experiments to understand what's happening inside of Facebook are people who, you know, grew up inside of Facebook or Pinterest or another social media company, and there needs to be a regulatory home where someone like me could do a tour of duty after working at a place like this and have a place to work on things like regulation to bring that information out to the oversight boards that have the right to do oversight.

Senator MORAN. A regulatory agency within the Federal Government?

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes.

Senator MORAN. Thank you very much. Thank you, Chairman.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Senator Cantwell. Thank you, Senator Moran.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MARIA CANTWELL,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM WASHINGTON**

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding this hearing, and I think my colleagues have brought up a lot of important issues and so I think I just want to continue on that vein.

First of all, the Privacy Act that I introduced along with several of my colleagues actually does have FTC oversight of algorithm transparency in some instances. I hope you take a look at that and tell us what other areas you think we should add to that level of transparency.

But clearly that's the issue at hand here, I think, in your coming forward. So thank you again for your willingness to do that.

The documentation that you say now exists is the level of transparency about what's going on that people haven't been able to see and so your information that you say has gone up to the highest levels at Facebook is that they purposely knew that their algorithms were continuing to have misinformation and hate information and that when presented with information about this termi-

nology, you know, downstream MSI, meaningful social information, knowing that it was this choice, you could continue this wrong-headed information, hate information about the Rohingya or you could continue to get higher click-through rates, and I know you said you don't know about profit, but I'm pretty sure you know that on a page, if you click through that next page, I'm pretty sure there's a lot more ad revenue than if you didn't click through.

So you're saying the documents exist that at the highest level at Facebook you had information discussing these two choices and that people chose, even though they knew that it was misinformation and hurtful and maybe even causing people lives, they continued to choose profit?

Ms. HAUGEN. We have submitted documents to Congress outlining Mark Zuckerberg was directly presented with a list of "soft interventions." So hard intervention is like taking a piece of content off Facebook, taking a user off Facebook. Soft interventions are about making slightly different choices to make the platform less viral, less twitchy.

Mark was presented with these options and chose to not remove downstream MSI in April 2020 in even just isolated and at-risk countries, that's countries at risk of violence, if it had any impact on the overall MSI metric. So he chose—

The CHAIRWOMAN. Which, in translation, means less money,—

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes, he said—

The CHAIRWOMAN.—right? Was there another reason given why they would do it, other than they thought it would really affect their numbers?

Ms. HAUGEN. I don't know for certain. Like Jeff Horowitz, the reporter at the *Wall Street Journal*, and I struggled with this. We sat there and read these minutes and were like how is this possible, like we've just read a hundred pages on how downstream MSI expands hate speech, misinformation, violence-inciting content, graphic violent content, why wouldn't you get rid of this, and the best theory that we've come up with, and I want to emphasize this is just our interpretation on it, is people's bonuses are tied to MSI, right. Like people stay or leave the company based on what they get paid and like if you hurt MSI, a bunch of people weren't going to get their bonuses.

The CHAIRWOMAN. So you're saying that this practice even still continues today? Like we're still in this environment? I'm personally—

Ms. HAUGEN. Oh, yes.

The CHAIRWOMAN.—very frustrated by this because we presented information to Facebook from one of my own constituents in 2018 talking about this issue with Rohingya, pleading with the company. We pleaded with the company and they continued to not address this issue.

Now you're pointing out that these same algorithms are being used and they know darn well in Ethiopia that it's causing and inciting violence and again they are still today choosing profit over taking this information down, is that correct?

Ms. HAUGEN. When rioting began in the United States in the summer of last year, they turned off downstream MSI only for when they detected content was health content, which is probably

COVID, and civic content, but Facebook's own algorithms are bad at finding this content. It's still in the raw form for 80–90 percent of even that sensitive content.

In countries where they don't have integrity systems in the local language and in the case of Ethiopia, there is a hundred million people in Ethiopia and six languages. Facebook only supports two of those languages for integrity systems. This strategy of focusing on language-specific content-specific systems AI to save us is doomed to fail.

The CHAIRWOMAN. I need to get to one of—first off fall, I'm sending a letter to Facebook today. They better not delete any information as it relates to the Rohingya or investigations about how they proceeded on this particularly in light of your information or the documents.

But aren't we also now talking about advertising fraud? Aren't you selling something to advertisers that's not really what they're getting? We know about this because of the newspaper issues. We're trying to say that journalism that basically has to meet a different standard, a public interest standard that basically is out there basically proving every day or they can be sued.

These guys are a social media platform that doesn't have to live with that and then the consequences, they're telling their advertisers that this was a—we see it. We see it. People are coming back to the local journalism because they're like we want to be again with the trusted brand. We don't want to be in, you know, your website.

So I think you're finding for the SEC is an interesting one, but I think that we also have to look at what are the other issues here and one of them is did they defraud advertisers in telling them this was the advertising content that you were going to be advertising and when, in reality, it was something different. It was based on a different model.

Ms. HAUGEN. We have multiple examples of question and answers for the advertising staff, the sales staff where advertisers say after the riots last summer were asked should we come back to Facebook or after the insurrection, like should we come back to Facebook, and Facebook said in their talking points that they gave to advertisers we're doing everything in our power to make this safer or we take down all the hate speech when we find it.

The CHAIRWOMAN. That was not true.

Ms. HAUGEN. That was not true.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you.

Ms. HAUGEN. They get three to 5 percent of hate speech.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Cantwell, and if you want to make your letter available to other members of the Committee, I'd be glad to join you myself—

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you, thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL.—and thank you for suggesting it.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Senator Lee.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MIKE LEE,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM UTAH**

Senator LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ms. Haugen, for joining us this week. It's very helpful. We're grateful that you're willing to make yourself available.

Last week we had another witness from Facebook, Ms. Davis. She came and she testified before this committee and she focused on, among other things, the extent to which Facebook targets ads to children, including ads that are either sexually suggestive or geared toward adult-themed products or themes in general.

Now while I appreciated her willingness to be here, I didn't get the clearest answers in response to some of those questions and so I'm hoping that you can help shed some light on some of those issues related to Facebook's advertising processes here today.

As we get into this, I want to first read you a quote that I got from Ms. Davis last week. Here's what she said during her questioning. "When we do ads to young people, there are only three things that an advertiser can target around, age, gender, location. We also prohibit certain ads to young people, including weight loss ads. We don't allow tobacco ads at all. We don't allow them to children. We don't allow them to minors."

Now since that exchange happened last week, there are a number of individuals and groups, including a group called The Technology Transparency Project or TTP, that have indicated that that part of her testimony was inaccurate, that it was false. TTP noted that TTP had conducted an experiment just last month and their goal was to run a series of ads that would be targeted to children ages 13 to 17, to users in the United States.

Now I want to emphasize that TTP didn't end up running these ads. They stopped them from being distributed to users, but Facebook did in fact approve them, and as I understand it Facebook approved them for an audience of up to 9.1 million users, all of whom were teens.

So I brought a few of these to show you today. This is the first one I wanted to showcase. This first one has a colorful graphic encouraging kids to "throw a Skittles party like no other," which, as the graphic indicates and as the slang jargon also independently suggests, this involves kids getting together randomly to abuse prescription drugs.

The second graphic displays an anitip, that is, a tip specifically designed to encourage and promote anorexia, and it's on there. Now the language, the anitip itself, independently promotes that. The ad also promotes it insofar as it was suggesting these are images you ought to look at when you need motivation to be more anorexic, I guess you could say.

Now the third one invites children to find their partner online and to make a love connection. You look lonely, find your partner now to make a love connection. Now, look, it could be an entirely different kettle of fish if this were targeted to an adult audience. It is not. It's targeted to 13- to 17-year-olds.

Now obviously I don't support and TTP does not support these messages, particularly when targeted to impressionable children, and again just to be clear, TTP did not end up pushing the ads out



after receiving Facebook's approval, but it did in fact receive Facebook's approval.

So I think this says something, one could argue that it proves that Facebook is allowing and perhaps facilitating the targeting of harmful adult-themed ads to our Nation's children.

So could you please explain to me, Ms. Haugen, how these ads with the target audience of 13-to-17-year-old children, how would they possibly be approved by Facebook? Is AI involved in that?

Ms. HAUGEN. I did not work directly on the ad approval system. What was resonant for me about your testimony is Facebook has a deep focus on scale. So scale is can we do things very cheaply for a huge number of people which is part of why they rely on AI so much.

It is very possible that none of those ads were seen by a human and the reality is, as we've seen from repeated documents within my disclosures, is that Facebook's AI systems only catch a very tiny minority of offending content and best case scenario in the case of something like hate speech at most they will ever get 10 to 20 percent.

In the case of children, that means drug paraphernalia ads like that, it's likely if they rely on computers and not humans they will also likely never get more than 10 to 20 percent of those ads.

Senator LEE. Mr. Chairman, I've got one minor follow-up question. It should be easy to answer.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Go ahead.

Senator LEE. So while Facebook may claim that it only targets ads based on age, gender, and location, even though these things seem to counteract that, but let's set that aside for a minute, and that they're not basing ads based on specific interest categories, does Facebook still collect interest category data on teenagers, even if they aren't at that moment targeting ads at teens based on those interest categories?

Ms. HAUGEN. I think it's very important to differentiate between what targeting are advertisers allowed to specify and what targeting Facebook may learn for an ad.

Let's imagine you have some texts on an ad. It would likely extract out features that it thought was relevant for that ad. For example, in the case of something about partying, it would learn partying is a concept.

I'm very suspicious that personalized ads are still not being delivered to teenagers on Instagram because the algorithms learn correlations. They learn interactions where your party ad may still go to kids interested in partying because Facebook almost certainly has a ranking model in the background that says this person wants more party-related content.

Senator LEE. Interesting. Thank you. That's very helpful and what that suggests to me is that while they're saying they're not targeting teens with those ads, the algorithm might do some of that work for them which might explain why they collect the data even while claiming that they're not targeting those ads in that way.

Ms. HAUGEN. I can't speak to whether or not that's the intention, but the reality is, it's very, very, very difficult to understand these algorithms today and over and over and over again we saw these biases the algorithms unintentionally learn and so, yes, it's very

hard to disentangle out these factors as long as we have engagement-based ranking.

Senator LEE. Thank you, Ms. Haugen.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you very much, Senator Lee.  
Senator Markey.

**STATEMENT OF HON. EDWARD MARKEY,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS**

Senator MARKEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much.

Thank you, Ms. Haugen. You are a 21st Century American hero warning our country of the danger for young people, for our democracy, and our Nation owes you just a huge debt of gratitude for the courage you're showing here today. So thank you.

Ms. Haugen, do you agree that Facebook actively seeks to attract children and teens on to its platforms?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook actively markets to children or markets to children under the age of 18 to get on Instagram and definitely targets children as young as eight to be on Messenger Kids.

Senator MARKEY. An internal Facebook document from 2020 that you revealed reads, "Why do we care about tweens? They are a valuable but untapped audience." So Facebook only cares about children to the extent that they are of monetary value.

Last week Facebook's Global Head of Safety, Antigone Davis, told me that Facebook does not allow targeting of certain harmful content to teens. Ms. Davis stated, "We don't allow weight loss ads to be shown to people under the age of 18." Yet a recent study found that Facebook permitted targeting of teens as young as 13 with ads that showed a young woman's thin waist promoting websites that glorify anorexia.

Ms. Haugen, based on your time at Facebook, do you think Facebook is telling the truth?

Ms. HAUGEN. I think Facebook has focused on scale over safety and it is likely that they are using artificial intelligence to try to identify harmful ads without allowing the public oversight to see what is the actual effectiveness of those safety systems.

Senator MARKEY. You unearthed Facebook's research about its harm to teens. Did you raise this issue with your supervisors?

Ms. HAUGEN. I did not work directly on anything involving teen mental health. This research is freely available to anyone in the company.

Senator MARKEY. Ms. Davis testified last week, "We don't allow tobacco ads at all. We don't allow them to children either. We don't allow alcohol ads to minors." However, researchers also found that Facebook does allow targeting of teens with ads on vaping.

Ms. Haugen, based on your time at Facebook, do you think Facebook is telling the truth?

Ms. HAUGEN. I do not. I have context on that issue. I assume that if they are using artificial intelligence to catch those vape ads, unquestionably ads are making its way through.

Senator MARKEY. OK. So from my perspective listening to you and your incredibly courageous revelations, time and time again Facebook says one thing and does another. Time and time again Facebook fails to abide by the commitments that they have made. Time and time again Facebook lies about what they are doing.

Yesterday Facebook had a platform outage but for years it has had a principles outage. Its only real principle is profit. Facebook's platforms are not safe for young people. As you said, Facebook is like Big Tobacco, enticing young kids with that first cigarette, that first social media account designed to hook kids as users for life.

Ms. Haugen, your whistleblowing shows that Facebook uses harmful features that quantify popularity, push manipulative influencer marketing, amplify harmful content to teens, and last week in this committee Facebook wouldn't even commit to not using these features on 10-year-olds. Facebook is built on computer codes of misconduct.

Senator Blumenthal and I have introduced the Kids Internet Design and Safety Act, the KIDS Act. You have asked us to act as a committee and Facebook has scores of lobbyists in this city right now coming in right after this hearing to tell us we can't act and they have been successful for a decade in blocking this committee from acting.

So let me ask you a question. The Kids Internet Design and Safety Act or the KIDS Act, here's what the legislation does. It includes outright bans on children's app features that: (1) quantify popularity with likes and follower accounts, (2) promotes influencer marketing, and (3) that amplifies of toxic posts and that it would prohibit Facebook from using its algorithms to promote toxic posts. Should we pass that legislation?

Ms. HAUGEN. I strongly encourage reforms that push us toward human-scale social media and not computer-driven social media. Those amplification harms are caused by computers choosing what's important to us, not our friends and family, and I encourage any system that children are exposed to to not use amplification systems.

Senator MARKEY. So you agree that Congress has to enact these special protections for children and teens to stop social media companies from manipulating young users and threatening their well-being, to stop using its algorithm to harm kids? You agree with that?

Ms. HAUGEN. I do believe Congress must act to protect children.

Senator MARKEY. And children and teens also need privacy, online bill of rights. I'm the author of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998, but it's only for kids under 13 because the industry stopped me from making it age 16 in 1998 because it was already their business model, but we need to update that law for the 21st Century.

Tell me if this should pass: (1) create an online eraser button so that young users can tell websites to delete the data they have collected about them, (2) give young teens under the age of 16 and their parents control of their information, and (3) ban targeted ads to children.

Ms. HAUGEN. I support all those actions.

Senator MARKEY. Thank you. And finally I've also introduced the Algorithmic Justice and Online Platform Transparency Act which would: (1) open the hood on Facebook and Big Tech's algorithms so we know how Facebook is using our data to decide what content we see and (2) ban discriminatory algorithms that harm vulnerable

populations online, like showing employment and housing ads to white people but not to black people in our country.

Should Congress pass that bill?

Ms. HAUGEN. Algorithmic bias issues are a major issue for our democracy. During my time at Pinterest, I became very aware of the challenges of—like I mentioned before, it's difficult for us to understand how these algorithms actually act and perform.

Facebook is aware of complaints today by people like African Americans saying that reels doesn't give African Americans the same distribution as white people and until we have transparency and our ability to confirm ourselves that Facebook's marketing messages are true, we will not have a system that is compatible with democracy.

Senator MARKEY. So I thank Senator Lee, I really do, and your line of questioning. I wrote Facebook asking them to explain that discrepancy because Facebook, I think, is lying about targeting 13-year- to 14-year-olds.

So here's my message for Mark Zuckerberg. Your time of invading our privacy, promoting toxic content, and preying on children and teens is over. Congress will be taking action. You can work with us or not work with us, but we will not allow your company to harm our children and our families and our democracy any longer.

Thank you, Ms. Haugen. We will act.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Markey.

We're going to turn to Senator Blackburn and then we will take a break. I know that there's some interest in another round of questions. Maybe we'll turn to Senator Luján for his questions.

Senator BLACKBURN. We have Senators Cruz and Scott.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And we have others. So we'll come back after the—

Senator LUJÁN. Mr. Chairman, I have to go sit in the chair starting at noon.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Why don't we turn to—you have questions?

Senator BLACKBURN. I do. I have one question. This relates to what Mr. Markey was asking.

Does Facebook ever employ child psychologists or mental health professionals to deal with these children online issues that we're discussing?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook has many researchers with PhDs. I assume some of them are—I know that some have psychology degrees. I'm not sure if they are child specialists. Facebook also works with external agencies that are specialists at children's rights online.

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Senator Luján, and then at the conclusion of Senator Luján's questions, we'll take a break. We'll come back at noon.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BEN RAY LUJÁN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW MEXICO**

Senator LUJÁN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate the indulgence of the committee.

Ms. Haugen, last week the committee heard directly from Ms. Davis, the Global Head of Safety for Facebook. During the hearing the company contested their own internal research as if it does not exist.

Yes or no. Does Facebook have internal research indicating that Instagram harms teens, particularly harming perceptions of body image, which disproportionately affects young women?

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes, Facebook has extensive research on the impacts of its products on teenagers, including young women.

Senator LUJÁN. Thank you for confirming these reports.

Last week I requested Facebook make the basis of this research, the Dataset Minus, any personally identifiable information available to this committee.

Do you believe it is important for transparency and safety that Facebook release the basis of this internal research, the core dataset, to allow for independent analysis?

Ms. HAUGEN. I believe it is vitally important for our democracy that we establish mechanisms where Facebook's internal research must be disclosed to the public on a regular basis and that we need to have privacy-sensitive datasets that allow independent researchers to confirm whether or not Facebook's marketing messages are actually true.

Senator LUJÁN. Beyond this particular research, should Facebook make its internal primary research, not just secondary slide decks of cherry-picked data, but the underlying data public by default? Can this be done in a way that respects user privacy?

Ms. HAUGEN. I believe in collaboration with academics and other researchers that we can develop privacy-conscious ways of exposing radically more data that is available today. It is important for our ability to understand how algorithms work, how Facebook shapes the information we get to see, that we have these datasets be publicly available for scrutiny.

Senator LUJÁN. Is Facebook capable of making the right decision here on its own or is regulation needed to create real transparency at Facebook?

Ms. HAUGEN. Until incentives change at Facebook, we should not expect Facebook to change. We need action from Congress.

Senator LUJÁN. Last week I asked Ms. Davis about shadow profiles for children on the site and she answered that no data is ever collected on children under 13 because they are not allowed to make accounts. This tactfully ignores the issue.

Facebook knows children uses their platform. However, instead of seeing this as a problem to be solved, Facebook views this as a business opportunity.

Yes or no. Does Facebook conduct research on children under 13, examining the business opportunities of connecting these young children to Facebook's products?

Ms. HAUGEN. I want to emphasize how vital it is that Facebook should have to publish the mechanisms by which it tries to detect these children because they are on the platform in far greater numbers than anyone is aware.

I do believe and I am aware that Facebook is doing research on children under the age of 13 and those studies are included in my disclosure.

Senator LUJÁN. You have shared your concerns about how senior management at Facebook has continuously prioritized revenue over potential user harm and safety, and I have a few questions on Facebook's decisionmaking.

Last week I asked Ms. Davis, "Has Facebook ever found a change to its platform would potentially inflict harm on users but Facebook moved forward because the change would also grow users or increase revenue?" Ms. Davis said in response, "It's not been my experience at all at Facebook. That's just not how we would approach it."

Yes or no. Has Facebook ever found a feature on its platform harmed its users but the feature moved forward because it would also grow users or increase revenue?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook likes to paint that these issues are really complicated. There are lots of simple issues. For example, requiring someone to click through on a link before you reshare it, that's not a large imposition but it does decrease growth a tiny little amount because in some countries reshares make up 35 percent of all the content that people see.

Facebook prioritized that content on the system, the reshares, over the impacts to misinformation, hate speech, or violence incitement.

Senator LUJÁN. Did these decisions ever come from Mark Zuckerberg directly or from other senior management at Facebook?

Ms. HAUGEN. We have a few choice documents that contain notes from briefings with Mark Zuckerberg where he chose metrics defined by Facebook, like meaningful social interactions, over changes that would have significantly decreased misinformation, hate speech, and other inciting content.

Senator LUJÁN. And this is the reference you shared earlier to Ms. Cantwell, April 2020.

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes, the soft interventions.

Senator LUJÁN. Facebook appeared to be able to count on the silence of its workforce for a long time, even as it knowingly continued practices and policies that continued to cause and amplify harm. Facebook content moderators have called out "a culture of fear and secrecy within the company that prevented them from speaking out."

Is there a culture of fear at Facebook around whistleblowing and external accountability?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook has a culture that emphasizes that insularity is the path forward, that if information is shared with the public, it will just be misunderstood, and I believe that relationship has to change. The only way that we will solve these problems is by solving them together and we will have much better, more democratic solutions if we do it collaboratively than in isolation.

Senator LUJÁN. And my final question, is there a senior level executive at Facebook, like an inspector general, who's responsible for ensuring complaints from Facebook employees are taken seriously and that employees' legal, ethical, and moral concerns receive consideration with the real possibility of instigating change to company policies?

Ms. HAUGEN. I am not aware of that role, but the company is large and it may exist.

Senator LUJAN. I appreciate that. It's my understanding that there's a gentleman by the name of Roy Austin who is the Vice President of Civil Rights who's described himself as an inspector general, but he does not have the authority to make these internal conflicts public.

The Oversight Board was created by Facebook to review moderation policies related to public content specifically. It was not created to allow employees to raise concerns. So again another area of interest I believe that we have to act on.

I thank you for coming forward today.

Ms. HAUGEN. My pleasure. Happy to serve.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. The Committee is in recess.

[Recess.]

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Welcome back, Ms. Haugen. Thank you for your patience.

We're going to reconvene and we'll go to Senator Hickenlooper.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN HICKENLOOPER,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM COLORADO**

Senator HICKENLOOPER. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ms. Haugen, for your direct answers and for being willing to come out and, you know, provide such clarity on so many of these issues.

Obviously Facebook can manipulate its algorithms to attract users and I guess my question would be do you feel in your humble opinion that, you know, simply maximizing profits no matter the societal impact that that is justified and I think the question then would be—that's the short question, which I think I know the answer.

What impact to Facebook's bottom line would it have if the algorithm was changed to promote safety and instead changed to save the lives of young women rather than putting them at risk?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook today makes approximately \$40 billion a year in profit. A lot of the changes that I'm talking about are not going to make Facebook an unprofitable company. It just won't be a ludicrously profitable company like it is today.

Engagement-based ranking, which causes those amplification problems that leads young women from, you know, innocuous topics like healthy recipes to anorexia content, if it were removed, people would consume less content on Facebook, but Facebook would still be profitable and so I encourage oversight and public scrutiny into how these algorithms work and the consequences of them.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. And I appreciate that. I'm a former small business owner and started a brew pub back in 1988 and we worked very hard to look—again, we weren't doing investigations but we were very sensitive to whether someone had had too much to drink, whether we had a frequent customer who was frequently putting himself at risk and others.

Obviously I think the Facebook business model puts—well, poses risk to youth and to teens. You compared it to cigarette companies which I thought was rightfully so.

I guess the question is, is this level of risk appropriate or is there a level of risk that would be appropriate?

Ms. HAUGEN. I think there is an opportunity to reframe some of these oversight actions. So when we think of them as these trade-offs of like it's either profitability or safety, I think that's a false choice, and in reality, the thing I'm asking for is a move from short-termism, which is what Facebook is run under today, right, is being led by metrics and not led by people, and that with appropriate oversight and some of these constraints, it's possible that Facebook could actually be a much more profitable company five or 10 years down the road because it wasn't as toxic, not as many people quit it, but that's one of those counter-factuals that we can't actually test.

So regulation might actually make Facebook more profitable over the long term.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. Right. That's often the case. I think the same could be said for automobiles and go down the list—

Ms. HAUGEN. Definitely.

Senator HICKENLOOPER.—of all those things. There's so much pushback in the beginning.

I also thought that the question of how do we assess the impact to their bottom line. We had a representative of Facebook in here recently who talked about that eight out of 10 Facebook users feel their life is better and that their job is to get to 10 out of 10. Maybe this is the 20 percent that they're missing. I don't know how large the demographic is of people that are caught back up into this circuitous, you know, sense of really taking them down into the wrong direction, how many people that is. Do you have any idea?

Ms. HAUGEN. That quote last week was really shocking to me because I don't know if you're aware of this but in the case of cigarettes, only about 10 percent of people who smoke ever get lung cancer, right. So the idea that, you know, 20 percent of your users could be facing serious mental health issues and that's not a problem is shocking.

I also want to emphasize for people that eating disorders are serious, right. There are going to be women walking around this planet in 60 years with brittle bones because of choices that Facebook made around emphasizing profit today or there are going to be women in 20 years who want to have babies who can't because they're infertile as a result of eating disorders today. They're serious, and I think there's an opportunity here for having public oversight and public involvement, especially in matters that impact children.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. Well, thank you for being so direct on this and for stepping forward. I yield back the floor, Mr. Chair.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Hickenlooper.

Senator Cruz.

**STATEMENT OF HON. TED CRUZ,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM TEXAS**

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Haugen, welcome. Thank you for your testimony.

When it concerns Facebook, there are a number of concerns that this committee and Congress has been focused on. Two of the biggest have been Facebook's intentional targeting of kids with content that is harmful to the children and then, second, a discreet



issue is the pattern of Facebook and social media engaging in political censorship.

I want to start with the first issue, targeting kids. As you're aware and as, indeed, the documents that you provided indicated, Facebook, according to the public reporting on it, Facebook's internal reports found that Instagram makes "body image issues worse for one in three teen girls," and additionally it showed that "13 percent of British users and 6 percent of American users traced their desire to kill themselves to Instagram."

Is that a fair and accurate characterization of what Facebook's research concluded?

Ms. HAUGEN. I only know what I read in the documents that were included in my disclosure. That is an accurate description of the ones that I have read. Because Facebook has not come forward with the total corpus of their known research, I don't know what their other things say, but, yes, there is documents that say those things.

Senator CRUZ. So at testimony last week in the Senate with the witness from Facebook who claimed that that information was not accurate and needed to be in context, of course, she wasn't willing to provide the context, the alleged mysterious context, do you know of any context that would make those data anything other than horrifying and deeply disturbing?

Ms. HAUGEN. Engagement-based ranking and these processes of amplification, they impact all users of Facebook. The algorithms are very smart in the sense that they latch on to things that people want to continue to engage with and, unfortunately, in the case of teen girls and things like self-harm, they develop these feedback cycles where children are using Instagram as to self-soothe but then are exposed to more and more content that makes them hate themselves.

This is a thing where we can't say 80 percent of kids are OK. We need to say how do we save all the kids.

Senator CRUZ. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Mark Zuckerberg was personally aware of this research. Do you have any information one way or the other as to Mr. Zuckerberg's awareness of the research?

Ms. HAUGEN. One of the documents included in the disclosures details something called Project Daisy, which is an initiative to remove likes off of Instagram. The internal research showed that removing likes off Instagram is not effective as long as you leave comments on those posts and yet the research directly presented to Mark Zuckerberg said we should still pursue this as a feature to launch even though it's not effective because the government, journalists, and academics want us to do this, like it would get us positive points with the public.

That kind of duplicity is why we need to have more transparency and why if we want to have a system that is coherent with democracy we must have public oversight from Congress.

Senator CRUZ. Do you know if Facebook, any of the research it conducted, attempted to quantify how many teenage girls may have taken their lives because of Facebook's products?

Ms. HAUGEN. I'm not aware of that research.

Senator CRUZ. Do you know if Facebook made any changes when they got back that 13 percent of British users and 6 percent of American users traced their desire to kill themselves to Instagram? Do you know if they made any changes in response to that research to try to correct or mitigate that?

Ms. HAUGEN. I found it very surprising that when Antigone Davis was confronted with this research last week she couldn't enumerate a five-point plan, a 10-point plan of the actions that they took.

I also find it shocking that once Facebook had this research it didn't disclose it to the public because this is the kind of thing that should have oversight from Congress.

Senator CRUZ. So when you were at Facebook were there discussions about how to respond to this research?

Ms. HAUGEN. I did not work directly on issues concerning children. These are just documents that were freely available in the company. So I'm not aware of that.

Senator CRUZ. OK. Do you have thoughts as to what kind of changes Facebook could make to reduce or eliminate these harms?

Ms. HAUGEN. You mentioned earlier concerns around free speech. A lot of the things that I advocate for are around changing the mechanisms of amplification, not around picking winners and losers in the marketplace of ideas. So problems—

Senator CRUZ. Explain what that means.

Ms. HAUGEN. Oh, sure. So like I mentioned before, you know, like how on Twitter if you have to click through on a link before you reshare it, small actions like that friction don't require picking good ideas and bad ideas. They just make the platform less twitchy, less reactive, and Facebook's internal research says that each one of those small actions dramatically reduces misinformation, hate speech, and violence-inciting content on the platform.

Senator CRUZ. So we're running out of time, but on the second major topic of concern of Facebook, which is censorship, based on what you've seen, are you concerned about political censorship at Facebook and in Big Tech?

Ms. HAUGEN. I believe you cannot have a system that has as big an impact on society as Facebook does today with as little transparency as it does. I'm a strong proponent of chronological ranking, ordering by time with a little bit of spam demotion because I think we don't want computers deciding what we focus on. We should have software that is human-scaled where humans have conversations together, not computers facilitating who we get to hear from.

Senator CRUZ. So how could we get more transparency? What would produce that?

Ms. HAUGEN. I strongly encourage the development of some kind of regulatory body that could work with academics, work with researchers, work with other government agencies to synthesize requests for data that are privacy-conscious.

This is an area that I'm really passionate about because right now no one can force Facebook to disclose data and Facebook has been stonewalling us or, even worse, they gave inaccurate data to researchers as the scandal recently showed.

Senator CRUZ. What data should they turn over? My time has expired.

Ms. HAUGEN. For example, even data as simple as what integrity systems exist today and how well do they perform. Like there are lots and lots of people who Facebook is conveying around the world that Facebook's safety systems apply to their language and those people aren't aware that they're using a raw original dangerous version of Facebook. Just basic actions like transparency would make a huge difference.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Cruz.

Senator Lummis.

**STATEMENT OF HON. CYNTHIA LUMMIS,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM WYOMING**

Senator LUMMIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your testimony.

If you were in my seat today instead of your seat, what documents or unanswered questions, would you seek from Facebook, especially as it relates to children, but even generally speaking?

Ms. HAUGEN. I think any research regarding what Facebook does problematic use, *i.e.*, the addictiveness of the product, is of vital importance and anything around what Facebook knows about parents' lack of knowledge about the platform.

I only know about the documents that I have seen, right. I do not work on teens or child safety myself, but in the documents that I read, Facebook articulates the idea that parents today are not aware of how dangerous Instagram is and because they themselves do not live through these experiences, they can't coach their kids on basic safety things and so at a minimum Facebook should have to disclose what it knows in that context.

Senator LUMMIS. OK. So we're trying to protect individuals' data that they're gathering, have data privacy, but have transparency in the manner in which the data is used. Can we bridge that gap?

Ms. HAUGEN. Imagine—I think reasonable people can have a conversation on how many people need to see a piece of content before it's not really private. Like if a 100,000 people see something, is it private? If 25,000 people see it, is it private?

Just disclosing the most popular content on the platform, including statistics around what factors went into the promotion of that content, would cause radically more transparency than we have today on how Facebook chooses what we get to focus on, how they shape our reality.

Senator LUMMIS. OK. If our focus is protecting the First Amendment and our rights to free speech while very carefully regulating data privacy, there are a number of things that are being discussed in Congress, everything from antitrust laws to calling Facebook a utility to the idea that you just raised of a regulatory board of some sort that has authority through understanding of the algorithms and how they're used and other mechanisms that create what we see, the face of Facebook, so to speak.

Tell me a little more about how you envision that board working. What is the—in your mind, based on your understanding of the company and the ill consequences, what is the best approach to bridging the gap between keeping speech free and protecting individual privacy with regard to data?

Ms. HAUGEN. So I think those issues, they're independent issues. So we can talk about free speech first which is having more transparency—like Facebook has solutions today that are not content-based and I am a strong advocate for non-content-based solutions because those solutions will also then protect the most vulnerable people in the world.

In a place like Ethiopia where they speak six languages, if you have something that focuses on good ideas and bad ideas, those systems don't work in diverse places.

So investing in non-content-based ways to slow the platform down not only protects our freedom of speech, it protects people's lives.

The second question is around privacy and it's a question of how can we have oversight and have privacy. There is lots and lots of research on how to extract datasets so you're not showing people's names. You might not even be showing the content of their posts. You might be showing data that is about the content of their posts but not the post itself.

There are many ways to structure these datasets that are privacy-conscious and the fact that Facebook has walled off the ability to see even basic things about how the platform performs or in the case of their past academic research releasing inaccurate data or not being clear about how they pulled that data is just part of a pattern of behavior of Facebook hiding behind walls and operating in the shadows and they have far too much power in our society to be allowed to continue to operate that way.

Senator LUMMIS. Well, I had heard you make the analogy earlier to the tobacco industry and I think that that's an appropriate analogy. I really believe we're searching for the best way to address the problem, and I'm not sure that it is the heavy hands, like breaking up companies or calling them a utility, which is why your approach of integrating people who understand the math and the uses of the math with protecting privacy is intriguing to me.

So the more information that you can provide to us about how that might work to actually address the problem, I think would be helpful. So in my case, this is an invitation to you to provide to my office or the committee information about how we can get at the root of the problem that you've identified and can document and save people's privacy.

So I extend that invitation to you and I thank you for your testimony.

Ms. HAUGEN. Thank you.

Senator LUMMIS. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Lummis.

Senator Sullivan.

**STATEMENT OF HON. DAN SULLIVAN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM ALASKA**

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank our witness here. Been a good hearing, a lot of information has been learned, particularly on the issue of how this is impacting our kids.

I think we're going to look back 20 years from now and all of us are going to be like what in the hell were we thinking when we

recognize the damage that's done to a generation of kids. Do you agree with that, Ms. Haugen?

Ms. HAUGEN. When Facebook has made statements in the past about how much benefit Instagram is providing to kids' mental health, like kids are connecting who were once alone, why I'm so surprised about what is if Instagram is such a positive force, have we seen a golden age of teenage mental health in the last 10 years? No. We've seen—

Senator SULLIVAN. We've seen the opposite, right?

Ms. HAUGEN. We've seen escalating rates of suicide and depression amongst teenagers.

Senator SULLIVAN. Do you think those rates are at least in part driven by the social media phenomena?

Ms. HAUGEN. There is a broad swath of research that supports the idea that usage of social media amplifies the risk for these mental health harms.

Senator SULLIVAN. Right now this hearing is helping to illuminate it. We are seeing—

Ms. HAUGEN. And Facebook's own research shows that.

Senator SULLIVAN. Right. Say that again. That's important.

Ms. HAUGEN. And Facebook's own research shows that, right, that kids are saying I am unhappy when I use Instagram and I can't stop, that if I leave I'm afraid I'll be ostracized.

Senator SULLIVAN. Right.

Ms. HAUGEN. And that's so sad.

Senator SULLIVAN. So they know that.

Ms. HAUGEN. That's what the research shows.

Senator SULLIVAN. So what do you think drives them to—I had this discussion with the witness last week and I said, well, you know, I think they called it their time-out or stop. I said but isn't that incompatible with your business model because your business model is more time online, more eyeballs online? Isn't that the fundamental elements of their business model?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook has had both an interesting opportunity and a hard challenge from being a closed system. So they have had the opportunity to hide their problems and like often people do when they can hide their problems, they get in over their heads, and I think Facebook needs an opportunity to have Congress step in and say guess what, you don't have to struggle by yourself anymore, you don't have to hide these things from us, you don't have to keep pretending they're not problems. You can declare moral bankruptcy and we can figure out how to fix these things together because we solve problems together. We don't solve them alone.

Senator SULLIVAN. And by moral bankruptcy, one of the things that I appreciate the phrase that the Chairman and you have been using, is one of those elements which is they know this is a problem, they know it's actually impacting negatively the mental health of the most precious assets we have in America, our youth, our kids, I have three daughters. They know that that is happening and yet the moral bankruptcy from your perspective is the continuation of this simply because that's how they make money.

Ms. HAUGEN. I phrased it slightly differently. We have a financial bankruptcy because we value people's lives more than we value money. The people get in over their heads and they need a process

where they admit they did something wrong, but we have a mechanism where we forgive them and we have a way for them to move forward.

Facebook is stuck in a feedback loop that they cannot get out of. They have been hiding this information because they feel trapped, right, like they would have come forward if they had solutions to these things. They need to admit they did something wrong and they need help to solve these problems and that's what moral bankruptcy is.

Senator SULLIVAN. Let me ask—I'm going to switch gears here and this is—what's your current position right now in terms of disinformation and counterespionage?

Ms. HAUGEN. My last role at Facebook was in Counterespionage.

Senator SULLIVAN. I'm sorry. Your last role. OK.

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes.

Senator SULLIVAN. So one of the things—this is a very different topic and I only got a minute or so left, but right now is Facebook—I know Facebook is not allowed in countries like China, but do they provide platforms for authoritarian or terrorist-based leaders, like the Ayatollahs in Iran, that's the largest state-sponsored terrorism in the world, or the Taliban or Xi Jinping or certain, in my view, our biggest rival for this century, a Communist Party dictator who's trying to export his authoritarian model around the world, do they provide a platform for those kind of leaders who, in my view, clearly don't hold America's interests in mind? Does Facebook provide that platform?

Ms. HAUGEN. During my time working with the Threat Intelligence Org, so I was a product manager supporting the Counterespionage Team, my team directly worked on tracking Chinese participation on the platform, surveilling, say, weaker populations in places around the world. You could actually find the Chinese based on them doing these kinds of things.

Senator SULLIVAN. So Facebook—I'm sorry.

Ms. HAUGEN. We also saw active participation of, say, the Iran Government doing espionage on other state actors. So this is definitely a thing that is happening and I believe Facebook's consistent understaffing of the Counter-espionage Information Operations and Counterterrorism Teams is a national security issue and I'm speaking to other parts of Congress about that.

Senator SULLIVAN. So you are saying in essence that the platform, whether Facebook knows it or not, is being utilized by some of our adversaries in a way that helps push and promote their interests at the expense of America's?

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes, Facebook's very aware that this is happening on the platform, and I believe the fact that Congress doesn't get a report of exactly how many people are working on these things internally is unacceptable because you have a right to keep the American people safe.

Senator SULLIVAN. Great. Thank you very much.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Sullivan. You may have just opened an area for another hearing.

Ms. HAUGEN. Sorry. Yes, I've strong national security concerns about how Facebook operates today.

Senator SULLIVAN. Well, Mr. Chairman, maybe we should, right. I mean, it's a real issue.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I'm not being at all facetious. Thank you for your questions on this topic and I know you have a busy schedule, but we may want to discuss this issue with you with members of our committee at least informally and if you'd be willing to come back for another hearing. That certainly is within the realm of possibility. I haven't consulted with the Ranking Member or the Chairwoman, but thank you for your honesty and your candor on that topic.

Senator Scott.

**STATEMENT OF HON. RICK SCOTT,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM FLORIDA**

Senator SCOTT. Thank you, Chairman.

First off, thanks for coming forward and thanks for coming forward in the manner that you wanted to have positive change. So that's not always what happens.

Earlier this year I sent a letter to Facebook and other social media platforms asking them to detail the harmful impacts that affects our mental health their platforms have on children and teens.

So your report revealed that Facebook has been clearly fully aware of this for awhile and the harmful impacts, especially on young women. So I think we all agree that's completely unacceptable and we've got to figure out how we protect the people that are vulnerable in this country from the harmful impacts of Facebook and other social media platforms.

So, first off, do you think there should be greater consideration for age when it comes to using any social media?

Ms. HAUGEN. I strongly encourage raising age limits to 16 or 18 years old based on looking at the data around problematic use or addiction on the platform and children's self-regulation issues.

Senator SCOTT. So I think you addressed this a little bit, but why do you think Facebook didn't address this publicly when they figured out internally that they were having an adverse impact on young people, especially young women? Why didn't they come forward and say we've got a problem, we've got to figure this out?

Ms. HAUGEN. I have a huge amount of empathy for Facebook. These are really, really hard questions and part of why I say—I think they feel a little trapped and isolated is the problems that are driving negative social comparison on Instagram, Facebook's own research says Instagram is actually distinctly worse than, say, TikTok or Snapchat or Reddit because Instagram—TikTok is about doing fun things with your friends. Snapchat is about faces and augmented reality. Reddit is vaguely about ideas, but Instagram is about bodies and about comparing lifestyles and so I think there are real questions where like Instagram would have to come in and think hard about their product or about like what is their product about, and I don't feel those answers are immediately obvious.

That's why I believe we need to solve problems together and not alone because collaborating with the public will give us better solutions.

Senator SCOTT. So do you think Facebook was trying to mitigate the problem?

Ms. HAUGEN. I think within the set of incentives that they were working within, they did the best they could. Unfortunately, those incentives are not sustainable and they are not acceptable in our society.

Senator SCOTT. Do you think Facebook and other social media platforms ought to be required to report any harmful effects they have on young people?

Ms. HAUGEN. One of the things I found very interesting after the report in the Wall Street Journal on teen mental health was that a former executive at the company said, "Facebook needs to be able to have private research," and the part that I was offended by this was Facebook has had some of this research on the negative effects of Instagram on teenagers for years. I strongly support the idea that Facebook should have a year, maybe 18 months to have private research, but given that they are the only people in the world who can do this kind of research, the public never gets to do it, they shouldn't be allowed to keep secrets when people's lives are on the line.

Senator SCOTT. So—

Ms. HAUGEN. Because to be clear, if they make \$40 billion a year, they have the resources to solve these problems. They're choosing not to solve them.

Senator SCOTT.—does that surprise you, they wouldn't put more effort into this?

Ms. HAUGEN. No.

Senator SCOTT. They knew it was going to catch up with them eventually, right?

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes.

Senator SCOTT. Why wouldn't they—

Ms. HAUGEN. Like I mentioned earlier to Senator Hickenlooper, coming in and having oversight might actually make Facebook a more profitable company five or 10 years from now because toxicity, Facebook's own research shows they have something called an integrity holdout. These are people who don't get protections from integrity systems to see what happens to them and those people who deal with the more toxic painful version of Facebook use Facebook less and so one could reason a kinder, friendlier, more collaborative Facebook might actually have more users 5 years from now. So it's in everyone's interests.

Senator SCOTT. Do you think—I've got a bill and there are a lot of bills that I think we've all talked about, but mine's called the Data Act. It's going to require expressed consent from users for large platforms to use algorithms on somebody. Do you agree with that? I mean, shouldn't we consent before they get to take everything about us and go sell it and how they send things to us?

Ms. HAUGEN. For selling personal data, that is an issue I believe people should have substantially more control over. Most people are not well informed on what the costs, the personal costs of having their data sold are and so I worry about pushing that choice back on individual consumers.

In terms of should people consent to working with algorithms, I worry that if Facebook is allowed to give users the choice of do you want an engagement-based newsfeed or do you want a chronological newsfeed, like ordered by time, maybe a little spam demo-



tion, that people will choose the more addictive option, that engagement-based ranking, even if it is leading their daughters to eating disorders.

Senator SCOTT. All right. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Scott.

I think we have concluded the first round, unless we're missing someone who is online and not hearing anyone, let's go to the second round.

Thank you again for your patience. I know you have a hard stop, I think, at 1:30. So we'll be respectful of that limitation and I'll begin by asking a few questions.

First, let me say Senator Klobuchar very aptly raised with you the principle obstacle to our achieving legislative reform in the past, which is the tons of money spent on lobbyists and other kinds of influence peddling, to use a pejorative word that is so evident here in the U.S. Congress. Some of it is dark money, some of it is very overt, but I guess the point I would like to make to you personally is that your being here really sends a profound message to our Nation that one person can really make a difference, one person standing up, speaking out, can overcome a lot of those obstacles for us, and you have crystallized in a way our consciousness here, you have been a catalyst, I think, for change in a way that we haven't seen, and I've been working on these issues for 10–15 years, and you have raised awareness in a way that I think is very unique.

So thank you not only for your risk-taking and your courage and strength in standing up but also for the effect that it has had, and I also want to make another point. You can tell me whether I'm correct or not.

I think there are other whistleblowers out there. I think there are other truth-tellers in the tech world who want to come forward, and I think you are leading by example. I think you are showing them that there is a path to make this industry more responsible and more caring about kids and about the nature of our public discourse generally and about the strength of our democracy, and I think you have given them a boost, those whistleblowers out there, in potentially coming forward. I think that is tremendously important and I think also, again you can tell me if I am wrong, there are a lot of people in Facebook who are cheering for you because there are public reports and I know of some of my friends in this world who tell me that there are people working for Facebook who wish they had the opportunity and the courage to come forward as you have done because they feel a lot of reservations about the way that Facebook has used the platform, used algorithms, used content and pushed it on kids in this way.

So those are sort of hypotheses that I hope you can confirm and I also would like to ask you because a lot of parents are watching right now. So you've advised us on what you think we should do: the reforms, some of them that you think we should adopt, stronger oversight authorized by Congress, better disclosure because right now Facebook essentially is a black box—

Ms. HAUGEN. YES.

Senator BLUMENTHAL.—for most of America. Facebook is a black box that's designed by Mark Zuckerberg, Incorporated, Mark

Zuckerberg and his immediate coterie, and the buck stops with him, and reform of Section 230, so there's some legal responsibility, so people have a day in court, some kind of recourse, legally, when they're harmed by Facebook because right now it has this broad immunity. Most of America has no idea.

Essentially you can't sue Facebook. You have no recourse. Most of America doesn't know about Section 230 and if you pushed a lot of Members of Congress, they wouldn't know either.

Ms. HAUGEN. It's actually slightly worse than that. Facebook made a statement in a legal proceeding recently where they said they had the right to mislead the court because they had immunity, right, that 230—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. —Exactly—

Ms. HAUGEN.—gave them immunity, so why should they have to tell the truth about what they're showing?

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Which is kind of—

Ms. HAUGEN. Shocking.

Senator BLUMENTHAL.—concerning. Well, it is shocking to a lawyer, which some of us are. It is also utter disregard and contempt for the Rule of Law and for the very legal structure that gives them that kind of protection. So it's kind of a new low in corporate conduct at least in court.

So you have provided us with some of the reforms that you think are important and I think that the oversight goes a long way because it in turn would make public a lot of what is going on in this black box.

But for now, since a lot of teens and tweens will be going home tonight, as you have said, to endure the bullying, the eating disorders, the invitations to feel insecure about themselves, heightened anxiety, they have to live with the real world as it exists right now, and they will be haunted for their lifetimes by these experiences.

What would you tell parents right now? What would you advise them about what they can do because they need more tools and some of the proposals that have been mentioned here would give parents more tools to protect their children? Right now a lot of parents tell me they feel powerless. They need more information. They are way behind their kids in their adeptness online and they feel that they need to be empowered in some way to protect their kids in the real world right now in real time.

So I offer you that open-ended opportunity to talk to us a little bit about your thoughts.

Ms. HAUGEN. Very rarely do you have one of these generational shifts where the generation that leads, like parents who guide their children, have such a different set of experiences that they do not have the context to support their children in a safe way.

There is an active need for schools or maybe the National Institutes of Health to make established information where if parents want to learn how they can support their kids, it should be easy for them to know what is constructive and not constructive because Facebook's own research says kids today feel like they are struggling alone with all these issues because their parents can't guide them.

One of the things I am saddest is when I look on Twitter is when people blame the parents for these problems with Facebook. They say just take your kid's phone away and the reality is the issues are a lot more complicated than that.

And so we need to support parents because right now if Facebook won't protect the kids, we at least need to help the parents to protect the kids.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Parents are anguished—

Ms. HAUGEN. They are.

Senator BLUMENTHAL.—about this issue. Parents are hardly uncaring. They need the tools. They need to be empowered and I think that the major encouragement for reforms is going to come from those parents and you have pointed out, I think in general but I'd like you to just confirm for me, this research and the documents containing that research is not only findings and conclusions, it's also recommendations for changes.

What I hear you saying is that again and again and again these recommendations were just rejected or disregarded, correct?

Ms. HAUGEN. There is a pattern of behavior that I saw at Facebook of Facebook choosing to prioritize its profits over people and any time that Facebook faced even tiny hits to growth, like .1 percent of sessions, 1 percent of views, that it chose its profits over safety.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And you mentioned, I think, bonuses tied to downstream MSIs.

Ms. HAUGEN. To core MSI, yes.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Could you explain what you meant?

Ms. HAUGEN. So MSI is Meaningful Social Interaction. Facebook's internal governance is very much based around metrics. So Facebook is incredibly flat to the point where they have the largest open floor plan office in the world. It's a quarter of a mile long and one room, right, they believe in flat.

Instead of having internal governance, they have metrics that people try to move. In a world like that, it doesn't matter that we now have multiple years of data saying MSI may be encouraging bad content, might be making spaces where people are scared, where they are shown information that puts them at risk. It's so hard to dislodge a ruler like that—that a yardstick, that you end up in a situation where because no one is taking leadership, like no one is intentionally designing these systems, it's just many, many people running in parallel, all moving the metric, that these problems get amplified and amplified and amplified and no one steps in to bring the solutions.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And I just want to finish and then I think we've been joined by Senator Young, and then we'll go to Senator Blackburn and Senator Klobuchar.

You know, I spent a number of years as an Attorney General helping to lead litigation against Big Tobacco and I came to hear from a lot of smokers how grateful they were, ironically and unexpectedly, that someone was fighting Big Tobacco because they felt they had been victimized as children. They started smoking when they were seven, eight, 12-years-old because Big Tobacco was hooking them and as we developed the research very methodically and purposefully addicting them at that early age when they believed

that they would make themselves more popular, that they would be cool and hip if they began smoking and then nicotine hooked them.

Now physiologically nicotine has addictive properties. What is it about Facebook's tactics of hooking young people that makes it similar to what Big Tobacco has done?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook's own research about Instagram contains quotes from kids saying I feel bad when I use Instagram but I also feel like I can't stop, right. I know that the more time I spend on it, the worse I feel, but like I just can't—like they want the next click, they want the next like, the dopamine, the little hits all the time, and I feel a lot of pain for those kids, right. Like they say they fear being ostracized if they step away from the platform. So imagine you're in the situation, in this relationship where every time you open the app, it makes you feel worse, but you also fear isolation if you don't.

I think there's a huge opportunity here to make social media that makes kids feel good, not feel bad, and that we have an obligation to our youth to make sure that they're safe online.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Senator Young.

**STATEMENT OF HON. TODD YOUNG,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM INDIANA**

Senator YOUNG. Ms. Haugen, thank you for your compelling testimony.

In that testimony you discuss how Facebook generates self-harm and self-hate, especially among vulnerable groups, like teenage girls. I happen to be a father of four kids, three daughters, two of whom are teenagers, and as you just alluded to, most adults, myself included, have never been a teenager during the age of Facebook, Instagram, and these other social media platforms, and therefore I think it can be really hard for many of us to fully appreciate the impact that certain posts may have, including, I would add, on the teens' mental health.

Can you discuss the short- and long-term consequences of body image issues on these platforms, please?

Ms. HAUGEN. The patterns that children establish in their teenage years live with them for the rest of their lives. The way they conceptualize who they are, how they conceptualize how they interact with other people are patterns and habits they will take with them as they become adults, as they themselves raise children.

I'm very scared about the upcoming generation because when you and I interact in person and I say something mean to you and I see you wince or I see you cry, that makes me less likely to do it the next time, right. That's a feedback cycle.

Online kids don't get those cues and they learn to be incredibly cruel to each other and they normalize it, and I'm scared of what will their lives look like where they grow up with the idea that it's OK to be treated badly by people who allegedly care about them. That's a scary future.

Senator YOUNG. Very scary future, and I see some evidence of that as to so many parents on a regular basis.

Are there other specific issues of significant consequence that the general public may not be fully aware of that are impacting vulnerable groups that you'd just like to elevate during this testimony?

Ms. HAUGEN. One of the things that's hard for people who don't look at the data of social networks every day, it can be hard to conceptualize the distribution patterns of harms or just of usage. There are these things called power logs. That means that a small number of users are extremely intensely engaged on any given topic and most people are just lightly engaged.

When you look at things like misinformation, Facebook knows that the people who are exposed to the most misinformation are people who are recently widowed, divorced, moved to a new city, are isolated in some other way.

When I worked on Civic Misinformation, we discussed the idea of the misinformation burden, like the idea that when people are exposed to ideas that are not true over and over again, it arose their ability to connect with the community at large because they no longer adhere to facts that are consensus reality.

The fact that Facebook knows that its most vulnerable users, people who are recently widowed, like that they're isolated, that the systems that are meant to keep them safe, like demoting this information, stop working when people look at 2,000 posts a day, right.

It breaks my heart the idea that these rabbit holes would suck people down and then make it hard to connect with others.

Senator YOUNG. So, Ms. Haugen, I desperately want to, which is the American impulse, I want to solve this problem and—

Ms. HAUGEN. Me, too.

Senator YOUNG.—I very much believe that Congress not only has a role but has a responsibility to figure this out. I don't pretend to have all the answers.

I would value your opinion, though, as to whether you believe that breaking up Facebook would solve any of the problems that you've discussed today. Do you think it would?

Ms. HAUGEN. So as an algorithmic specialist, so someone who designs algorithmic experiences, I'm actually against the breaking up of Facebook because even looking inside of just Facebook itself, not even Facebook and Instagram, you see the problems of engagement-based ranking repeat themselves.

So the problems here are about the design of algorithms, of AI, and the idea that AI is not intelligent, and if you break up Instagram and Facebook from each other, it's likely—so I used to work on Pinterest and the thing that we faced from a business model perspective was that advertisers didn't want to learn multiple advertising platforms, that they wanted to learn—they got one platform for Instagram and Facebook and whatever and learning a second one for Pinterest, Pinterest made radically fewer dollars per user.

What I'm scared of is right now Facebook is the Internet for lots of the world. If you go to Africa, the Internet is Facebook. If you split Facebook and Instagram apart, it's likely that most advertising dollars will go to Instagram and Facebook will continue to be this Frankenstein that is altering—like that is endangering lives around the world, only now there won't be money to fund it.

So I think oversight and finding collaborative solutions with Congress is going to be key because these systems are going to continue to exist and be dangerous even if broken up.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Young.

Senator Blackburn.

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have a text that was just put out by Facebook's spokesperson, Mr. Stone. It says, "Just pointing out the fact that Frances Haugen did not work on child safety or Instagram or research these issues and has no direct knowledge of the topic from her work at Facebook."

So I will simply say this to Mr. Stone. If Facebook wants to discuss their targeting of children, if they want to discuss their practices, privacy invasion, or violations of the Children Online Privacy Act, I am extending to you an invitation to step forward, be sworn in, and testify before this committee. We would be pleased to hear from you and welcome your testimony.

One quick question for you. What's the biggest threat to Facebook's existence? Is it greed? Is it regulators? Is it becoming extinct or obsolete for teenage users? What is the biggest threat to their existence?

Ms. HAUGEN. I think the fact that Facebook is driven so much by metrics and that these lead to a very heavy emphasis on short-termism. Every little individual decision may seem like it helps with growth, but if it makes it a more and more toxic platform that people don't actually enjoy, like when they passed meaningful social interactions back in 2018, Facebook's own research said that users said it made it less meaningful, right.

I think this aggregated set of short-term decisions endangers Facebook's future, but sometimes we need to pull it away from business as usual, help it write new rules if want it to be successful in the future.

Senator BLACKBURN. So they can't see the forest for the trees.

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes, yes.

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you. And I know Senator Klobuchar is waiting. So I'll yield my time back, and I thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Blackburn.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thanks very much, and thank you to both of you for your leadership and all three of us are on the Judiciary Committee, so we're also working on a host of other issues, including the App Store issues which is unrelated to Facebook actually, including issues relating to dominant platforms when they promote their own content or engage in exclusionary conduct, which I know is not our topic today.

I see the thumb's up from you, Ms. Haugen, which I appreciate. I think this idea of establishing some rules of the road for these tech platforms goes beyond the kid protection that we so dearly need to do, and I just want to make sure you agree with me on that.

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes, totally. I was shocked when I saw the *New York Times* story a couple weeks ago about Facebook using its own platform to promote positive news about itself. I was like wow, a new shape to our reality. I wasn't aware it was that much.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Right. And that's a lot of the work that we're doing over there.

So I want to get to get something Senator Young was talking about, misinformation, and Senator Luján and I have put together an exception actually to the 230 immunity when it comes to vaccine misinformation in the middle of a public health crisis.

Last week YouTube announced it was swiftly banning all anti-vaccine misinformation and I've long called on Facebook to take similar steps. They've taken some steps, but do you think they can remove this content and do they put sufficient resources?

We know the effect of this. We know that over half the people that haven't gotten the vaccine just because of something that they've seen on social media. I know the guy I walked into a café and said his mother-in-law wouldn't get a vaccine because she thought a microchip would be planted in her arm, which is false. I'm just saying that now for the record here—

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes.

Senator KLOBUCHAR.—in case it gets put on social media.

Could you talk about are there enough resources to stop this from happening?

Ms. HAUGEN. I do not believe Facebook as currently structured has the capability to stop vaccine misinformation because they overly rely on artificial intelligence systems that they themselves say will likely never get more than 10 to 20 percent of content.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. There you go. And yet it's a company that what, over a trillion dollars, one of the world's biggest companies that we've ever known and that's what really bothers me.

Senator Luján and I also have pointed out the issue with content moderators. Does Facebook have enough content moderators for content in Spanish and other languages besides English?

Ms. HAUGEN. One of the things that is disclosed—we have documentation that shows how much operational investment there was by different languages and it showed a consistent pattern of underinvestment in languages that are not English.

I am deeply concerned about Facebook's ability to operate in a safe way in languages beyond maybe the top 20 in the world.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. OK. Thank you. Go back to eating disorders. Today you've said that you have documents indicating Facebook is doing studies on kids under 13, even though technically no kids under 13 are permitted on the platform.

The potential for eating disorder content to be shown to these children raises serious concerns. Senator Blumenthal has been working on this. I've long been focused on this eating disorder issue, given the mortality rates.

Are you aware of studies Facebook has conducted about whether kids under 13 on the platform are nudged toward content related to eating disorders or unhealthy diet practices? CNN also did investigation on this front.

Ms. HAUGEN. I have not seen specific studies regarding eating disorders in under the age of 13, but I have seen research that indicates that they are aware that teenagers coach tweens who are on the platform to not reveal too much, to not post too often, and that they've categorized that as a "myth," that you can't be authentic on the platform, and that the marketing team should try to ad-

vertise to teenagers to stop coaching tweens that way. So I believe we shared that document with Congress already.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Exactly. Well, thank you, and we'll be looking more—speaking of the research issue, Facebook has tried to downplay the internal research that was done, saying it was unreliable.

It seems to me that they're trying to mislead us there. The research was extensive, surveying hundreds of thousands of people traveling around the world to interview users.

In your view, are the internal researchers at Facebook who examined how users are affected by the platform, is their work thorough? Are they experienced? Is it fair for Facebook to throw them under the bus?

Ms. HAUGEN. Facebook has one of the top-ranked research programs in the tech industry, like they've invested more in it than I believe any other social media platform.

Some of the biggest heroes inside the company are the researchers because they are boldly asking real questions and being willing to say awkward truths. The fact that Facebook is throwing them under the bus, I think, is unacceptable and I just want the researchers to know that I stand with them and that I see them.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Or maybe we should say, as the name of one book, the ugly truth.

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. What about Facebook blocking researchers at NYU from accessing the platform, does that concern you? These are outside researchers.

Ms. HAUGEN. I am deeply concerned. So for context for those who are not familiar with this research, there are researchers at NYU who, because Facebook does not publish enough data on political advertisements or how they are distributed, these are advertisements that influence our democracy and how it operates, they created a plug-in that allowed people to opt in, to volunteer to help collect this data collectively, and Facebook lashed out at them and even banned some of their individual accounts.

The fact that Facebook is so scared of even basic transparency that it goes out of its way to block researchers who are asking awkward questions shows you the need for congressional oversight and why we need to do Federal research and Federal regulations on this.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Very good. Thank you. Thank you for your work.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Klobuchar.

Senator Markey.

Senator MARKEY. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your incredible leadership on this issue.

As early as 2012, Facebook has wanted to allow children under the age of 12 to use its platform. At that time in 2012 I wrote a letter to Facebook asking questions about what data it planned to collect and whether the company intended to serve targeted ads at children. Now here we are 9 years later debating the very same issues.

Today, Ms. Haugen, you've made it abundantly clear why Facebook wants to bring more children on to the platform. It's to



hook them early, just like cigarettes, so that they become lifelong users, so Facebook's profits increase.

Yet we should also ask why in the last 9 years has the company not launched Facebook for Kids or Instagram for Kids? After all, from the testimony here today, Facebook appears to act without regard to any moral code or any conscience or instead puts profit above people, profit above all else.

The reason why Facebook hasn't officially permitted kids 12 and under to use its platform is because the Child Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 that I'm the author of exists, because there is a privacy law on the books which I authored that gives the Federal Trade Commission regulatory power to stop websites and social media companies from invading the privacy of our children 12 and under.

That's why we need to expand the Child Online Privacy Protection Act. That's why we need to pass the KIDS Act that Senator Blumenthal and I have introduced, and why we need an algorithmic justice act to pass because the absence of regulation leads to harming teens, stoking division, damaging our democracy. That's what you've told us today.

So, Ms. Haugen, I want you to come back to the protections that you are calling on us to enact. This isn't complicated. We're going to be told online all day with these paid Facebook people, oh, Congress can't act. They're not experts. It's too complicated for Congress. Just get out of the way. You're not experts.

Well, this isn't complicated. Facebook and its Big Tech lobbyists are blocking my bills to protect kids because it would cost them money. That's how complicated it is.

So let's start with the KIDS Act that Senator Blumenthal and I that would ban influencer marketing to kids. Today's popular influencers peddle products while they flaunt their lavish lifestyles to young users.

Can you explain how allowing influencer marketing to teens and children makes Facebook more money?

Ms. HAUGEN. The business model that provides a great deal of the content on Instagram is one where people produce content for free. They put it on Instagram free. No one's charged for it. But many of those content creators have sponsorships from brands or from other affiliate programs.

Facebook needs those content creators to continue to make content so that we will view content and in the process view more ads.

Facebook provides tools to support influencers who do influencer marketing because it gives them the supply of content that allows them to keep people on the platform viewing more ads, making more money for them.

Senator MARKEY. Yes. So I am actually the author of the 1990 Children's Television Act. What does that do? Well, it says to all the television networks in America stop preying upon children, stop using all of your power in order to try to get young children in our country hooked on the products that are going to be sold.

We had to pass a law to ban television stations from doing this. That's why I knew that after my law passed in 1996 to break up the monopolies of the telecommunications industry and allow in the Googles and the Facebooks and all the other companies, you name

it, that we would need a child privacy protection there because everyone would just move over to that new venue.

It was pretty obvious and, of course, the industry said no way we're going to have privacy laws for adults and they blocked me from putting that on the books in 1996, but at least for children I got up to age 12. That's all I could get out of the industry.

But we also know that as time has moved on they've become even more sophisticated so that the KIDS Act is necessary to stop children and teen apps from being features, such as likes and follower counts that quantify popularity.

Ms. Haugen, can you explain how allowing these features that create an online popularity contest makes Facebook more money?

Ms. HAUGEN. Just to make sure, so I am only familiar with issues regarding teens from the research I have read of Facebook's. So I want to put that caveat on there.

The research I have seen with regard to quantifiable popularity is that as long as comments are allowed, so this is not a quantitative thing, this is comments, as long as comments are still on posts on Instagram, just taking likes off Instagram doesn't fix the social comparison problem, that, you know, teenage girls are smart. They see that Sally is prettier than them, her pictures are really good, she gets tons of comments, they don't ever make comments, right, and so I do think we need larger interventions than just removing quantitative measures.

Facebook has a product that is very attractive. The reason why they have the study of problematic use is because it is kind of addictive and those kinds of things, like having lots of little feedback loops, keeps kids engaged and like I mentioned earlier, part of why Facebook switched over to meaningful social interactions was it found that if you got more likes, more comments, more reshares, you produced more content.

So having those systems of little rewards makes people produce more content, which means we view more content and we view more ads which makes them more money.

Senator MARKEY. OK. And the KIDS Act that Senator Blumenthal and I are advocating for also prohibits amplification of dangerous and violent content to children and teens.

Can you explain how algorithms pushing that dangerous content makes Facebook more money?

Ms. HAUGEN. I don't think Facebook ever set out to intentionally promote divisive extreme polarizing content. I do think, though, that they are aware of the side effects of the choices they have made around amplification and they know that algorithmic-based rankings, so engagement-based ranking, keeps you on their sites longer. You have longer sessions. You show up more often and that makes them more money.

Senator MARKEY. So do you believe we have to ban all features that quantify popularity as a starting point in legislation?

Ms. HAUGEN. As I covered before, the internal research I have seen is that removing things like likes alone, if you don't remove things like comments, doesn't have a huge impact on social comparisons. So I do believe we need to have a more integrated solution for these issues.

Senator MARKEY. OK. Should we ban targeted advertisements to children?

Ms. HAUGEN. I strongly encourage banning targeted advertisements to children and we need to have oversight in terms of I think the algorithms will likely still learn the interests of kids and match ads to those kids. Even if the advertiser can't articulate, they'll want to target on those interests.

Senator MARKEY. Right. How much money does Facebook make from targeting children?

Ms. HAUGEN. Targeting children? I don't know what fraction of the revenue comes from children.

Senator MARKEY. OK. So ultimately children are not commodities.

Ms. HAUGEN. No.

Senator MARKEY. They've always been given historically special protections. That's what the Children's Television Act of 1990 is all about. They've always been given this special safety zone so that children can grow up without being preyed upon by marketers.

When I was a boy and the salesman would knock on the front door, my mother would just say tell him I'm not home. That man is not getting into our living room. Well, I would say to my mother but you are home. Not to him, she would say.

Well, we need to give parents the ability just to say no one's home for you and your company and your attempts to prey upon children, to get into our living room. That's our moment in history and we have to make sure that we respond to the challenge.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Senator Markey, and my thanks to Senator Markey for his leadership over many years on protecting children. As you have heard, he was a champion in the House of Representatives before coming here well before I was in the U.S. Senate but around the time I was elected Attorney General. I've been very pleased and honored to work with him on legislation now going forward and I join him in thanking you.

I have just a few concluding questions and I seem to be the last one left standing here. So the good news is I don't think we'll have others.

As you may know, you do know, my office created an Instagram user identified as a 13-year-old girl. She followed a few easily identifiable accounts on weight loss, dieting, eating disorders, and she was deluged literally within a day of content pushed to her by algorithms that in effect promoted self-injury and eating disorders. Are you surprised by that fact?

Ms. HAUGEN. I'm not surprised by that fact. Facebook has internal research where they have done even more gentle versions of that experiment, where they have started from things like interest in healthy recipes, so not even extreme dieting, and because of the nature of engagement-based ranking and amplification of interests, that imaginary user was pushed or that real account was pushed toward extreme dieting and pro-anorexia content very rapidly.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And that's the algorithm.

Ms. HAUGEN. That's the algorithm.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. That algorithm could be changed.

Ms. HAUGEN. The algorithm definitely could be changed. I have firsthand experience from having worked at Pinterest. Pinterest used to be an application that was heavily based just on you following certain people's pings and those are put into your feed and over time it grew to be much, much more heavily based on recommendations that the algorithm would figure out what are you interested in.

You can have wonderful experiences that are based on human interactions. So these are human-scale technologies, not computers choosing what we focus on.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. So the average parent listening here worried about their daughter or son being deluged with these kinds of content would want that kind of algorithm changed, I would think, and would welcome the oversight that you're recommending.

Ms. HAUGEN. I believe parents deserve more options and more choices, and today they don't know even what they could be asking for.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I just received by text literally about 15 minutes ago a message from someone in Connecticut and I'm going to read it to you. It is from a dad. "I'm in tears right now watching your interaction with Frances Haugen. My 15-year-old daughter loved her body at 14, was on Instagram constantly and maybe posting too much. Suddenly she started hating her body, her body dysmorphia, now anorexia, and was in deep, deep trouble before we found treatment. I fear she'll never be the same. I'm broken-hearted."

I think people tend to lose sight of the real world impact here—

Ms. HAUGEN. Yes.

Senator BLUMENTHAL.—and I think that is the reason that you are here. I would just like to invite you, if you have any words to those other employees at Big Tech, the workers who may be troubled by the misconduct or unethical conduct that they see, what you would tell them?

Ms. HAUGEN. We live in a pattern that we have seen throughout time with regards to technologies. Humans are very crafty people. We find interesting solutions. We often get out over our skies, right. We develop things that are of a larger scale than we really know how to handle, and what we have done in the past is when we see this happen, we take a step back and we find institutions and we find frameworks for doing these things in a safe way.

We live in a moment where whistleblowers are very important because these technological systems are walled off. They are very complicated. They're things that you need to be a specialist to really understand the consequences of and the fact that we've been having the exact same kinds of false choice discussions about what to do about Facebook, you know, is it a privacy or oversight, is it about censorship or safety, but the fact that we are being asked these false choices is just an illustration of what happens when the real solutions are hidden inside of companies.

We need more tech employees to come forward through legitimate channels, like the FCC or Congress, to make sure that the public has the information they need in order to have technologies be human-centric, not computer-centric.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.  
On that note, we'll conclude.

Ms. HAUGEN. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you for an extraordinary testimony. I think that anybody watching would be impressed and much better informed and you have done America a real public service. I thank you.

Ms. HAUGEN. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. The record will remain open for two weeks. Any Senators who want to submit questions for the record should do so by October 19.

This hearing is adjourned.

Ms. HAUGEN. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 1:22 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]



## A P P E N D I X

### RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. ROY BLUNT TO FRANCES HAUGEN

*Question 1.* In your testimony, you focused in particular on the effects of Facebook’s products on children, including in terms of addiction and mental health. As a Senator who has heard from countless Missouri parents on this very issue, and as a parent and grandparent myself, this is a huge concern of mine as well. Children’s screen time, including on social media, has spiked in recent years—especially during the pandemic—and we don’t have an adequate picture of the corresponding long- and short-term harms on children’s health and development. I think better research in this area is needed, both to inform public policy and to help parents make educated decisions. That’s why, earlier this year, along with bipartisan colleagues from the Senate and House, I co-sponsored the introduction of the CAMRA Act, which would authorize the National Institutes of Health to conduct research into the effects of technology and media, including social media, on children in their cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional development.

Ms. Haugen, as both a data scientist and Facebook alumni, do you agree that the CAMRA Act would be a step in the right direction in better understanding the effects of social media on children and to help private companies design safer products? What advice would you give NIH in conducting this study, to yield accurate, informative, and useful research?

Answer. Thank you Senator Blunt, for your excellent questions and your care and consideration of the issues surrounding Facebook’s impact on our families and communities.

I do not feel qualified to speak to the merits of the CAMRA Act legislation. I do, however, support research into the effects of technology and media, including social media and on children in their cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional development. I support this because those findings are essential to informing both oversight and regulatory bodies as well as to media and social media companies who are enabling access and exposure of these products to children. I believe informed decision-making is essential.

I strongly encourage laws mandating that Facebook publicly disclose a “Firehose” of content seen by those under the age of 18 in the United States (or even by State, as the effects of Instagram are not consistent across the country). If Facebook could be required to publish 10 percent of all the public posts that were seen by more than 1000 people, along with appropriate metadata, we could confirm for ourselves that Instagram is performing as the company publicly represents. This is particularly true regarding children. *The problems on Facebook and Instagram are not about bad people or bad content—it is about an algorithm-based platform that systematically promotes the most extreme and divisive content.*

Facebook has the ability to segment users of the platform based on their interests and behavior in a manner that still protects personal privacy *e.g.*, by creating clusters with numbers rather than user attributes. I myself worked on such a project in order to understand the insidious and hard to detect practice of “narrowcasting” used in targeted misinformation and disinformation campaigns.

The harms on Instagram are not evenly distributed across the platform but rather disproportionately experienced by the most vulnerable young people using it. Given the need to understand the disparity of the problematic effects, it is important to understand what content is being delivered to the median user versus the vulnerable user. Being able to see differences in what content is viewed by different segments of children will help us understand whether and how some children are being pulled down harmful rabbit holes.

*Question 2.* Another issue I’m very concerned about is the protection of consumers’ personal data, particularly when it comes to data collected through biometric software such as facial recognition technology. From your time working at Facebook,

do you think the company is doing enough to protect the privacy and security of its users' data?

Answer. It is important to understand that there is more than one type of personal data over which users may wish to protect their privacy and security. There is personal data as publicly understood, such as an individual's real identity and confidential personally identifying information, that is overtly collected pursuant to the user agreements required to launch an app on a person's device. Facebook also collects and creates digital profiles of users and non-users through the analysis of their behavior—*e.g.*, usage history and activities. This latter category can be much more invasive as it is used for targeted advertising, marketing and platform performance, growth strategies, micro-targeting as well as for predictive modelling. I have no knowledge or information about protection over the latter type of personal data.

I do think it should be legally mandated that Facebook publicly disclose how personal data is used, including but not limited to how ads are targeted and how group recommendations are selected, because the sum of the usage of our personal data leads to radically different outcomes.

---

RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. JOHN THUNE TO  
FRANCES HAUGEN

*Question 1.* Ms. Haugen, the public's trust of big tech platforms has been significantly diminished over the past few years and rightfully so. I believe we should consider providing incentives for whistleblowers in the technology sector to shed light on some of the practices of big tech platforms to Federal regulators. One of the provisions of the PACT Act would require an assessment of establishing a whistleblower protection and award program for employees who work for social media platforms. What are the challenges you've faced as a whistleblower that you think Congress could effectively address?

Answer. Thank you, Senator Thune, for your excellent questions and your care and consideration of the issues surrounding the incentives Facebook faces and ensuring the appropriate protections for whistleblowers, such as myself, that are able to bring essential information and knowledge into the public discourse and to the attention of policy-makers, oversight and regulatory bodies.

*Addressing challenges faced by whistleblowers is absolutely critical in my opinion.*

In my own case, when I became alarmed by the information I had while working inside Facebook, I had no knowledge of any way in which I could make my concerns known to anyone who could reliably or independently consider them—let alone act to address these very serious concerns. As I have said before, if I drove a bus or worked in a hospital, there would be a phone number in my break room saying, "Did you see something that endangers public safety? Please call this number and someone will take you seriously". There is no such mechanism for employees in social media platforms writ large across the industry—and it imposes a high personal cost on the employees that work there because unless potential whistleblowers have the luxury of being able to risk their jobs or careers, they are forced to live with secrets that endanger people's lives. Even if some companies were to have internal mechanisms for reporting problematic behavior, in my experience, it is unlikely that Facebook employees such as myself would trust that mechanism given Facebook's track record of ignoring the public good.

It is a very difficult decision to come forward as a whistleblower—especially when working in a powerful global corporation with seemingly limitless influence. I struggled for a long time to find a way forward because I knew that the information needed to be in the hands of someone who could assess and act upon what was happening inside the company. This very information was actively being hidden from the public, the users, and the oversight and regulatory bodies. Further, from my first day of orientation, I witnessed the company create a culture against raising concerns with anyone lest I alienate my "Facebook family" and be labelled a traitor. In my experience, this culture of blind loyalty was pervasive and intimidating to the point that I felt I must follow the company line to succeed inside Facebook.

I know there are many people inside social media companies that have this same experience of helplessness—particularly because there are numerous examples of tech whistleblowers whose lives are destroyed after bringing forward their concerns. It is unacceptable in my opinion that there is no mechanism to safely report a concern which has potentially massive adverse effects on even one individual user.

I support any actions that will lead to safe avenues for whistleblowing. While I am very thankful for the SEC protections provided by the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 and the Dodd-Frank Act of 2010, I remained concerned *about the lack of*



*awareness of such protections for former employees like me*, as well as concern about the seeming lack of protections for whistleblowers in non-publicly traded companies which may have similar implications for user safety and security. At a minimum, we should extend the current whistleblower protections to private companies. Ideally, all employers and employees will be properly trained concerning the mechanisms by which to make lawful disclosures and the protections afforded to whistleblowers who do so.

Lastly, social media companies specifically should be held to a higher standard because they have the ability to shape our perception of reality. The scope of the danger of harm should be a factor in required standards of social responsibility. Due to the closed nature of these companies, whistleblowers are even more important, as there is no other mechanism for getting clear information out of these walled-off systems. As technology continues to accelerate faster and faster, whistleblowers will become an essential counterbalancing mechanism for society, as otherwise technology will be far further down the road before we realize what externalities it is exerting on the public and the consequences of those externalities.

It is important to remember that a whistleblower who comes forward today must weigh the public good against losing a secure future that can only be maintained by remaining silent. I strongly encourage the establishment of reward programs with whistleblower protections to offset some of this risk and to provide a way to acknowledge the public service these whistleblowers do.

*Question 2.* Facebook has stated that as part of its efforts to make its platform a healthier place for kids and teenagers, that it was looking at adding “nudges” to its platform. The “nudges” feature would be designed to nudge someone viewing potentially harmful content towards something more positive. How confident are you that this latest feature by Facebook will improve young users’ experience?

Answer. I have no personal knowledge or information about the specific “nudges” referenced in this question. However, based on my experience at Facebook and the evidence I have disclosed to the SEC and to the U.S. Congress, Facebook has a track record of publicizing efforts to make their platforms safer, though in reality there may be little improvement to diminishing harms facing users on any of Facebook’s Family of Apps. In the disclosed documents, there is an example of this behavior in the case of “Project Daisy”. Project Daisy became a PR-friendly project announcement. Facebook management decided to implement the removal of the “like” button in order to appeal to the press and the public despite the research findings that such a change would not materially reduce the harm to users. Facebook did this again with their eating disorder and self harm intervention—they claimed it was a clear indication of the commitment of the company to protecting kids, yet it only triggers hundreds of times per day rather than at a meaningful pace, because it is so narrowly tuned.

Other examples are the frequent public announcements of what content will no longer be permitted on the platform. In these instances, Facebook will announce that particular speech will not be acceptable on its platform but fails to disclose that prohibited content classifiers are used oftentimes because internally it is known that this approach is woefully inadequate. By their own research Facebook knows that content classifiers are largely ineffective or, for most languages aside from English, non-existent.

This is why Facebook must be required to publish which AI labeling systems they have, which languages they cover, and the effectiveness of those systems—language by language. The United States is a linguistically diverse country, and the public must be aware that people speaking languages beyond English will be exposed to more extreme, polarizing, and divisive content on Facebook—potentially leading to radicalization. Facebook has said and will say again that they can’t tell you which safety systems they have because “bad guys” will find out and that will be dangerous to our country. But the reality is the ‘bad guys’ already know where Facebook’s holes are because they are continuously testing where Facebook is weak. The “bad guys” are experts at exploiting the vulnerabilities of the platform which is a separate problem without adequate resources in combating influence operations and inauthentic behavior. Right now, based on my experience and understanding, the only people who are unaware of how deficient Facebook is are the “good guys” in places like the U.S. Congress, or other oversight, regulatory or law-enforcement bodies.

It was clear during my experience at Facebook, through the corporate structure and through the many experiences of my colleagues, that decisions about public statements or announcements of positive actions taken by the company are based more on anticipated receptivity by the press and the public than actual positive impact of the announced action.

Proposals to introduce “nudges” often make me nervous, because I don’t believe Facebook should be allowed to define what is “good” or “bad” content without substantial transparency and oversight from the public. However, I do think that identifying kids who are viewing increasing amounts of self harm content or eating disorder material and providing interventions is important.

As you consider this and other Facebook-proffered mitigation actions, please note that because of Facebook’s history of secrecy and misleading public assurances, today we have no idea what topics Facebook believes “nudges” are needed for, how they define those topics, or the effectiveness of the systems for identifying this content. If it is anything like hate speech, Facebook’s internal research says that only 3–5 percent of that content will be identified, with a future maximum ceiling of 10–20 percent effectiveness achieved only with substantial further investment. This is not an effective model.

Lastly, Facebook has a pattern of behavior of waiting until the pot is boiling over before intervening, rather than slowly turning down the temperature as the water warms. If the solution is based on content (as opposed to making the platform slower and more human-scale over all), I would anticipate that they would wait until there is a public perception that kids are being significantly harmed before taking and intervening actions. Substantial and unnecessary harm to children would result from such a strategy.

*Question 3.* The PACT Act would promote transparency by requiring Internet platforms like Facebook to disclose in detail their moderation and censorship practices, and give more due process to users whose content has been taken down. Do you believe this provision would help build trust with Facebook’s users?

*Answer.* *Transparency is essential for public trust.* Given Facebook has made repeated assurances about improvements to the content moderation process, such as not tolerating various types of speech while harmful content continues to be amplified on the platform, they should be required to provide detailed methodology on HOW they execute each of their public promises.

It is important for Facebook to disclose exactly which content labeling systems (e.g., hate speech, self harm, nudity, etc.) exist, which languages they exist in (including dialects), and the efficacy of those systems in each language (ex. precision and recall). I believe Facebook has all of this information already and tracks these data points internally. Right now there are widely divergent outcomes for moderation and censorship on the platform. For example: I would be unsurprised if speech that would be taken down in English was allowed to stay up in Chinese, because Chinese language issues have had radically less investment by Facebook than those in English. This is not disproportionate to the risks of harm and it is dangerous as it has resulted in, and will continue to impact, radicalization and susceptibility to disinformation campaigns.

I believe that Facebook should have to disclose samples of real content that meet each percentile of score within their systems (e.g., something that has a 50th percentile score looks like X and a 90th percentile score looks like Y), and disclose at which scores do they either take down or demote content. We have seen in Facebook’s own research that counter-terrorism speech is often misclassified as terrorism-promoting speech due to the limitations of how content-based enforcement systems operate and Facebook’s chronic under-investment in these systems. If the public could see a thousand examples once a week of each score percentile, independent analysts would be able to ensure that critical public safety information like counter-terrorism speech is not erroneously removed from the platform. This is an example of how Facebook’s over-reliance on AI versus making the platform focus on family and friends makes the platform more dangerous. Counter-terrorism speech by people you know is the most effective way to prevent radicalization and the rise of extremism.

*Lastly, Facebook must publish the code used to produce any information disclosed to the public.* I cannot emphasize this point enough. As a data scientist, I am aware of how every data analysis requires assumptions and simplifications. Facebook has repeatedly demonstrated in the past that *Facebook cannot be trusted to disclose the data they claim they are disclosing* because they manipulate data to serve their needs. They will put in assumptions invisibly behind the scenes that benefit them or support their public narratives—which hide the truth. If Facebook is required to publish how their data is produced, independent researchers can explain and verify what they claim their data is saying is what is actually occurring on the platform.

The path to trust is earned, and meaningfully increasing transparency is vital to rebuilding Facebook’s relationship with the public.

*Question 4.* As you have testified, an algorithm is not benign code that is developed in a vacuum. An algorithm is a piece of software designed by software engineers in consultation with lawyers and policy experts.

Please describe in as much detail as you are able the internal processes by which Facebook designs, deploys, and updates its content selection algorithms, and provide citations to relevant internal documents in your possession that detail these processes.

Answer. It is important to note that algorithms do not exist in isolation from other product changes. For example, having Groups with 1 million members that can inject content into your news feed in the absence of any agreement from you is a product choice that substantially increases extreme and polarizing information in a user's feed. At the same time, this is only possible because of how Facebook's algorithms are designed. For example, if Facebook designed Groups to work using Chronological ranking, they could not inject content into your feed because it would be you rather than the AI focusing your attention.

At a high level, there are two kinds of ranking changes for social media platforms—1) changes designed to improve a goal metric or metrics, and 2) integrity/safety changes that remove content or change the position of content in the feed.

At Facebook, some algorithm change ideas are instigated by product managers to achieve specific performance goals whether to increase goal metrics like Meaningful Social Interactions (MSI). Other times they are implemented to reduce harm by manipulating factors in the main scoring function or by creating rate limits. These changes are researched and tested by software engineers whose findings may become recommendations for changes to the core algorithm. Once experiments have been run, the findings and recommendations are sent to other teams inside Facebook for consideration, including the Growth and the Policy team. Decisions on whether to implement changes require agreement and approval by these and other groups in order to be “turned on” or implemented. Similarly, the impact of algorithm changes are closely monitored after launch and may be recommended to be “turned off” by various teams inside Facebook if they hurt core metrics like the # of sessions or length of sessions.

There are multiple documents within my disclosure that discuss how the process of improving algorithms at Facebook is poorly understood. Scores are not calibrated, so a piece of content might have a score from -5,000 to +100,000. As a result, safety related changes often are undone by people working on growth related changes—the right hand does not talk to the left hand, and because algorithms aren't easy to understand, safety changes regularly regress.

*Question 5.* In 2014, a peer reviewed article appeared in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences entitled “Experimental evidence of massive-scale emotional contagion through social networks.” The article revealed that Facebook had conducted a massive experiment on its platform that found that “emotional states can be transferred to others via emotional contagion, leading people to experience the same emotions without their awareness.”

To your knowledge, has Facebook conducted any other studies like these for its internal use? If so, please provide as much detail and internal documents and communications about these studies as you are aware.

Answer. I'm not aware of research related to this. I do know that engagement-based ranking will pull people together into rabbit holes where they reinforce the emotional state of each other. Many have said “the solution to bad speech is more speech”—unfortunately within a rabbit hole and whatever extreme beliefs exist there, people who question extreme content will be silenced by the group via comment pile-ons or by being removed from the group. In my experience, within groups that are united by a belief in extreme content, there is no mechanism for reporting problematic content, rendering intervention based on reporting ineffective.

*Question 6.* You have worked closely with the Wall Street Journal, a News Corp publication, to reveal thousands of internal Facebook documents. You have testified that you were the lead Product Manager on the Civic Misinformation team at Facebook, which dealt with issues related to democracy and misinformation during the 2020 presidential election. As you know, on October 14, 2020, Andy Stone, Policy Communications Director at Facebook, tweeted that Facebook would be “reducing its distribution” of an article dated that same day headlined “Smoking-gun e-mail reveals how Hunter Biden introduced Ukrainian businessman to VP dad,” published in another News Corp publication, the New York Post. Stone further tweeted that “this is part of our standard process to reduce the spread of misinformation.” However, Ben Schreckinger, a reporter at Politico, has independently confirmed that this e-mail and others uncovered by the New York Post were, in fact, authentic. Clearly,

Facebook harmed our democracy by suppressing true information about the corruption of a presidential candidate at the height of the 2020 presidential campaign.

Please describe in detail the decision-making process at Facebook when it decided to limit distribution of this *New York Post* article on its platform.

Answer. I have no information or knowledge about the post or the decision referenced above. While the story referenced likely went through Facebook's process for determining the veracity of stories via the third party fact checking program, I do not know for sure.

*Question 7.* Did you have a hand in any of the decision-making at Facebook to suppress this *New York Post* article? If so, please explain in detail your role in suppressing this article. Do you have any internal documents or communications in your possession regarding Facebook's decision to suppress this *New York Post* article? If so, please describe these documents and communications in detail.

Answer. To be clear—my team, Civic Misinformation, was *responsible for misinformation in places that **did not have third-party fact checking*** (i.e., most of the world/most languages in the world). The team that would have been tasked with assessing the accuracy of that article was the Viral Misinformation team (also known as just the Misinformation team). This team also did not have regular interactions with the Civic Integrity group, since it was within the larger Community Integrity organization.

I worked on the Civil Integrity and the Threat Intelligence teams while I was at Facebook. As such, I did not have any direct role in or knowledge of Facebook's decisions or actions related to issues of moderating U.S. focused content.

*Question 8.* What are the lessons learned from this specific experience, in your view?

Answer. Without direct knowledge or involvement in this decision, I cannot speak to what considerations were made nor what lessons were learned from the experience. Nonetheless, the internal documents make clear that the company's level of transparency to date has been inadequate and problematic.

I am a strong proponent of *non-content based solutions* because they are the only solutions that scale to linguistically diverse places, and they reduce the chance of bias on the part of Facebook on which content is actioned. Non-content based solutions are things like requiring someone to click on a link before they reshare it, or limiting chains of reshares to a depth of two (ex. Alice posts, Bob reshares, Carole reshares, now if Dan wants to reshare it, he has to copy/paste). In the case of limiting reshares to depth of 2, it has a similar impact on misinformation to the entire third party fact checking program.

---

RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTION SUBMITTED BY HON. MARSHA BLACKBURN TO  
FRANCES HAUGEN

*Question.* Are you aware of any other specific instances of human exploitation content that Facebook failed to remediate once identified? If so, why did they fail to take action (to the best of your knowledge)?

Answer. Thank you, Ranking Member Blackburn, for your care of and commitment to these issues as well as Facebook's impact on our families and communities. In my experience, human exploitation content and other extremely repugnant use of the platform were not given the resources necessary to materially address the problems at Facebook.

When I left Facebook, the threat investigator team dedicated to finding networks of Human Exploitation was composed of less than 10 employees—this team covered topics as broad as human trafficking, sex trafficking, trafficking in organs, child trafficking and labor trafficking, for every language across the platform. This illustrates that Facebook is aware that these criminal networks exist on the platform. Many journalists have written articles since the WSJ broke this story demonstrating it is trivially easy to find ads on the platform for buying and selling human beings.

The reality is that because Facebook does not have to disclose publicly which threat investigator teams exist, and exactly how many people work on each problem space and in each role, Facebook never has to invest an appropriate number of people to stop human trafficking. The documents show that Facebook took targeted action to address the concerns raised on human trafficking on the platform in 2019 only once Apple issued a letter threatening to remove the Facebook family of Apps ("FOA").

Facebook has taken a higher level responsibility because they hide information on how their platform works from the public. As a result, Facebook undertakes critical national security actions (like fighting terrorism, cartels, human trafficking net-

works) in a vacuum, because Facebook will not *allow* anyone outside the company to work with its data in this effort. When our country is subjected to targeted and pervasive information and influence campaigns conducted by hostile adversaries including nation-states, I believe this has created a very dangerous vulnerability to our national security. In contrast, Twitter allows security researchers to supervise 1/10th of all the public tweets—a very different shared responsibility for safety. If Facebook is going to insist that they alone can work on stopping human trafficking on the platform, they must be forced to disclose in detail all the steps being taken so that Congress can evaluate if those actions are indeed sufficient and proportional to the dangers that exist.

