Republicans dig into Facebook and Twitter over concerns of ‘conservative bias’

On Wednesday, a panel of mostly Republicans, led by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX), laid into representatives from Facebook and Twitter over concerns that conservative speech is actively being censored on both platforms.

Representatives from Facebook and Twitter sparred with Republican lawmakers for hours at the Senate hearing where Cruz, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee’s panel on the Constitution, pressured industry representatives over deep concerns he and his colleagues have that social media platforms actively censor conservative political speech. But all of the evidence Republicans provided were anecdotal stories that representatives from the companies were able to clearly explain away by citing their respective content policies or investigations into specific takedowns.

In his opening statement, Cruz said, “Not only does Big Tech have the power to silence voices with which they disagree, but Big Tech likewise has the power to collate a person’s feed so they only receive the news that comports with their own political agenda.”

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The entire premise of the hearing, conservative bias, was rebuked by the subcommittee’s ranking member Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI), who was one of only two Democrats who took their seat at the dais throughout the hearing. “We cannot simply allow the Republican Party to harass tech companies into weakening content moderation policies that already fail to remove

hateful, dangerous, and misleading content," Hirono said. "If conservatives have had their content removed, maybe they should look at the content they're posting."

Last week, Republicans were up in arms after the Twitter account for pro-life film, *Unplanned*, was suspended from Twitter. Cruz, Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO), and Vice President Mike Pence were only a few conservatives who voiced their concerns over the suspension on Twitter. But shortly after the account was taken down, Twitter reinstated it, and at the hearing today, Twitter's director of public policy and philanthropy, Carlos Monje, explained that the individual who created the *Unplanned* account had previously operated an account that had broken Twitter's rules.

In his prepared testimony, Monje said, "The account was caught in our automated systems used to detect ban evasion. Ban evasion occurs when an individual registers for a new account despite having been suspended previously for breaking our rules."

The concern over the alleged conservative bias doesn't run deep across the Republican party. More libertarian-leaning conservative groups like Americans for Prosperity have spent the last few days calling out Republicans like Cruz over the premise of Wednesday's hearing.

"We risk turning online platforms into 8-Chan"
"Senator Cruz is right: tech companies ought to provide an open platform for speech across the political and ideological spectrum. But asking the government to police online speech – either through direct action or by cajoling private firms – sets a dangerous precedent that will undermine essential elements of free speech," Billy Easley, a senior tech policy analyst for conservative advocacy group Americans for Prosperity, said in a statement.

At the beginning of the hearing, Cruz suggested that this

perceived bias could be remedied through changes to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, antitrust action, or charging companies like Facebook and Twitter for fraud, because Cruz suggested users who access these platforms are not aware that the algorithms are “bias” to specific political opinions.

“If we prevent online platforms from removing objectionable content, we risk turning online platforms into 8-Chan,” said Carl Szabo, general counsel for NetChoice. “Section 230 was specifically created to enable private platforms to remove offensive content.”

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