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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

September 21, 2022

Ms. Susan Wojcicki
Chief Executive Officer
YouTube
901 Cherry Ave.
San Bruno, CA 94066

Dear Ms. Wojcicki:

On September 14, 2022, Neal Mohan, YouTube's Chief Product Officer testified before the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee (HSGAC) about social media's impact on homeland security. In the hearing, Mr. Mohan testified that YouTube "worked with third party health authorities, in this country that did include the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] and FDA [Food and Drug Administration]" to create the company's policies surrounding COVID-19 misinformation.¹ These policies appear to have led to the repeated censorship of me, proceedings before the United States Senate, and news media. I write to request information and material concerning the development and implementation of YouTube's content moderation policies.

As mentioned, YouTube has censored me on multiple occasions. Your company has suspended me twice for advocating for the early treatment of COVID-19, opposing vaccine mandates for children and workers, and advocating for the vaccine injured. The following timeline highlights YouTube's censorship of me and journalists that have interviewed me.

Timeline of YouTube's Actions Against Sen. Johnson

January 2021: YouTube removes two videos of a December 8, 2020 HSGAC hearing that focused on early treatments of COVID-19.²

- YouTube removed a 30-minute summary of the hearing from my page. YouTube also removed the opening statement of Dr. Pierre Kory. Dr. Kory is from Milwaukee, WI and is a part of a group of world-renowned doctors who developed groundbreaking use of corticosteroids to treat hospitalized COVID-19 patients. YouTube gave my staff five

¹ *Social Media's Impact on Homeland Security: Hearing Before S. Comm. on Homeland Sec. and Governmental Affairs Comm*, 117th Cong. (2022) (statement of Neal Mohan, Chief Product Officer, YouTube) video available at <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/hearings/social-medias-impact-on-homeland-security>.

² My account dashboard currently has a warning associated with the two videos from this hearing that the videos violate YouTube's "community guidelines" against "medical misinformation" (screenshot on file with Subcomm.).

hours warning before deleting Dr. Kory's Senate testimony from my YouTube channel.³ A few days later, YouTube removed the same video from Fox News Now's YouTube channel, where the video had nearly 8 million views.⁴

June 2021: YouTube removes an interview of me at the Milwaukee Press Club newsmaker luncheon and suspends my account for seven days.⁵

- In an email to my staff, YouTube cited two statements that led to my account's suspension.⁶ Both statements that garnered the suspension are objectively true: ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine are both safe and effective drugs; and in June 2021, the National Institutes of Health guidelines for patients with COVID-19 were to isolate at home. Despite your censorship, the Milwaukee Press club ended up reposting the video on their own website, saying they "believe it is extremely important to provide information on topics of interest regardless of their political perspective."⁷

October 7, 2021: YouTube censors another HSGAC hearing.⁸

- On October 7, 2021, YouTube removed a video from my channel that included a series of questions asked by Sen. Rand Paul to witnesses at a December 16, 2020 HSGAC hearing examining irregularities with the 2020 election.⁹ YouTube censored Sen. Paul's questioning of retired federal judge Ken Starr regarding the results of nationwide litigation concerning alleged voter fraud in the 2020 election.¹⁰ Sen. Paul noted that the courts dismissed a number of cases on procedural grounds, never actually reached the merits of the cases, and that the results of the litigation should not be interpreted to mean that there was zero fraud in the 2020 election.¹¹ Judge Starr agreed that the courts dismissed the cases on procedural grounds.¹² Sen. Paul also raised concerns about non-legislators (e.g. State Secretaries of State) effectively changing election laws without

³ Ron Johnson, *Youtube Censored Me* (Jan. 29, 2021) <https://www.ronjohnson.senate.gov/2021/1/youtube-censored-me>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Email from YouTube Staff to staff for Sen. Ron Johnson, June 10, 2021 (on file with Subcomm.).

⁶ The first statement was "It's an incredibly safe drug - both hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin." The second statement was, "currently still the NIH guidelines in terms of early treatment of COVID is to do nothing, go home, afraid, scared, isolate yourself until you're so sick you come into the hospital where it just may be too late. That's not compassionate care, that is a nonsensical guideline, particularly when you have studies more and more of them worldwide showing the efficacy and the safety the long-term multi-decade safety of both ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine." Email from YouTube staff to staff for Sen. Ron Johnson, June 10, 2021 (on file with Subcomm.).

⁷ Milwaukee Press Club, *Milwaukee Press Club Re-Posts Johnson Video After YouTube Removed it From Club's Page*, <https://milwaukeepressclub.org/milwaukee-press-club-re-posts-johnson-video-after-youtube-removed-it-from-clubs-page/> (last visited Sept. 21, 2022).

⁸ Email from YouTube Staff to staff for Sen. Ron Johnson, Oct. 7, 2021 (on file with Subcomm.).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Examining Irregularities in the 2020 Election: Hearing Before the S. Homeland Sec. and Governmental Affairs Comm.*, 117th Cong. 25-27 (2020) <https://www.congress.gov/116/chr/CHRG-116shrg43071/CHRG-116shrg43071.pdf>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

input from state legislators.¹³ YouTube told my staff that they removed the clip because it “alleges widespread fraud or errors that changed the outcome of the 2020 US Presidential Election.”¹⁴ The video was uploaded on December 20, 2020, meaning YouTube waited nearly a year to remove the video.

October 22, 2021: YouTube censors and suspends a Wisconsin journalist for interviewing me.

- On October 22, 2021, YouTube suspended the account of Dan O’Donnell, a Wisconsin talk show host for one week after he posted an interview with me.¹⁵ In that interview, I discussed a number of issues including my opposition of vaccine mandates, my concern for the FDA’s rushed approval of the vaccination for children, and other newsworthy topics of interest to my constituents.¹⁶ In its communications to Mr. O’Donnell informing him of the suspension, YouTube reportedly wrote, “we know that this might be disappointing, but it’s important to us that YouTube is a safe place for all.”¹⁷ YouTube explained further that it “doesn’t allow claims about COVID-19 vaccinations that contradict expert consensus from local health authorities or the World Health Organization.”¹⁸

November 12, 2021: YouTube suspends me again.

- On November 12, 2021, YouTube suspended my channel again for one week and removed a video of a November 2, 2021 roundtable I convened.¹⁹ The roundtable brought together medical experts from across disciplines that advocated for early treatment of COVID-19, discussed the importance of natural immunity, heard stories on the disastrous consequences of vaccine mandates, highlighted the lack of transparency from the federal health agencies, and gave a voice to the vaccine injured.²⁰ During the panel discussion, I cited government data from the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS), had a conversation with doctors and other frontline medical professionals that have actually treated COVID-19 patients, and heard about the experiences of the vaccine injured.²¹ YouTube pulled down the full three-plus hour roundtable, but left online a 34-minute highlight clip of the round table.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Email from YouTube leg affairs to staff for Sen. Ron Johnson, Oct. 7, 2021 (on file with Subcomm.).

¹⁵ Dan O’Donnell, Maclver Institute, *The Censors Come for Ron Johnson (Again)* (Oct. 22, 2021) <https://www.maciverinstitute.com/2021/10/the-censors-come-for-ron-johnson-again/>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Ron Johnson (@SenRonJohnson), TWITTER (Nov. 12, 2021, 9:23 AM), <https://twitter.com/SenRonJohnson/status/1459346100691873795>.

²⁰ Toria Barnhart, Newsweek, *YouTube Suspends Senator Ron Johnson for a Week Over COVID Misinformation* (Sept. 21, 2022) <https://www.newsweek.com/youtube-suspends-senator-ron-johnson-week-over-covid-misinformation-1648942>; Ron Johnson (@SenRonJohnson), TWITTER (Nov. 12, 2021, 9:23 AM), <https://twitter.com/SenRonJohnson/status/1459346100691873795>.

