

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 21, 2021

Mr. Jack Dorsey  
1355 Market Street, Suite 900  
San Francisco, CA 94103

Mr. Sundar Pichai  
1600 Amphitheatre Pkwy  
Mountain View, CA 94043

Ms. Susan Wojcicki  
1000 Cherry Avenue  
San Bruno, CA 94066

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

Dear Mr. Dorsey, Mr. Pichai, Ms. Wojcicki, and Mr. Zuckerberg:

In light of the emergency approvals of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna coronavirus vaccines by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), we write to urge you to increase transparency around your platforms' efforts to combat the spread of coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation and disinformation.

A successful coronavirus vaccine rollout is critical for saving lives, stopping the spread of the virus, and getting the country up and running again. Ensuring Americans receive clear and accurate information about the vaccine is vital. Since the beginning of the pandemic, reports have found that your companies have struggled with limiting the spread of coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation and disinformation in the United States.<sup>1</sup> This has resulted in tens of millions of Americans seeing harmful misinformation, including conspiracy theories.<sup>2</sup> There can be no replacement for accurate, verified information about vaccine safety, efficacy, and availability, and your companies will continue to play an important role in helping ensure Americans are not misinformed about the vaccine rollout.

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<sup>1</sup>COVID-19 Medical Misinformation Policy, YouTube Help (May 20, 2020), <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/9891785>; Casey Newton, *How another video of COVID-19 misinformation went viral on Facebook*, THE VERGE (Jul. 29, 2020), <https://www.theverge.com/interface/2020/7/29/21345138/facebook-viral-hydroxychloroquine-video-removal-trump-junior-stella-immanuel>; <https://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/social-media-platforms-combating-misinformation>.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew A. Baum et al., *The State of the Nation: A 50-State COVID-19 Survey, Report #14: Misinformation and Vaccine Acceptance*, The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (Sep. 2020), <http://www.kateto.net/covid19/COVID19%20CONSORTIUM%20REPORT%2014%20MISINFO%20SEP%202020.pdf>; Claire Goforth, *YouTube is struggling to keep COVID vaccine conspiracies off its site*, Daily Dot (Dec. 10, 2020), <https://www.dailydot.com/debug/coronavirus-vaccine-misinformation-youtube/>; Judd Legum, *UPDATE: After Population Information report, Facebook removes COVID vaccine misinformation*, POPULAR INFORMATION (Dec. 15, 2020).

While we understand that your companies have implemented policies regarding the removal of vaccine-related misinformation and dedicated resources to stop the spread of misinformation, we believe more must be done.<sup>3</sup> It is imperative that you be transparent about the amount of harmful misinformation that appears on your platforms and the effectiveness of your efforts to remove this content, so that public health organizations and experts can respond appropriately. In addition, policies must be strictly enforced to limit users' exposure to misinformation and these policies should include additional mechanisms to ensure that accurate information is elevated and actively promoted to users. Given the seriousness of this issue, we request that you respond to the following questions:

## 1) Transparency

- a. How many reports and removals of coronavirus and vaccine-related content have you processed each day, on average, since the beginning of the pandemic? What proportion of the total amount of coronavirus and vaccine-related content do you estimate these removals and reports represent?
- b. On average, how long does coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation remain on your platform after it has been marked as false content? On average, how frequently do accounts that have been previously banned for spreading coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation return to your platforms, and what enforcement procedures do you have in place to limit this type of activity?
- c. Research indicates that a small number of users account for a high proportion of vaccine-related misinformation.<sup>4</sup> What steps are you taking to address accounts with a repeated pattern of promoting coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation?

## 2) Effective Policies and Partnerships

- a. Are you alerting and redirecting users who encounter misinformation about the vaccine to trusted sources of information? Have you made any changes to, or ceased using, your "recommendation algorithms" regarding coronavirus content?
- b. For those of your platforms that have "politician exemptions"<sup>5</sup> or "opinion exemptions,"<sup>6</sup> do these exemptions apply to coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation? If so, please explain why.

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<sup>3</sup>Kang-Xing Jin, *Keeping People Safe and Informed About the Coronavirus*, FACEBOOK (Dec. 18, 2020), <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/12/coronavirus/>; Twitter Safety, *COVID-19: Our approach to misleading vaccine information*, TWITTER (Dec. 16, 2020) [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2020/covid19-vaccine.html](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/covid19-vaccine.html); *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Merchant Center policy updates*, GOOGLE ADS HELP (Dec. 1, 2020), <https://support.google.com/google-ads/answer/9811449>; Karen DeSalvo and Kristie Canegallo, *How you'll find accurate and timely information on COVID-19 vaccines*, GOOGLE (Dec. 10, 2020), <https://blog.google/technology/health/accurate-timely-information-covid-19-vaccines/>; <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/9891785>; Allana Akhtar, *Facebook, Twitter, and Google are uniting to stop vaccine misinformation from spreading online*, BUSINESS INSIDER (Nov. 19, 2020), <https://www.businessinsider.com/facebook-twitter-google-team-up-to-fight-vaccine-misinformation-2020-11>; See also Lisa Macpherson, *How Are Platforms Responding to This Pandemic?*, PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE, <https://misinfotrackingreport.com/> (for case studies on the entire lifecycle of COVID-19 moderation on major platforms).

<sup>4</sup>Davey Alba and Sheera Frenkel, *From Voter Fraud to Vaccine Lies: Misinformation Peddlers Shift Gears* N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 7, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/16/technology/from-voter-fraud-to-vaccine-lies-misinformation-peddlers-shift-gears.html>.

<sup>5</sup>Facebook, *Elections and Political Speech*, FACEBOOK (Sep. 24, 2019), <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/09/elections-and-political-speech/>.

<sup>6</sup>Veronica Penney, *How Facebook Handles Climate Disinformation*, N.Y. TIMES (Jul. 14, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/14/climate/climate-facebook-fact-checking.html>.

- c. How are you incorporating the advice of extremism researchers, disinformation and misinformation experts, and civil society groups to effectively identify, report, and modify your content curation and community moderation policies to combat coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation?
- d. Are your treatment and vaccine misinformation policies developed with the input of public health experts and civil rights organizations? If so, please list the organizations.

3) **Raising Authoritative Information**

- a. You have partnered with global health organizations, including the World Health Organization, to combat coronavirus-related misinformation. Do you have plans to initiate programs with the help of global health organizations to actively encourage coronavirus vaccinations? If so, please provide details of these efforts.
- b. What additional measures are you taking to ensure that communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus pandemic have access to accurate information about the coronavirus vaccine?

As we continue to battle this pandemic and advance a national vaccine strategy, it is vital that your platforms—which millions of Americans use on a daily basis—do not spread content that can harm the health of Americans. Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response.

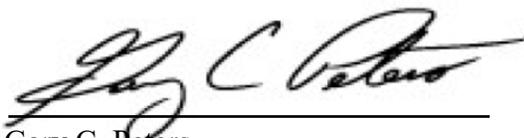
Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator