

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 29, 2022

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Meta Platforms, Inc.

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

In October 2020, when the *New York Post* published articles based on evidence from Hunter Biden's laptop, many news and social media organizations inappropriately rushed to censor and discredit the initial reporting and falsely labeled it as "disinformation."¹ You recently appeared to indicate that the reason why Facebook made the unwise decision to censor articles about Hunter Biden's laptop was based off an alert from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).²

On the August 25, 2022, episode of the podcast, the Joe Rogan Experience, you noted that at some point leading up to the 2020 election the FBI came to Facebook with a warning:

Basically the background here is the FBI, I think basically came to us – some folks on our team – and was like, 'Hey, just so you know, you should be on high alert. We thought that there was a lot of Russian propaganda in the 2016 election. We have it on notice that basically there's about to be some kind of dump that's similar to that. So just be vigilant.'³

You appeared to indicate that as a result of the FBI's warning, Facebook eventually took steps to censor news articles about Hunter Biden's laptop.⁴ Specifically, you said that "distribution" of those articles on Facebook was decreased and explained that "the ranking and

¹ Emma-Jo Morris and Gabrielle Fonrouge, *Smoking-gun email reveals how Hunter Biden introduced Ukrainian businessman to VP dad*, N.Y. POST (Oct. 14, 2020), <https://nypost.com/2020/10/14/email-reveals-how-hunter-biden-introduced-ukrainian-biz-man-to-dad/>; Alec Schemmel, *Journalists lose face after NYT confirms Hunter Biden emails not Russian disinformation*, THE NATIONAL DESK (Mar. 17, 2022), <https://mynbc15.com/news/nation-world/journalists-lose-face-after-nyt-confirms-hunter-biden-emails-not-russian-disinformation>.

² #1863 – Mark Zuckerberg, *The Joe Rogan Experience*, SPOTIFY (Aug. 25, 2022), at 1:47:38 – 1:51:02; <https://open.spotify.com/episode/51gxrAActH18RGhKNza598#login>.

³ *Id.* at 1:47:58 – 1:48:23.

⁴ When asked whether the FBI specifically told Facebook to be "on guard" about articles on Hunter Biden's laptop, you responded, "I don't remember if it was that specifically but it basically fit the pattern." *Id.* at 1:49:50 – 1:49:55; 1:47:38 – 1:51:02.

newsfeed was a little bit less. So fewer people saw it than would have otherwise.”⁵ Although you noted that users could still share the articles, you clarified that the number of users who could see it decreased by a “meaningful” amount.⁶

Your revelation that Facebook took steps to censor information about Hunter Biden on its platform based on the FBI’s guidance raises even more questions about the FBI’s actions regarding Hunter Biden’s laptop. As you may know, whistleblowers have recently alleged to Senator Grassley that in August 2020, FBI officials initiated a scheme to downplay derogatory information on Hunter Biden for the purpose of shutting down investigative activity relating to his potential criminal exposure by labeling it “disinformation.”⁷ Whistleblowers have also alleged to Senator Johnson that local FBI leadership instructed its employees not to look at the Hunter Biden laptop immediately after the FBI had obtained it.⁸

The American people deserve to know whether the FBI used Facebook as part of their alleged plan to discredit information about Hunter Biden. If so, Congress and the American people require clarity with respect to the extent the FBI communicated with Facebook during the 2020 election about Hunter Biden-related information. With this in mind, please provide the following information no later than September 12, 2022:

1. All records⁹ between and among Facebook, FBI, Department of Justice, and other government agency employees referring or relating to Hunter Biden including, but not limited to, Russian disinformation, Hunter Biden’s laptop, and Senator Johnson’s and Senator Grassley’s investigation into Hunter Biden’s business dealings, from July 1, 2020 to July 1, 2021.
2. The names of the Justice Department and FBI officials who communicated with Facebook regarding Russian disinformation during the 2020 election.
3. The names of the Facebook officials who the Justice Department and FBI made contact with during the 2020 election.
4. The dates of when Facebook decreased the distribution of articles relating to Hunter Biden’s laptop.

⁵ *Id.* at 1:49:08 – 1:49:11; 1:48:47 – 1:48:58.

⁶ *Id.* at 1:49:17.

⁷ Press Release, Sen. Charles E. Grassley, Whistleblowers’ Reports Reveal Double Standard In Pursuit of Politically Charged Investigations By Senior FBI, DOJ Officials (July 25, 2022), <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/whistleblowers-reports-reveal-double-standard-in-pursuit-of-politically-charged-investigations-by-senior-fbi-doj-officials>.

⁸ Letter from Sen. Ron Johnson to Inspector Gen. Michael Horowitz, Dep’t. of Justice, (Aug. 23, 2022), <https://www.ronjohnson.senate.gov/services/files/7CD44E16-BF0B-495E-8B87-900467F69E50>.

⁹ “Records” include any written, recorded, or graphic material of any kind, including letters, memoranda, reports, notes, electronic data (emails, email attachments, and any other electronically-created or stored information), calendar entries, inter-office communications, meeting minutes, phone/voice mail or recordings/records of verbal communications, and drafts (whether or not they resulted in final documents).

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Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chuck Grassley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ron Johnson
Ranking Member
Permanent Subcommittee
on Investigations

cc: The Honorable Richard Durbin
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Jon Ossoff
Chairman
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations