

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 20, 2023

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chief Executive Officer
Meta Platforms, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Ms. Linda Yaccarino
Chief Executive Officer
Twitter, Inc.
1355 Market Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

Mr. Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Alphabet, Inc.
1600 Amphitheater Parkway
Mountain View, CA 93043

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg, Mr. Pichai, and Ms. Yaccarino:

As we approach the 2024 elections, we write to express serious concerns about your companies' decisions to lay off employees dedicated to countering election-related disinformation on your platforms and to request information about your efforts to combat this troubling content.

According to public reports, your companies have significantly reduced the number of staff charged with addressing misinformation and disinformation pertaining to our elections. This month one report stated that Meta has only 20 percent of the number of staff who worked on election-related issues in 2020 - or 60 employees down from 300 - and that additional layoffs are planned.¹ In January YouTube reported layoffs that left just one person in charge of handling misinformation policy globally,² and earlier this month YouTube reversed its policy of taking down false claims about previous elections. Late last year Twitter cut about 15 percent of employees who work on content moderation, with additional layoffs announced earlier this year.³ The platform is reported to be facing challenges with moderating misinformation and harmful posts.⁴

Given these layoffs, we are deeply concerned about your companies' ability to respond effectively to the increasing spread of election-related disinformation in the 2024 election cycle.

¹ Sheera Frenkel and Cecilia Kang, *As Midterms Loom, Elections Are No Longer Top Priority for Meta C.E.O.*, THE NEW YORK TIMES (June 23, 2022), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/23/technology/mark-zuckerberg-meta-midterm-elections.html>; Naomi Nix, *Meta to begin fresh layoffs, cutting heavily among business staff*, THE WASHINGTON POST (May 23, 2023), available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/05/23/meta-layoffs-misinformation-facebook-instagram/>.

² Steven Lee Myers and Nico Grant, *Combating Disinformation Wanes at Social Media Giants*, THE NEW YORK TIMES (February 14, 2023), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/14/technology/disinformation-moderation-social-media.html>.

³ Matt O'Brien and David Klepper, *Twitter's pared-down staff struggles with misinformation*, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS (Nov. 7, 2022), available at: <https://apnews.com/article/voting-rights-elon-musk-twitter-inc-technology-dd4273dbda5b15343753f56c1f43a659>; Alyssa Stringer, *A comprehensive list of 2023 tech layoffs*, TechCrunch (June 5, 2023), available at: <https://techcrunch.com/2023/06/05/tech-industry-layoffs-2023/>.

⁴ O'Brien and Klepper, *supra* note 3.

This is particularly troubling given the emerging use of artificial intelligence to mislead voters. According to one report, even before recent layoffs your companies lacked sufficient policies and staff to counter disinformation during the 2022 elections.⁵ Just last month several current and former employees from Meta's trust and safety teams warned that layoffs could weaken Meta's response to viral election misinformation and foreign influence campaigns.⁶

In light of the serious risks that online disinformation presents to our free and fair elections, we respectfully ask that you provide responses to the following questions:

1. What are your company's existing procedures to address the spread and amplification of election-related misinformation and disinformation? Please describe the effectiveness of these policies and procedures and the metrics used to measure their effectiveness.
2. In advance of the 2024 elections, what additional policies and procedures does your company intend to implement to counter election-related misinformation and disinformation on your platform?
3. How is your company specifically preparing for the possible proliferation of deceptive AI-generated content about elections and candidates on your platform?
4. What steps has your company taken to improve the effectiveness of your automated content detection system in identifying misinformation in English, Spanish, and other languages?
5. How many employees at your company, including contractors, are currently dedicated to addressing election-related misinformation and disinformation on its platforms, and what are their roles?
6. How many employees at your company, including contractors, were dedicated to addressing election-related misinformation and disinformation on its platform for the 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022 election cycles, and what were their roles?
7. Do you intend to hire any additional employees, including contractors, to address election-related misinformation and disinformation in advance of the 2024 elections? If so, how many do you intend to hire and what is your timeline to bring those employees on board?
8. How have the layoffs at your company affected the number of employees who develop and enforce any policies to counter election-related misinformation and disinformation? What other effects have these layoffs caused to your company's efforts to address this type of content?

⁵ Free Press, *Empty Promises: Inside Big Tech's Weak Effort to Fight Hate and Lies in 2022* (2022), available at: https://www.freepress.net/sites/default/files/2022-10/empty_promises_inside_big_techs_weak_effort_to_fight_hate_and_lies_in_2022_free_press_final.pdf.

⁶ Naomi Nix, *Meta to begin fresh layoffs, cutting heavily among business staff*, THE WASHINGTON POST (May 23, 2023), available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/05/23/meta-layoffs-misinformation-facebook-instagram/>.

9. What disinformation policies and procedures implemented for the 2020 and/or 2022 elections have been discontinued and why?

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We look forward to your responses by July 10, 2023.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator