

**Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden  
“Twitter: Transparency and Accountability”  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
September 5, 2018**

*(As prepared for delivery)*

Good afternoon and thank you Mr. Dorsey for appearing before the Energy and Commerce Committee today.

When you and your co-creators founded Twitter in 2006, you probably never envisioned the issues we are going to discuss today: so-called “shadow-banning,” misinformation, abuse, and bots, to name a few. Twelve years later, Twitter bears a great responsibility to its users, including nearly 70 million Americans.

Let’s be clear from the start: Twitter’s algorithms have made mistakes and its methods for moderating and policing content have been opaque to consumers. We’re holding this hearing to give you the opportunity to better explain your company’s actions to Congress, and, more importantly, to the American people.

I do want to take a moment to recognize that you have worked in recent weeks to reach out to conservative audiences and discuss publicly the issues your company is facing. Earlier this year, you and I had a productive conversation here in Washington, and have since stayed in contact.

As Google, Apple, Facebook and others grapple with their own controversies, I commend you as a leader amongst your peers in understanding the importance of substantive dialogue with Congress and the American people. I reiterate again my open invitation to other tech CEOs. Testifying in good faith before a scandal happens can go a long way towards building trust and goodwill.

Now, we recognize the complexity of trying to manage your service, which posts over half-a-billion tweets a day. We also understand that humans build Twitter’s algorithms, humans make decisions about Twitter’s Terms of Service, and humans recommend changes to Twitter’s policies.

And people can make mistakes.

How Twitter manages those circumstances is critically important in an environment where algorithms are set up to decide what we see in our newsfeed, ads, search suggestions, and more.

It should now be quite clear that even well-intentioned algorithms can have unintended consequences. Prominent Republicans, including multiple Members of Congress and the Chairwoman of the Republican Party have seen their Twitter presences temporarily minimized in recent months, due to what you have claimed was a mistake in the algorithm.

When you boil it down, a set of data inputs and algorithmic outcomes can shape the national conversation in the time it takes for a tweet to go viral. That's why this committee takes allegations of bias and algorithms gone awry so seriously, and you should, too.

It takes years to build trust, but it only takes 280 characters to lose it.

It is critical that you are living up to your own promises and the expectations you set out for consumers. According to Twitter's rules, the company believes "that everyone should have the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers."

That is a noble mission, and one that has enriched the world, changed societies, and given an outlet to voices that might otherwise never be heard.

It has also brought on many of the challenges we're here to discuss today.

It's worth noting that Twitter's content moderation decisions are enabled by Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, landmark legislation co-authored by this committee in 1996, and since widely credited as "the law that gave us the modern internet." Through this legislation, Congress entrusted you with broad authority to ban, promote, or deprioritize content as you see fit, without taking the kind of responsibility for what appears on your website that a publisher must.

But as we saw recently with the enactment of the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act, the Section 230 safe harbor was not intended to be an unlimited free pass. It can evolve, and Congress must maintain oversight of how the safe harbor is being used and the appropriateness of the moderating decisions it enables.

Mr. Dorsey, it is now up to you to assure the American people how Twitter continues to live up to its mission, not only through public statements but through action. We hope you can help us better understand how Twitter decides when to suspend a user or ban them from the service, and what you do to ensure that such decisions are made without undue bias. We hope you can help us better understand what role algorithms have in this process, and how those algorithms are designed to ensure consistent outcomes and a fair process.

We also expect to hear what you are doing to implement change and make Twitter more transparent for consumers.

We appreciate your willingness to appear before us today and we thank you for taking the time to help us understand this important topic.