²¹ Toria Barnhart, Newsweek, *YouTube Suspends Senator Ron Johnson for a Week Over COVID Misinformation* (Sept. 21, 2022) <https://www.newsweek.com/youtube-suspends-senator-ron-johnson-week-over-covid-misinformation-1648942>.

During the September 14, 2022 HSGAC hearing I read the following two quotes that President Biden said on July 21, 2021.²² The first was, “You’re not going to get COVID if you have these vaccinations.”²³ The second was, “If you’re vaccinated, you’re not going to be hospitalized, you’re not going to be in an ICU unit, and you’re not going to die.”²⁴ There is no doubt that these two statements are false. I asked Mr. Mohan and the witnesses from the other social media companies whether your companies ever flagged President Biden as a spreader of misinformation.²⁵ No one even attempted to answer my question.²⁶

YouTube has displayed a troubling track record of censoring a sitting United States Senator, the proceedings of the United States Senate, journalists that interview me, and the display of data that is entirely generated from U.S. government health agencies. In the September 14, 2022 HSGAC hearing, Mr. Mohan committed to “shar[ing] how YouTube developed” its COVID-19 misinformation policy.²⁷ In light of Mr. Mohan’s commitment to me, I request the following information and material:

1. Mr. Mohan testified that YouTube worked with U.S. health authorities, including the CDC and FDA to develop its COVID-19 misinformation policies.²⁸ Please provide:
 - a. The complete list of U.S. health agencies YouTube worked with on the development of its COVID-19 misinformation policies;
 - b. The names of officials at each of the federal health agencies that YouTube worked with on the development of its COVID-19 misinformation policies; and
 - c. All communications with employees of federal health agencies referring or relating to the development, implementation, or application, of YouTube’s COVID-19 misinformation policies from January 2020 to the present.
2. All documents and communications, internal and external of YouTube, referring or relating to YouTube’s removal of videos associated with HSGAC’s December 8, 2020 hearing in January 2021. Please provide the relevant documents for the removal of videos associated with this hearing from:
 - a. My account; and
 - b. Any account associated with Fox News.

²² *Social Media’s Impact on Homeland Security: Hearing Before S. Comm. on Homeland Sec. and Governmental Affairs*, 117th Cong. (2022) video available at <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/hearings/social-medias-impact-on-homeland-security>.

²³ The White House, *Remarks by President Biden in a CNN Town Hall with Don Lemon* (July 22, 2021) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/07/22/remarks-by-president-biden-in-a-cnn-town-hall-with-don-lemon/>.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Social Media’s Impact on Homeland Security: Hearing Before S. Comm. on Homeland Sec. and Governmental Affairs*, 117th Cong. (2022) (question by Sen. Ron Johnson, Ranking Member, *Permanent Subcomm. on Investigations*) video available at <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/hearings/social-medias-impact-on-homeland-security>.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.* (statement of Neal Mohan, Chief Product Officer, YouTube) video available at <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/hearings/social-medias-impact-on-homeland-security>.

²⁸ *Id.*

3. All documents and communications, internal and external of YouTube, referring or relating to YouTube's June 2021 suspension of my page or removal of videos associated with my interview with the Milwaukee Press Club.
4. All documents and communications, internal and external of YouTube, referring or relating to YouTube's October 2021 removal of videos from my page associated with the HSGAC hearing held on December 16, 2020.
5. All documents and communications, internal and external of YouTube, referring or relating to YouTube's October 2021 suspension of Dan O'Donnell or removal of his interview with me.
6. All documents and communications, internal and external of YouTube, referring or relating to YouTube's November 2021 suspension of my page or removal of videos associated with a roundtable I held on November 2, 2021.
7. Provide all instances in which YouTube labeled content posted by President Biden or any White House affiliated account operated by the Biden administration as misinformation.

Thank you for your attention to this important request. Please produce all responsive material by October 5, 2022. I look forward to receive a prompt and complete response.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson
Ranking Member
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

cc: The Honorable Jon Ossoff
Chairman
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations