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Opening Statement Congress on Twitter Transparency and Accountability

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[AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio]

Thank you, Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Pallone, and the Committee for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Twitter to the American people. I look forward to our conversation about our commitment to impartiality, to transparency, and to accountability.

If it's okay with all of you, I'd like to read you something I personally wrote as I thought about these issues.

And I'm also going to tweet it out -- right now.

I want to start by making something very clear: We don't consider political viewpoints, perspectives, or party affiliation in any of our policies or enforcement decisions. Period.

Impartiality is our guiding principle let me explain why.



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We believe many people use Twitter as a Digital Public Square. They gather from all around the world to see what's happening and have a conversation about what they see. Twitter cannot rightly serve as a public square if it's constructed around the personal opinions of its makers.

We believe a key driver of a thriving public square is the fundamental human right of freedom of opinion and expression. Our early and strong defense of open and free exchange has enabled Twitter to be *the* platform for activists, marginalized communities, whistleblowers, journalists, governments, and the most influential people around the world. Twitter will always default to open and free exchange.

A default to free expression, left unchecked, can generate risks and dangers for people. It's important Twitter distinguishes between people's opinions and their behaviors, and disarms behavior intending to silence another person or adversely interfere with their universal human rights. We build our policies and rules with a principle of impartiality: objective criteria, rather than on the basis of bias, prejudice, or preferring -- or preferring the benefit to one person over another for improper reasons. If we learn we failed to create impartial outcomes, we immediately work to fix [those outcomes?].

In the spirit of accountability and transparency, recently we failed our intended impartiality. Our algorithms were unfairly filtering 600,000 accounts, including some members of Congress, from our search auto-complete and latest results.

We fixed it, but how did it happen?

Our technology was using a decision-making criteria that considers [sic] the behavior of people following these accounts. We decided that wasn't fair and we corrected it. We'll always improve our technology and algorithms to drive healthier usage and measure the impartiality of those outcomes.

Bias in algorithms is an important topic. Our responsibility is to understand, measure, and reduce accidental bias due to factors such as the quality of the data used to train our algorithms. This is an extremely complex challenge facing everyone applying artificial intelligence.



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For our part, machine learning teams at Twitter are experimenting with these techniques in developing roadmaps to ensure present and future machine learning models uphold a high standard when it comes to algorithmic fairness. It's [an] important step towards ensuring impartiality.

Looking at the data, we analyzed tweets sent by all members of the House and Senate and found no statistically significant difference between the number of times a tweet by a Democrat is viewed versus a Republican -- even after all of our ranking and filtering of tweets has been applied.

Also, there's a distinction we need to make clear: When people follow you, you've earned that audience. And we have a responsibility to make sure they can see your tweets. We do not have a responsibility, nor you a right, to amplify your tweets to an audience that doesn't follow you.

What our algorithms decide to show in shared spaces, like search results, is based on thousands of signals that constantly learn and evolve over time.

Some of those signals are *engagement*.

Some are the *number of abuse reports*.

We balance all of these to prevent gaming our system.

We acknowledge the growing concern people have of the power held by -- by companies like Twitter. We believe it's dangerous to ask Twitter to regulate opinions or be the arbiter of truth. We'd rather be judged by the impartiality of outcomes, and criticized when we fail this principle.

In closing, when I think of our work, I think of my mom and dad in Saint Louis, a Democrat and a Republican. We had lots of frustrating and -- frustrated -- frustrating and heated debates. But looking back, I appreciate I was able to hear and challenge different perspectives. And I also appreciate I felt safe to do so.



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We believe Twitter helps people connect to something bigger than themselves, show all the amazing things that happen -- that are happening in the world, and all the things we need to acknowledge and address. We're constantly learning how to make it freer and healthier for all to participate.

Thank you all.