

United States Senate

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION
JUDICIARY
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

November 12, 2020

The Honorable Joseph J. Simons
Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Chairman Simons:

Competition is the backbone of American industry and the engine that drives our entrepreneurial spirit. Monopolies, however, cause stagnation and smother innovation. As the Commission presses forward with its ongoing antitrust investigation of Facebook, I urge that you consider interviewing former employees to target the full scope of the company's anticompetitive conduct.

I understand that Mr. Zuckerberg sat for a deposition with the Commission this summer. While that is promising, I encourage you to also speak to other Facebook executives and engineers who can reveal the company's real agenda. Many of them fear letting Facebook's dominance go unchecked can hold dark consequences for competitors and consumers alike.

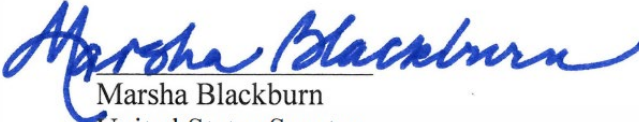
- Company co-founder Chris Hughes believes it is time to break up Facebook, which he calls a "powerful monopoly, eclipsing all of its rivals and erasing competition." On Mr. Zuckerberg's influence, he said, "Mark alone can decide how to configure Facebook's algorithms to determine what people see in their News Feeds, what privacy settings they can use and even which messages get delivered."¹
- Former Chief Security Officer Alex Stamos said Mr. Zuckerberg should step down because he holds "too much power."² He compared Facebook to "a banana republic."³
- Yaël Eisenstat, the former Head of Global Elections Integrity Operations, said, "Facebook profits partly by amplifying lies and selling dangerous targeting tools that allow political operatives to engage in a new level of information warfare."⁴
- Early Facebook investor Roger McNamee said, "In order to maximize its share of human attention, Facebook employed techniques designed to create an addiction to its platform."⁵
- Justin Rosenstein, who led the creation of the Facebook "Like" button, warned, "We are seeing corporations use powerful artificial intelligence to outsmart us and figure out how to pull our attention for the things they want us to look at, rather than the things that are most consistent with our goals, our values, and our lives."⁶
- Chamath Palihapitiya, who once led Facebook's user growth team, feared that "we have created tools that are ripping apart the social fabric of how society works."⁷
- Facebook's first president Sean Parker said the platform is "exploiting" human "vulnerability," lamenting, "God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains."⁸

Facebook makes money manipulating users' time and attention, at the cost of damaging civil society and our children's health. The social media giant still aggressively defies regulators all around the world, sacrificing user data privacy for profit and engaging in practices that unfairly undermine rivals. Each day the chorus for greater Internet safeguards only grows louder in Congress, with voices chiming in from both sides of the aisle. However, legislative reform alone cannot cure Facebook's destructive business behavior. Americans depend on the Commission to stand up to Facebook and to fully prosecute entities that violate the Sherman Antitrust Act.

Social media monopolies harm the strength of the modern American economy, leaving users with no meaningful choice for alternatives, and no space for new competitors to succeed. If there is any hope for the future of innovation, and the next generation of tech entrepreneurs, our country needs a competitive marketplace free from excessive dominance by one man or one company. To that end, as you expand your probe further, I urge you to consider the entire spectrum of options for penalizing Facebook. Their CEO is used to moving fast and breaking rules, and another fine won't be enough to get his attention.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator

¹ Chris Hughes. "It's Time to Break Up Facebook." New York Times. May 9, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/09/opinion/sunday/chris-hughes-facebook-zuckerberg.html>.

² Eric Johnson. "Don't break up Facebook—replace Mark Zuckerberg, says former security boss Alex Stamos." Vox. May 24, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/recode/2019/5/24/18637823/alex-stamos-facebook-mark-zuckerberg-ceo-kara-swisher-decode-podcast-interview-collision-conference>.

³ Will Oremes. "Alex Stamos Is Still Living the 2016 Election." Slate. Nov. 21, 2018. <https://slate.com/technology/2018/11/what-former-facebook-security-chief-alex-stamos-says-about-that-damning-nyt-story.html>.

⁴ Yaël Eisenstat. "I worked on political ads at Facebook. They profit by manipulating us." Washington Post. Nov. 4, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/11/04/i-worked-political-ads-facebook-they-profit-by-manipulating-us/>

⁵ Roger McNamee. "If Mark Zuckerberg wants forgiveness, he's going to need to come clean first." USA Today. Oct. 10, 2017.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/10/10/if-facebooks-mark-zuckerberg-wants-forgiveness-hes-going-need-come-clean-first-roger-mcmanee-column/744520001/>.

⁶ *Social Dilemma*. Directed by Jeff Orlowski, Exposure Labs, 2020. Netflix, Sept. 9, 2020.

⁷ Casey Newton. "In 2017, key Facebook creators disowned their creation." The Verge. Dec. 20, 2017.

<https://www.theverge.com/2017/12/20/16800842/facebook-2017-russia-scandal-news-feed-criticism-defectors>.

⁸ Mike Allen. "Sean Parker unloads on Facebook." Axios. Nov. 9, 2017. <https://www.axios.com/sean-parker-unloads-on-facebook-2508036343.html>.