

U.S. Sens. Baldwin: Along with U.S. Sens. Klobuchar and Peters urge tech industry leaders to combat coronavirus vaccine misinformation

Posted on Monday, Jan 25, 2021

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), a member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, joined Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Gary Peters (D-MI) in sending a letter to Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, Google CEO Sundar Pichai, YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki, and Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg urging them to increase transparency around their platforms' efforts to combat the spread of coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation and disinformation.

The letter requests information regarding the extent of existing coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation. It also asks the companies to provide updates on new policies and encourages partnerships with public health, civil rights organizations, extremism researchers, disinformation experts, and civil society groups to effectively protect users.

The Senators wrote, *“Ensuring Americans receive clear and accurate information about the vaccine is vital. Since the beginning of the pandemic, reports have found that your companies have struggled with limiting the spread of coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation and disinformation in the United States. This has resulted in tens of millions of Americans seeing harmful misinformation, including conspiracy theories. There can be no replacement for accurate, verified information about vaccine safety, efficacy, and availability, and your companies will continue to play an important role in helping ensure Americans are not misinformed about the vaccine rollout.”*

Full text of the letter is below and [here](#). An online version of this release is available [here](#).

Dear Mr. Dorsey, Mr. Pichai, Ms. Wojcicki, and Mr. Zuckerberg:

In light of the emergency approvals of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna coronavirus vaccines by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), we write to urge you to increase transparency around your platforms' efforts to combat the spread of coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation and disinformation.

A successful coronavirus vaccine rollout is critical for saving lives, stopping the spread of the virus, and getting the country up and running again. Ensuring Americans receive clear and accurate information about the vaccine is vital. Since the beginning of the pandemic, reports have found that your companies have struggled with limiting the spread of coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation and disinformation in the United States. This has resulted in tens of millions of Americans seeing harmful misinformation, including conspiracy theories. There can be no replacement for accurate, verified information about vaccine safety, efficacy, and availability, and your companies will continue to play an important role in helping ensure Americans are not misinformed about the vaccine rollout.

While we understand that your companies have implemented policies regarding the removal of vaccine-related misinformation and dedicated resources to stop the spread of misinformation, we believe more must be done. It is imperative that you be transparent about the amount of harmful misinformation that appears on your platforms and the effectiveness of your efforts to remove this content, so that public health organizations and experts can respond appropriately. In addition, policies must be strictly enforced to limit users' exposure to misinformation and these policies should include additional mechanisms to ensure that accurate information is elevated and actively promoted to users. Given the seriousness of this issue, we request that you respond to the following questions:

1. Transparency

- 1. How many reports and removals of coronavirus and vaccine-related content have you processed each day, on average, since the beginning of the pandemic? What proportion of the total amount of coronavirus and vaccine-related content do you estimate these removals and reports*

represent?

- 2. On average, how long does coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation remain on your platform after it has been marked as false content? On average, how frequently do accounts that have been previously banned for spreading coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation return to your platforms, and what enforcement procedures do you have in place to limit this type of activity?*
- 3. Research indicates that a small number of users account for a high proportion of vaccine-related misinformation. What steps are you taking to address accounts with a repeated pattern of promoting coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation?*

1. Effective Policies and Partnerships

- 1. Are you alerting and redirecting users who encounter misinformation about the vaccine to trusted sources of information? Have you made any changes to, or ceased using, your "recommendation algorithms" regarding coronavirus content?*
- 2. For those of your platforms that have "politician exemptions" or "opinion exemptions," do these exemptions apply to coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation? If so, please explain why.*
- 3. How are you incorporating the advice of extremism researchers, disinformation and misinformation experts, and civil society groups to effectively identify, report, and modify your content curation and community moderation policies to combat coronavirus and vaccine-related misinformation?*
- 4. Are your treatment and vaccine misinformation policies developed with the input of public health experts and civil rights organizations? If so, please list the organizations.*

1. Raising Authoritative Information

- 1. You have partnered with global health organizations, including the World Health Organization, to combat coronavirus-related misinformation. Do you have plans to initiate programs with the help of global health organizations to actively encourage coronavirus vaccinations? If so, please provide details of these efforts.*
- 2. What additional measures are you taking to ensure that communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus pandemic have access to accurate information about the coronavirus vaccine?*

As we continue to battle this pandemic and advance a national vaccine strategy, it is vital that your platforms—which millions of Americans use on a daily basis—do not spread content that can harm the health of Americans. Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response.