

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1309

January 15, 2021

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chief Executive Officer
Facebook
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We write to request that you take immediate action to remove advertisements from companies promoting and selling products designed to equip white nationalists, neo-Nazis and other domestic extremist organizations to engage in violent insurrection and seditious conspiracy against the Constitution of the United States of America, the United States Government, State and local governments, members of the U.S. Armed Forces, law enforcement officers and civil servants who patriotically serve our Nation.

The deadly January 6, 2021 attack on the United States Capitol resulted in the brutal murder of a United States Air Force Veteran who bravely protected a symbol of democracy while serving as a U.S. Capitol Police Officer. However, as tragic as this violent insurrection was, it could have been much worse. The improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) safely detonated were real pipe bombs, not dummy devices. Subsequent criminal investigations have uncovered caches of firearms and explosive devices brought to the District of Columbia by domestic enemies of the United States that have demonstrated a willingness to commit acts of domestic terrorism.

Facebook must hold itself accountable for how domestic enemies of the United States have used the company's products and platform to further their own illicit aims. Whether through negligence or with full knowledge, Facebook is placing profit ahead of our Nation's democracy. Advertisements of semi-automatic rifles and body armor appearing alongside of news coverage of the January 6, 2021 deadly violent insurrection are outrageous. Facebook must disavow and actively shun customers that sought to block the execution of the Electoral Count Act. We hope that you share our outrage over the chilling reality that violent insurrectionists and seditious inflicted death and injury against law enforcement that renders the peaceful transfer of power an impossibility.

We are deeply disappointed that based on the existing facts and circumstances, we have little confidence in your company or your corporate leadership. It appears that Facebook has yet to reflect on, let alone accept, the company's vast power to not only incubate and spread extremism, but serve as an operational tool to conduct planning and procure tactical equipment.

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For example, Facebook's Chief Operating Officer's (COO) recent denial that your company serves as a platform for organizations and individuals that engaged in insurrection and seditious conspiracy appeared demonstrably false and at odds with observed use of your platform.

Denying that a demand exists among Facebook's user base for this content, and that Facebook profits from such engagement and advertisers, indicates a troubling failure among your firm's upper management to understand, or even accept, the reality that some users have found your company's products to be effective in advancing illicit aims.

The public comments of your COO are even more perplexing in light of a public report that your own employees internally flagged advertisements featuring semi-automatic rifles and selling body armor and other equipment as irresponsible and dangerous. According to this report, certain Facebook employees used your company's internal forum to highlight the threat of this activity, both to our national security and Facebook's own corporate reputation:

- *“IMO it's a set of products we'd be better off not advertising, especially not when combined with a rifle in the graphic, and it is at best terrible timing”*
- *“This looks serious to me because it can be read as 1) us profiting off of the events 2) encouraging people to take some kind direction to the events”*

Such statements are clear evidence that Facebook employs responsible individuals who recognize national security threats. Facebook should listen to these individuals and empower its personnel to implement corrective action against extremist organizations.

From cold medicine to entire product lines, private industries and companies often take action to place physical controls or even cease selling certain products when it becomes clear that a subset of consumers are using such goods or services to advance illicit activity that is deadly and dangerous. Facebook must do the same.

January 6, 2021 was a wakeup call that we must never take our Republic for granted. It is incumbent upon all Americans to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. The excuses must end. The falsehoods must cease. It is long past time for Facebook to take accountability and action. Accordingly, we request that you act decisively to:

1. Immediately develop and execute a Facebook policy permanently prohibiting advertisements of products that a reasonable observer would interpret as primarily designed for use in lethal tactical operations and armed combat;

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2. Hire an independent, outside law firm – and provide it with 100 percent access – to conduct a comprehensive review of Facebook’s role in supporting, aiding or hosting individuals and organizations that attacked the United States Capitol and sought to assassinate the Vice President of the United States on January 6, 2021; and
3. Add a member to your Board of Directors with extensive experience and expertise in matters of domestic terrorism, violent extremism and terrorist networks – particularly in regard to how violent extremists and conspiracy theorists have used Facebook and other social media platforms to enhance recruitment, propaganda and planning – to make sure your corporate governance is informed by a true subject matter expert on this grave and emerging danger that threatens your legacy; Facebook’s reputation and bottom line; and most importantly, our Nation’s constitutional order.

Please provide a response to our urgent request no later than Tuesday, January 19, 2021.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator