

Ranking Member Maria Cantwell Opening Statement

Hearing Part II of Shut Your App: How Uncle Sam Jawboned Big Tech Into Silencing Americans

Wednesday, October 29, 2025

[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for having this hearing and for the witnesses being here—but my fundamental question still is: “Where is Brendan Carr?”

We might have the right hearing, but I'm not sure we have the right witnesses. We might have the right questions, but I'm not sure we have the right administration we're calling into question. I will take the opportunity to ask the witnesses about AI, about algorithms, about competition on platforms. But as we discuss censorship today, this hearing isn't serious if it ignores the ongoing corporate consolidation green-lighted by the Trump Administration, which is only approving deals that come with a political [quid] pro quo.

Mr. Feld, in your testimony, you talk about “consolidation amplifies the ability to control content on an unprecedented scale,” and I appreciate that you recognize the threat posed by corporate consolidation to free speech and independent journalism. In fact, you also say, “a handful of opaque algorithms are controlling the majority of discussion online.”

Just this year, FCC Chairman Carr approved Skydance’s \$8 billion acquisition of Paramount, but only after Paramount paid \$16 million to settle with President Trump and install a first-term Trump appointee as the ombudsman at CBS. And FTC Chairman Ferguson approved Omnicom’s \$13 billion acquisition of Interpublic, creating the world's largest media buying agency, while ignoring the serious concerns about market consolidation. So rather than protecting consumers and competition, the FTC imposed conditions to favor certain kinds of content.

[A]s Mr. Feld was saying in his testimony, [it’s] really important to have somebody at the FTC that is making sure we understand the consumer harm when you reduce competition, when you basically are reducing investment. The consolidation of audiences and advertising dollars on just a few social media platforms pose real risk to democracy, to the sustainability of local, diverse and trusted media sources.

When a handful of companies control how information spreads, that makes it easier for any administration to abuse that power with political threats to chill speech. We've seen both Meta and Google recently reach a \$25 million settlement[s] with President Trump. Those settlements raise concerns about the kind of back-channel arrangements that can distort information.

The stakes are high now, because as we look to turning to AI for the future, how will that tool be used?

A July poll from the Associated Press showed that 60% of Americans use AI to find information. While AI [has] tremendous power for good, this trend raises concerns of the concentration and monopolization of that information. The amount of control in the hands of just a select few could

erode the foundation of free speech. The First Amendment isn't just a line in the Bill of Rights—it is about an operating system for our democracy that protects everybody--comedians, protesters, the free press and obviously people we disagree with.

That is why this Committee should focus on ensuring competition, diverse and truly independent media systems—and all supportive of both transparency expressed in this panel's testimony today and in the previous panel's testimony. Transparency in process can be a very good and antiseptic.

The proposed TikTok deal is a perfect example of danger when those principles break down. It places yet another major media platform under control [of the same family who] already [own] Paramount, CBS, Skydance and reportedly...[are] seeking to buy Warner Brothers Discovery. [W]hat are the details of how we are going to rid the Chinese influence of these algorithms and their misuse of algorithms? I am still waiting for that explanation.

So, we've seen how consolidation erodes both competition and we only have a handful of companies owning outlets that Americans rely on for news, entertainment—and those companies become easier to intimidate.

So I ask again, where is Chairman Carr? These are important issues. I hope they will appear before this Committee at some point in time, because we need to understand the direction that we are going in our country to protect free speech and that is why the work of this Committee should be, as you said, Mr. Chairman, to defend the First Amendment and have a free, diverse media landscape. It is more urgent than ever. Thank you

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Sen. Cantwell: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Feld, thank you for that distinction between the bully pulpit versus coercion. I think I even saw Mr. Creeley nodding his head in agreement. So I think we have two organizations who are characterizing the challenge in front of us. And Mr. Feld, you were more specific about when you really do have the power, like the FCC Chairman does, and you don't -- or you do abuse that power -- then that really is the coercion that we have to worry about. So I am concerned about where we are today in the state of media and diversity of voices, and so it does make me concerned that we have more competition, not less competition. That is one of the reasons why I want to see Mr. Carr in this hearing room, because we have a big challenge facing us, and the consolidation issues are challenging enough without using coercion in the middle of them.

But back to this larger question and something I'd ask my panelists too is, what can we do in the tide of AI, where AI is now making this even more opaque, how information is being gathered and used? What can we do in the era of AI to make sure that we are instilling more competition, growing more diverse media sources, and certainly protecting -- I would think that the platforms that were here today would understand that their seed corn is people who actually produce information. How can you continue to have information if you don't have information publishing sources? So, Mr. Feld, what do we need to do to preserve that model?

Mr. Feld: Thank you, Senator. We agree that competition in AI is a critically important question, particularly given that the natural network effects and the access to information that giant companies have as compared to startups in this situation, create an environment in which natural monopolies or natural oligopolies would emerge. In this situation, it is important, we believe, one for the government to support open source, which allows for innovation by multiple parties and combines the abilities of many. We believe that there may be necessary interventions, such as providing access to information that is used to train these models. If it develops that one monopoly in, say, search or on social media, is feeding and growing another monopoly in AI, this is something that the government needs to keep a very careful eye on. We are particularly concerned with Judge Mehta's decision that the emergence of AI relieves the need to care about concentration and monopoly power in the search market. We think it is just the opposite, that the emergence of AI, which feeds on that information, means that we must be extremely rigorous in our antitrust remedies with regard to these adjacent monopolies.

Sen. Cantwell: Well, I think in Senator Blackburn and I's provenance model, you would know where the content was created, and you could follow that and demand compensation. In a search AI world, it becomes more opaque as to what information was gathered, and so it becomes even more important, I think, for us to get this right.

Mr. Potts, Mr. Erickson, we've had in the last, since 2005,-- 127 newspapers closed last year alone -- but 1/3 of newspapers [since 2005]. So don't you think that this is eating the seed corn here, that, how can you have a perfect stack of information if you're going to have less information?

Mr. Erickson: Senator, happy to take that question first. Google is committed to a thriving news ecosystem. For 25 years, users come to our site, and we send them to publishers all over the world, free of charge, and those publishers are able to grow their user base, to have advertising, to monetize those interactions, or to have subscriptions.

Sen. Cantwell: I'm asking you, if you think it's time to do more. Mr. Potts, I know Meta actually does -- took some resources, and I find it interesting -- there are very few journalists that cover, you know...when I first got to the Hill, there were probably five people from the state of Washington that covered what we did on the Hill. Now, literally, there's one person, and basically from Spokane, Washington, who's funded by a Facebook grant that was compensation to the journalism community. But now, you know, he does a great job, covering me, covering Senator Risch, Crapo, Senator Murray, but that's it. So, all that information that you would get, you know, if you had people covering from Seattle and Vancouver, Washington, [and] Bellingham is

lost. So at what point do you guys care about the fact that the stack of information needs to be supported. If you want to have a perfect stack and have competition, and if we want the U.S. stack to be the best stack in the world, then you have to have true competition of voices, as we have pointed out from the two witnesses on the end.

Mr. Potts: Senator, this is, I'm sure, a very important topic. Unfortunately, it's not one that I work on directly, especially around competition, so I don't have an informed opinion, but we're committed to having a platform for everyone to share their voice.

Sen. Cantwell: Okay, well, I think, I think they should send somebody here who can answer this question, but we'll take it for a direct question to your leadership and get an answer. But this question of AI, is here, and we have a couple of choices. You know, we've put...privacy legislation on the table that also would basically -- I think in Meta's whistleblower case, that was before our Committee before -- Meta was publishing hate information against the Rohingya population by the government. And even though many, many people tried to get that information erased because it was directly saying to harm a population.

Your previous model didn't correct for that. Your newest model probably would better address that. But the point is, we need to have a system that is responsive to the fact that we need information. So...I see my time has expired, but I will -- I would hope that both of you will get a formalized answer on what in the era of AI do we need to do to make sure that journalism survives, so that your information, that you feel is so precious, actually gets created, because without local journalism, it's not going to get created.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.