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Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittees on Consumer Protection & Commerce and Communications & Technology

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Testimony of Mark Zuckerberg
Facebook, Inc.

I. Introduction

Chairs Pallone, Schakowsky, and Doyle, Ranking Members McMorris Rodgers, Latta, and Bilirakis, and members of the Committee,

I want to start by extending my deepest condolences to the families of the Capitol police officers who lost their lives in the wake of January 6 and my appreciation to the many officers who put themselves at risk to protect you. Their bravery stands as an example to us all. My heart also goes out to those of you who lived through the awful events of that day. The Capitol attack was a horrific assault on our values and our democracy, and Facebook is committed to assisting law enforcement in bringing the insurrectionists to justice.

I look forward to discussing the role that misinformation and disinformation play in our country's information ecosystem and the work Facebook is doing to reduce harmful content on our platform. Facebook's mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. Our services enable more than three billion people around the world to stay connected with friends and family, discover what's going on in the world, and entertain and express themselves. We build products people use to share ideas, have fun, offer support, connect with neighbors, celebrate milestones, promote small businesses and non-profits, and discuss important topics, including family, careers, health, politics, and social issues.

It's important to note that the vast majority of what people see on Facebook is neither political nor hateful. Political posts make up only about 6 percent of what people in the United States see in their News Feed, and the prevalence of hateful content people see on our service is less than 0.08 percent. While we work hard to prevent abuse of our platform, conversations online will always reflect the conversations taking place in living rooms, on television, and in text messages and phone calls across the country. Our society is deeply divided, and we see that on our services too.

We are committed to keeping people safe on our services and to protecting free expression, and we work hard to set and enforce policies that meet those goals. We will continue to invest extraordinary resources into content moderation, enforcement, and transparency.

II. Our Efforts to Combat Misinformation

People want to see accurate information on Facebook, and so do we. That's why we have made fighting misinformation and providing people with authoritative information a priority for the company. We have recalibrated our products and built global partnerships to combat misinformation on a massive scale.

We created an industry-leading fact-checking program. We work with 80 independent third-party fact-checkers certified through the non-partisan International Fact-Checking Network to curb misinformation on Facebook and Instagram. If content is rated false by one of these third-party fact-checkers, we put a warning label on it. And based on one fact-check, we're able to kick off similarity detection methods that identify duplicates of debunked stories. When content is rated false, we significantly reduce its distribution; on average, this cuts future views by more than 80 percent. If people do try to share the content, we notify them of additional reporting, and we also notify people if content they have shared in the past is later rated false by a fact-checker. Group admins are notified each time a piece of content rated false by fact-checkers is posted in their Group, and they can see an overview of this in the Group Quality tool. We use information from fact-checkers to improve our technology so we can identify misinformation faster in the future.

We also work to reduce the incentives for people to share misinformation to begin with. Since a lot of the misinformation that spreads online is financially motivated spam, we focus on disrupting the business model behind it. We take action against Pages that repeatedly share or publish content rated false, including reducing their distribution and, if necessary, removing their ability to monetize. And we've enhanced our recidivism policies to make it harder to evade our enforcement. We've also taken steps to reduce clickbait and updated our products so people see fewer posts and ads in News Feed that link to low-quality websites.

As well as taking steps to fight misinformation, we also use our platform to proactively connect people to authoritative information. We have directed over 2 billion people to our Covid-19 Information Center, and over 140 million people to our Voting Information Center. This is an important component of our work to build a healthier information ecosystem.

As one of the leading platforms where people share information and express themselves, misinformation is an ongoing challenge for us. With millions of Americans using our services every day, there will always be things we miss. However, I believe we do more to address misinformation than any other company, and I am proud of the teams and systems we have built.

Below is an overview of this work in two important contexts: Covid-19 and the 2020 presidential election.

A. Covid-19 and Vaccine Misinformation

Since Covid-19 was declared a global public health emergency, Facebook has been working to connect people to authoritative information from health experts and keep harmful misinformation about Covid-19 from spreading on our apps. As part of our efforts, we have focused on:

- Promoting reliable information by launching a Covid-19 Information Center which we showed at the top of the Facebook News Feed and on Instagram, and that we direct people to when they search for information about Covid-19. We have connected over 2 billion people to authoritative information through this resource.
- Combating Covid-19 misinformation by removing over 12 million pieces of false content, including from foreign leaders; barring entities that have repeatedly shared false information;

removing exploitative ads spreading panic about the virus or mistruths about cures for financial gain; and promoting authoritative and science-based search results.

- Providing aggregated data on symptoms and travel patterns to public health officials, researchers, and nonprofits to help them calibrate the public health response.
- Supporting newsgathering by investing \$100 million to assist local news and journalists and funding a \$1 million grant program to support fact-checkers covering the virus.

In April 2020, we started showing messages in News Feed to people who liked, commented on, or reacted to posts with Covid-19 misinformation that we later removed for violating our policy. We've redesigned these notifications to make them more personalized and to more clearly connect people with authoritative information. Now people will see a thumbnail of the post and more information about where they saw it, how they engaged with it, why it was false, and why we removed it. People will then be able to see more facts in our Covid-19 Information Center and take other actions such as unfollowing the Page or Groups that shared this content.

We are also continuing to improve search results on our platforms. When people search for vaccine or Covid-19 related content on Facebook, we promote relevant, authoritative results and provide third-party resources to connect people to expert information about vaccines.

In the Appendix are some of the alerts people see on Facebook that are designed to keep them informed and limit misinformation about Covid-19.

1. Covid-19 Vaccines

In addition to our work to combat misinformation about Covid-19 generally, we're running the largest worldwide campaign to promote authoritative information about Covid-19 vaccines specifically by:

- Providing \$120 million in ad credits to help health ministries, non-profits, and UN agencies reach billions of people around the world with Covid-19 vaccine and preventive health information.
- Providing training and marketing support to help governments and health organizations move quickly and reach the right people with the latest vaccine information.
- Providing data to inform effective vaccine delivery and educational efforts to build trust in Covid-19 vaccines.
- Helping people find where and when they can get vaccinated, similarly to how we helped people find information about voting during elections.

We're also focused on removing misinformation on Facebook and Instagram about Covid-19 and vaccines. In December, we began removing false claims about Covid-19 vaccines that could lead to imminent harm, including false claims about the safety, efficacy, ingredients, or side effects of the vaccines. Last month, we expanded the list of false claims we will remove to include additional debunked claims about Covid-19 and vaccines following consultations with leading health

organizations, including the World Health Organization. We already reject these claims in advertisements and prohibit any ads that discourage vaccines.

Groups, Pages, and accounts on Facebook and Instagram that repeatedly share these debunked claims may be removed altogether. In some instances, we are also requiring Group admins to temporarily approve all posts from other admins or members who have violated our Covid-19 policies. Claims about Covid-19 or vaccines that do not violate these policies may remain eligible for review by our independent third-party fact-checkers. If a claim is then identified as false, it will be labeled and will be demoted in News Feed.

B. Election Misinformation and Support for the Democratic Process

Facebook stands for giving people a voice, and it was important to us that everyone could make their voice heard during the election. While we were only a small piece of the broader election ecosystem, we announced a series of policies in advance to help protect the integrity of the election and support our democratic process.

As part of this effort, we worked hard to combat misinformation and voter suppression. We partnered with election officials to remove false claims about polling conditions and displayed warnings on more than 150 million pieces of content after review by our independent third-party fact-checkers. We put in place strong voter suppression policies prohibiting explicit or implicit misrepresentations about how or when to vote as well as attempts to use threats related to Covid-19 to scare people into not voting. We also removed calls for people to engage in poll watching that used militarized language or suggested that the goal was to intimidate, exert control, or display power over election officials or voters, and we stopped recommending civic Groups.

As the ballots were counted, we deployed additional measures that we announced in advance of the election to help people stay informed:

- We partnered with Reuters and the National Election Pool to provide reliable information about election results in the Voting Information Center and notified people proactively as results became available. We added labels to posts about voting by candidates from both parties and directed people to reliable information about results.
- We attached an informational label to content that sought to delegitimize the outcome of the election or discuss the legitimacy of voting methods.
- We strengthened our enforcement against militias, conspiracy networks, and other groups to help prevent them from using our platform to organize violence or civil unrest in the period after the election.

Based on what we learned in 2016 about the risk of coordinated online efforts by foreign governments and individuals to interfere in our elections, we invested heavily in our security systems and monitored closely for any threats to the integrity of elections from at home or abroad. We invested in combatting influence operations on our platforms, and since 2017, we have found and removed over 100 networks of accounts for engaging in coordinated inauthentic behavior. We

also blocked ads from state-controlled media outlets in the US to provide an extra layer of protection against various types of foreign influence in the public debate ahead of the election.

Finally, we proactively supported civic engagement on our platform. We ran the largest voting information campaign in American history. Based on conversion rates we calculated from a few states we partnered with, we estimate that we helped 4.5 million people register to vote across Facebook, Instagram, and Messenger—and helped about 100,000 people sign up to be poll workers. We launched a Voting Information Center to connect people with reliable information on deadlines for registering and voting and details about how to vote by mail or vote early in person, and we displayed links to the Voting Information Center when people posted about voting on Facebook. 140 million people visited the Voting Information Center on Facebook and Instagram since it launched. We are encouraged that more Americans voted in 2020 than ever before and that our platform helped people take part in the democratic process.

III. Our Efforts to Address Polarization and Divisive Content

Facebook’s mission is to bring people together, and we stand firmly against hate and the incitement of violence. We have industry-leading policies that prohibit such content on our platforms, and we invest billions of dollars and work tirelessly to improve and enforce these policies. We are proud of the work we have undertaken to address harmful content on Facebook, from our robust content review and enforcement program to our industry-leading Community Standards Enforcement Report, which includes hard data that we hope can inform public discourse and policymaking about these issues.

A. Efforts to Keep Hate and Violence Off Our Platform

We have taken major steps to keep our community safe. While our enforcement efforts are not perfect and there is always more work to be done, we have built industry-leading policies, teams and systems to keep hate and violence off our platform.

Our Dangerous Organizations and Individuals policy prohibits content calling for or advocating violence, and we ban organizations and individuals that proclaim a violent mission. We remove language that incites or facilitates violence, and we ban Groups that proclaim a hateful and violent mission from having a presence on our apps. We also remove content that represents, praises, or supports them. We believe this policy has long been the broadest and most aggressive in the industry.

In August 2020, we expanded this policy further to address militarized social movements and violence-inducing conspiracy networks such as QAnon. To date, we have banned over 250 white supremacist groups and 890 militarized social movements, and we have been enforcing our rules that prohibit QAnon and militia groups from organizing on our platform. We have also continued to enforce our ban on hate groups, including the Proud Boys and many others.

Moving quickly to find and remove dangerous organizations such as terrorist and hate groups takes significant investment in both people and technology. That’s why we have tripled the size of our teams working in safety and security since 2016 to over 35,000 people. Our team of experts includes 300 professionals who work exclusively or primarily on preventing terrorist and violent

content from appearing on our platform and quickly identifying and removing it if it does. These professionals possess expertise ranging from law enforcement and national security to counterterrorism intelligence and radicalization.

Four years ago, we developed automated techniques to detect content related to terrorist organizations such as ISIS, al Qaeda, and their affiliates. We've since expanded these techniques to detect and remove content related to other terrorist and hate groups. We are now able to detect and review text embedded in images and videos, and we've built media-matching technology to find content that's identical or near-identical to photos, videos, text, and audio that we've already removed. Our work on hate groups focused initially on those that posed the greatest threat of violence at the time; we've now expanded this to detect more groups tied to different hate-based and violent extremist ideologies. In addition to building new tools, we've also adapted strategies from our counterterrorism work, such as leveraging off-platform signals to identify dangerous content on Facebook and implementing procedures to audit the accuracy of our AI's decisions over time.

B. Actions to Address Content That Violates Community Standards in Groups

People turn to Facebook Groups to connect with others who share their interests and to build community. This is particularly important in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis, which makes connecting both more important and more challenging than ever. However, we recognize the importance of keeping violent and hateful content out of Groups and have taken significant steps towards that goal.

We remove Groups that represent QAnon, even if they contain no violent content. And we do not allow militarized social movements—such as militias or groups that support and organize violent acts amid protests—to have a presence on our platform. In addition, last year we temporarily stopped recommending US civic or political Groups, and earlier this year we announced that policy would be kept in place and expanded globally. We've instituted a recommendation waiting period for new Groups so that our systems can monitor the quality of the content in the Group before determining whether the Group should be recommended to people. And we limit the number of Group invites a person can send in a single day, which can help reduce the spread of harmful content from violating Groups.

We also take action to prevent people who repeatedly violate our Community Standards from creating new Groups. Our recidivism policy stops the administrators of a previously removed Group from creating another Group similar to the one removed, and an administrator or moderator who has had Groups taken down for policy violations cannot create any new Groups for a period of time. Posts from members who have violated any Community Standards in a Group must be approved by an administrator or moderator for 30 days following the violation. If administrators or moderators repeatedly approve posts that violate our Community Standards, we'll remove the Group.

Our enforcement effort in Groups demonstrates our commitment to keeping content that violates these policies off the platform. In September, we shared that over the previous year we removed about 1.5 million pieces of content in Groups for violating our policies on organized hate, 91 percent of which we found proactively. We also removed about 12 million pieces of content in

Groups for violating our policies on hate speech, 87 percent of which we found proactively. When it comes to Groups themselves, we will remove an entire Group if it repeatedly breaks our rules or if it was set up with the intent to violate our standards. We took down more than one million Groups for violating our policies in that same time period.

IV. Updating the Rules of the Internet

In my testimony above, I laid out many of the steps we have taken to balance important values including safety and free expression in democratic societies. We invest significant time and resources in thinking through these issues, but we also support updated Internet regulation to set the rules of the road. One area that I hope Congress will take on is thoughtful reform of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act.

Over the past quarter-century, Section 230 has created the conditions for the Internet to thrive, for platforms to empower billions of people to express themselves online, and for the United States to become a global leader in innovation. The principles of Section 230 are as relevant today as they were in 1996, but the Internet has changed dramatically. I believe that Section 230 would benefit from thoughtful changes to make it work better for people, but identifying a way forward is challenging given the chorus of people arguing—sometimes for contradictory reasons—that the law is doing more harm than good.

Although they may have very different reasons for wanting reform, people of all political persuasions want to know that companies are taking responsibility for combatting unlawful content and activity on their platforms. And they want to know that when platforms remove harmful content, they are doing so fairly and transparently.

We believe Congress should consider making platforms' intermediary liability protection for certain types of unlawful content conditional on companies' ability to meet best practices to combat the spread of this content. Instead of being granted immunity, platforms should be required to demonstrate that they have systems in place for identifying unlawful content and removing it. Platforms should not be held liable if a particular piece of content evades its detection—that would be impractical for platforms with billions of posts per day—but they should be required to have adequate systems in place to address unlawful content.

Definitions of an adequate system could be proportionate to platform size and set by a third-party. That body should work to ensure that the practices are fair and clear for companies to understand and implement, and that best practices don't include unrelated issues like encryption or privacy changes that deserve a full debate in their own right.

In addition to concerns about unlawful content, Congress should act to bring more transparency, accountability, and oversight to the processes by which companies make and enforce their rules about content that is harmful but legal. While this approach would not provide a clear answer to where to draw the line on difficult questions of harmful content, it would improve trust in and accountability of the systems and address concerns about the opacity of process and decision-making within companies.

Ultimately it is up to Congress and the new Administration to chart the path forward. Facebook stands ready to be a productive partner in the discussion about Section 230 reform—as well in important and urgent conversations about updating the rules for privacy, elections, and data portability.

V. Conclusion

Every day we see people using our services to come together and do good—forming supportive communities, raising money for good causes, drawing attention to important issues, creating opportunities for themselves, or simply being there for one another in times of need.

Facebook is successful because people around the world have a deep desire to connect and share, not to stand apart and fight. This reaffirms our belief that connectivity and togetherness are ultimately more powerful ideals than division and discord—and that technology can be part of the solution to the deep-seated challenges in our society. We will continue working to ensure our products and policies support this ambition.

APPENDIX: Facebook Efforts to Combat Covid-19 Misinformation

