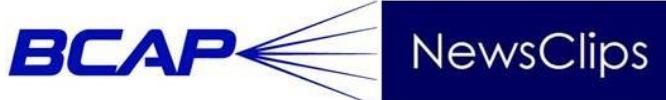


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March 26, 2021

Politico
[VA asking California if net neutrality law will snag veterans' health app](#)

U.S. House lawmakers trained bipartisan anger at the CEOs of Facebook, Twitter and Google on Thursday for allowing the spread of disinformation and harmful content on their social media platforms, providing the strongest statements yet that Congress intends to strengthen a key internet liability law to hold tech companies accountable.

Bloomberg
[Disney+, Netflix Hikes Bring Cost of Cord-Cutter Package to \\$92](#)

Rep. Mike Doyle, D-Forest Hills, who led off the lengthy hearing, told the panel that the Jan. 6 attack at the U.S. Capitol was "started and was nourished on your platforms" despite Silicon Valley's claims of reforms, demanding the country's most influential social media platforms that lawmakers would "legislate to stop this — the stakes are simply too high." "You have the means, but, time after time, you are picking engagement and profit over the health and safety of your users, our nation and our democracy," Mr. Doyle said at the start of a nearly six-hour hearing before the House Energy and Commerce Committee. "The power of this technology is awesome — and terrifying," Mr. Doyle added. "And each of you has failed to your users and the world from the worst consequences of your creations."

Fierce Video
[March Madness logs 1B minutes streamed across first two days](#)

The committee's hearing, the first with social media CEOs since a mob stormed the legislative chambers two months ago, parsed the root causes of disinformation on the internet as, Mr. Doyle said, waves of dangerous content continues to spread. Mr. Doyle, who chairs the panel's subcommittee on communications and technology, has [called for lawmakers](#) to strengthen Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act, which currently shields social media companies from lawsuits for user-generated content.

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

Section 230 provides broad legal immunity to publishers of user-generated content, while also encouraging those publishers to moderate discussions and

Gov. Wolf hints that vaccination phases could fade in light of open eligibility goal

The Markup

We ran tests on every state's COVID-19 vaccine website. Pennsylvania's vaccine portal performance had the second-lowest score for accessibility in our tests.

Fox News

The Pro-Biden press corps is deeply embarrassing – just look at these follow up questions

Reuters

Conservative news outlets, accused of election falsehoods, air disclaimers

develop systems to flag inappropriate or illegal activity. The law has been widely credited with allowing the internet to thrive, and Mr. Doyle and other critics have no plans of entirely repealing it. Scrutiny of that law has grown from both parties — albeit for different reasons — as public distrust of social media has grown in recent years.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, tech platforms have come to rule everyday American society, leading to increased reliance on online shopping to the proliferation of virtual meetings to social media as a way to connect. (The hearing itself, called “Disinformation Nation: Social Media’s Role in Promoting Extremism and Misinformation,” was held virtually, with all members and the CEOs appearing via Cisco Webex.)

Republicans have taken aim at Section 230 on behalf of former President Donald Trump, who was banished from major social media platforms after a mob of his supporters stormed the Capitol using Mr. Trump’s claims of unproven election fraud. Twitter had flagged Mr. Trump’s tweets about his loss in the 2020 presidential election for months before barring him permanently in January.

In December, Mr. Trump vetoed the annual defense bill, in part because lawmakers refused to repeal Section 230. Both chambers of Congress voted to override his veto. “You censor political viewpoints you disagree with,” said Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., the top Republican on the full committee. “You fail to promote the battle of ideas and free speech.” Ms. Rodgers said, even more than that, social media platforms influence on young people, from the threat of online predators to depression and suicide among children and teenagers. She echoed other Republicans who expressed frustration that tech platforms were targeting children under 13 even as they had failed to stem bullying, sexual harassment, drug sales, and other illegal online content. “Remember, our kids — the users — are the product,” Ms. Rodgers said. “You, Big Tech, are not advocates for children. You exploit and profit off of them.”

It remains to be seen whether Congress can translate bipartisan anger seen during another high-profile hearing into action. Lawmakers would have to tackle thorny legal issues, including free speech and telecommunications policy that touches every American with a screen, on top of issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and a looming \$3 trillion infrastructure and stimulus package this spring.

But both parties appeared ready to act Thursday, with lawmakers’ patience wearing thin. The CEOs have answered lawmakers’ questions several times now. Since 2018, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has appeared before Congress six times, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey has appeared four times, and Google’s Sundar Pichai has appeared three times. “The business model itself has become the problem, and the time for self-regulation is over,” Rep. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., said. “It’s time we legislate to hold you accountable. That’s what we’re going to do.”

Mr. Zuckerberg stated in prepared remarks at the start of the hearing that he would support changing the liability law. And Facebook, which owns Instagram, has run advertisements in recent months in support of updating internet regulations. He argued that instead of automatically being granted immunity from lawsuits, online platforms should be required to “demonstrate that they have systems in place for identifying unlawful content and removing it.”

Mr. Zuckerberg highlighted Facebook’s actions, stating the social media network has banned more than 250 white supremacist groups and 890 militarized social movements, and has worked to block QAnon, the Proud Boys and militia groups from using Facebook to mobilize support. During the election, Facebook partnered with election officials to encourage voter engagement by removing false claims about polling conditions and displaying

warnings on more than 150 million pieces of content after review by its independent fact-checkers.

Meanwhile, Mr. Pichai of Google, which owns YouTube, told lawmakers that Section 230 reform could threaten its ability to legally remove harmful content. Section 230 is “foundational to the open web, which has been a powerful force for good for so many,” Mr. Pichai said. Mr. Dorsey said he generally supported Section 230 reform but the specifics would be complex. “Some of you will say we are doing too much and removing free speech rights,” he said. “Some of you will say we are not doing enough and end up causing more harm. Both points of view are reasonable and worth exploring.” Mr. Doyle argued the companies had clearly not done enough. He said his office had continued to find content that promotes disinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine and hateful content. “You can take down this content, you can reduce division, you can fix this — but you choose not to,” Mr. Doyle said.

During questioning, Mr. Doyle asked the CEOs whether their platforms bore any responsibility for the Capitol riots. Mr. Zuckerberg and Mr. Pichai would not give a “yes” or “no” answer, while Mr. Dorsey said “yes.” “My point is I think the responsibility here lies with the people who took the actions to break the law and do the insurrection,” Mr. Zuckerberg said. “And secondarily, also, the people who spread that content — including the president, but others as well — with repeated rhetoric over time, saying the election was rigged and encouraging people to organize, I think that those people bear the primary responsibility.” “But your platforms supercharged that,” Mr. Doyle responded. “Many of us just find it unacceptable.”

Mr. Doyle then asked about false vaccine information on their platforms. Just a dozen accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram account for 65% of all the vaccine disinformation, he said. “Look at it today and get back to us tomorrow, because those still exist,” Mr. Doyle told Mr. Zuckerberg. “We found them just last night.”

Rep. John Joyce, R-Blair, demanded to know why some of his constituents, including the Adams County Republican Party, had lost access to his Facebook account in December. He said Facebook and Twitter should gather data on the political leanings of the accounts that are removed. Mr. Zuckerberg said Facebook was working to make its appeals process better, but pushed back against collecting political affiliation. “I don’t know that most people would want us to collect data on whether they’re a Democrat or Republican,” he said.
— *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

While the general consensus is that 2021 broadband subscriber growth will slow to 2019-like levels and avoid a repeat of the explosive growth seen in a pandemic-marked 2020, a top industry analyst believes that a string of federal stimulus projects could provide a surprising boost to the US broadband industry. "New stimulus measures are aimed for the first time not just at rural broadband expansion but also at urban broadband affordability," MoffettNathanson analyst Craig Moffett noted in his latest report on the US broadband industry.

The new measures, he points out, target consumers who were unable to continue service after the FCC's Keep Americans Connected Pledge expired. "The stimulus package will likely also boost household formation. And, like everything about the new stimulus package... the numbers are BIG," he wrote. Among those big numbers is the [\\$1.9 trillion affixed to the federal COVID-19 relief act](#). "We have rarely heard it mentioned as a potential driver of broadband growth. It should be," Moffett explained.

Another potential driver, he adds, is the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBBP), a \$3.2 billion temporary program designed to address the connectivity needs of low-income households during the pandemic. "This program alone would be enough to significantly shift expectations for 2021," Moffett wrote. Other initiatives he views as helping to push the broadband

needle include the Emergency Connectivity Fund/E-Rate Program and the American Rescue Plan Act, which will provide billions for state and local governments to invest in capital projects tied to remote work, education, and health monitoring in response to the pandemic. "To be clear, not all of this will be for broadband. But some of it will be," Moffett said.

To provide a sense of the magnitude of these proposals, Moffett notes that the first phase of the Rural Digital Opportunities Fund (RDOF) awarded about \$9.2 billion, including about [\\$1.2 billion in government support to Charter Communications](#). MSO involvement in future broadband-related government programs can't be discounted. "Cable is not usually viewed as a meaningful beneficiary of federal handouts. This time, it should be," Moffett explained.

He also believes that these stimulus programs should "overwhelm the consensus risk of regulation" under the new Biden administration. "Up to now, almost all of the focus on the new administration has been on regulatory risk, and, in particular, on the prospects for Title II reclassification and whether that reclassification could lead to price regulation," Moffett explained. "Not enough attention has been paid to the upside potential from stimulus spending."

Still, pressure is already mounting for the FCC to reinstate network neutrality rules – Mozilla and Reddit are part of a group urging the Commission to take up the effort, though [Multichannel News reports](#) that the situation will likely stay in neutral until there's a Democratic majority on the FCC. Moffett acknowledges that it's difficult to determine exactly how a wave of new stimulus projects will impact individual broadband service providers. But he still believes that original forecasts for 2021, particularly in the second half of the year, need to come up.

Per Moffett's revised forecast, he expects Comcast to pull in 1.40 million broadband subs in 2021, up from a prior estimate of +1.17 million. For Charter, he now expects the operator to add 1.3 million in 2021, up from prior expectations of +1.10 million, and Altice USA to add 123,000 versus a previous forecast of +91,000. For Cable One, an operator more focused on rural parts of the US, Moffett now expects the MSO to add 94,000 broadband subs in 2021, down from a prior estimate of +108,000.

That's a look ahead. Here's a look back at the quarter that was.

The rate of US cable broadband customer gains flattened in Q4 2020, but recent gains are increasingly coming from the likes of AT&T U-verse rather than from low-tier services like legacy DSL. US cable's rapid rate of broadband subscriber growth tapered off a bit in Q4 2020, but the target of those gains appear to be shifting. Rather than snaring customers on lower-end legacy DSL services, cable's share gains appear to be coming increasingly from "mid-tier" fiber-to-the-node (FTTN) competition such as AT&T's U-Verse, Moffett's report surmised.

A big part of that trend is attributable to a rapidly eroding base of legacy DSL competition. AT&T lost another 33,000 DSL subs in Q4 2020, [ending the quarter with a mere 407,000 subs](#). When Verizon's 6.2 million Fios customers are removed from the equation, the telco has just 445,000 customers in a "broadband" category that includes DSL subs. That competitive picture appears to be driving AT&T further toward fiber-to-the-premises as well as fixed wireless. AT&T announced at its recent investor day that it intends to [deploy FTTP to another 3 million-plus residential and business locations](#) across more than 90 metro areas this year, and is already making plans to deploy it to an additional 4 million locations in 2022. AT&T Communications CEO Jeff McElfresh also hinted that the company might use C-band and other midband spectrum to hit parts of its footprint with fixed wireless services that capture customers on older DSL connections.

Meanwhile, Moffett warned that cable's share gains snared from the mid-tier broadband market might be fleeting. "Even these mid-tier services are now beginning to be depleted," he explained. "As of the end of 2019, these mid-tier

services and legacy DSL (collectively categorized as 'DSL' by the FCC) were still larger than the TelCos' collective FTTH subscriber base... but only slightly so. These two pools are now reasonably close to being of equal size. It is appropriate to expect that the TelCos' rate of share losses should continue to moderate."

Fueled by strong numbers at Comcast, US cable operators added 964,000 broadband subs in Q4 2020, versus a gain of 961,000 in the year-ago period, and off from a gain of 1.38 million in Q3 2020. US telcos lost about 266,000 in Q4 2020, roughly the same as the year-ago period, while satellite broadband lost about 35,000 subs. Rolled up, the total US broadband industry saw subscribers rise 4.9% in the period, to 114.71 million. – *LightReading*



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