

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6216

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August 5, 2024

Mr. Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Alphabet
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai:

The Committee on the Judiciary and the Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government continue to conduct oversight of how and to what extent the Executive Branch has coerced or colluded with companies and other intermediaries to censor lawful speech.¹ We have obtained documents showing how social media companies engaged with the Executive Branch to censor true information about the Biden family's corruption in advance of the 2020 presidential election.² This censorship and other covert forms of manipulation in favor of one candidate could amount to excessive or prohibited in-kind corporate contributions in violation of federal law.

The Committee and Select Subcommittee's oversight has shown how the federal government has coerced or colluded with technology, social media, and other companies, including Alphabet, to moderate content online.³ In particular, the Committee obtained documents showing that the federal government has successfully pressured YouTube, a

¹ See Ryan Tracy, *Facebook Bowed to White House Pressure, Removed Covid Posts*, WALL ST. J. (July 28, 2023).

² See, e.g., Brief for Jim Jordan, et. al, as Amicus Curiae, *Murthy v. Missouri*, No. 23-411 (filed Feb. 15, 2024); Letter from Rep. Jim Jordan, Chairman, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, to Hon. Christopher A. Wray, Dir., Fed. Bureau of Investigation (July 20, 2023); see also Letter from Rep. Jim Jordan, Chairman, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, to Mark Zuckerberg, CEO, Meta (Dec. 14, 2022) (Request 6, Appendix: Outstanding Requests from October 14, 2020) (inquiring whether Meta intended to report its actions in censoring the October 2020 *New York Post* story on corruption allegations involving the Biden family "to the Federal Election Commission as an in-kind contribution to the Biden campaign").

³ See, e.g., STAFF OF THE H. COMM. ON THE JUDICIARY AND THE SELECT SUBCOMM. ON THE WEAPONIZATION OF THE FED. GOV'T OF THE H. COMM. ON THE JUDICIARY, 118TH CONG., *THE CENSORSHIP INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX: HOW TOP BIDEN WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS COERCED BIG TECH TO CENSOR AMERICANS, TRUE INFORMATION, AND CRITICS OF THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION* (Comm. Print May 1, 2024).

Mr. Sundar Pichai

August 5, 2024

Page 2

subsidiary of Alphabet, to censor certain content, including content that did not violate YouTube's content moderation policies.⁴

Recent reporting has indicated that Google may now be interfering in the 2024 presidential election by censoring information about former President Donald Trump's ongoing campaign for the presidency, including relating to the July 13 assassination attempt on him in Pennsylvania.⁵ In response to the Committee and Select Subcommittee's oversight, your counsel provided the Committee and Select Subcommittee with non-public information about Google's issues with Search and Autocomplete and the company's efforts to correct them, in addition to offering a private briefing to the Committee and Select Subcommittee this week.⁶ We write today to remind you of your continuing obligation to provide documents to the Committee pursuant to the February 15, 2023 subpoena, and to ensure that your counsel is ready to provide detailed answers to specific questions at the briefing.⁷

1. Omission of the Trump Assassination Attempt from Autocomplete

Through counsel, Alphabet admitted to the Committee and Select Subcommittee that after the July 13 assassination attempt on President Trump, "predictions for queries about the assassination attempt against former President Trump" "should have appeared but didn't."⁸ Alphabet explained that Google Search's Autocomplete's built-in protections around political violence were "out of date," and that as a result, Autocomplete failed to provide relevant results about the attempt on President Trump's life.⁹ Alphabet also shared that the company updated these protections once this issue was flagged, and that Autocomplete now shows results about the July 13 assassination attempt as reflected in the image below:¹⁰

⁴ See, e.g., *id.*, at 6, 52-66; see also Rep. Jim Jordan (@Jim_Jordan), X (Nov. 30, 2023, 8:44 AM), https://twitter.com/Jim_Jordan/status/1730221179632226337; Rep. Jim Jordan (@Jim_Jordan), X (Dec. 1, 2023, 2:26 PM), https://twitter.com/Jim_Jordan/status/1730669728002142706; Rep. Jim Jordan (@Jim_Jordan), X (May 1, 2024, 4:09 PM), https://x.com/Jim_Jordan/status/1785763383142129733.

⁵ Louis Casiano & Christina Wurm, *Google feature omits search results for failed Trump assassination; Big Tech accused of election manipulation*, FOX BUSINESS (July 28, 2024).

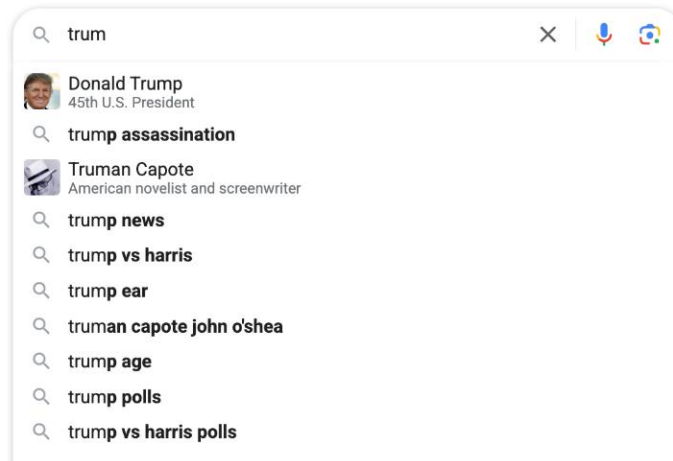
⁶ Email from Daniel Donovan to Committee Staff (Aug. 1, 2024, 2:46 PM).

⁷ See Letter from Rep. Jim Jordan, Chairman, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, to Sundar Pichai, CEO, Alphabet (Feb. 15, 2023) (attaching subpoena); see also Letter from Rep. Jim Jordan, Chairman, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, to Sundar Pichai, CEO, Alphabet (Apr. 9, 2024).

⁸ Email from Daniel Donovan to Committee Staff (Aug. 1, 2024, 2:46 PM).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*



For this week's briefing, we ask that Alphabet please be prepared to provide detailed answers to the following questions:

1. How did executives at Google learn that Autocomplete was not providing suggested search results for the assassination attempt on former President Trump?
2. When did executives at Google learn that Autocomplete was not providing suggested search results for the assassination attempt on former President Trump?
3. Which teams or divisions within Google worked to fix this issue?
4. How long after Google was aware of the issue was a fix implemented?
5. Did Google have any correspondence or communication with any Executive Branch officials referring or relating to Autocomplete's failure to suggest searches about the assassination attempt on former President Trump?
6. Were other assassination attempts on prominent political figures omitted from Autocomplete? If so, which ones?

7. What impact has this correction to Autocomplete had in Americans' ability to obtain information about the July 13 assassination attempt on President Trump?
8. How can the American people be confident that a similar issue, whether intentional or not, will not occur again?

2. Omission of President Trump's Name from Autocomplete

Alphabet also admitted to the Committee and Select Subcommittee that Autocomplete was not showing President Trump's name in response to searches for "President Donald" and similar terms.¹¹ Alphabet claims "that this particular issue was caused by a bug" and has been fixed by a recent update.¹² Because this vague excuse leaves many questions unanswered, we ask that Alphabet please be prepared to answer the following questions at the briefing:

1. How did executives at Google learn that Autocomplete was not providing suggested search results about former President Trump?
2. When did executives at Google learn that Autocomplete was not providing suggested search results about former President Trump?
3. How long was this "bug" affecting Autocomplete and causing it to display incomplete search results?
4. What is the nature of the update that Google implemented to fix this "bug"?
5. Which teams or divisions within Google worked to design this update?
6. How long after Google was aware of the "bug" was the update implemented?
7. Did Google have any correspondence or communication with any Executive Branch officials concerning the omission of the names of current or former government officials from Autocomplete?
8. Which other prominent American political figures, if any, were affected by this "bug"?
9. What impact has this correction to Autocomplete had in Americans' ability to obtain information regarding President Trump and his campaign?
10. How can the American people be confident that a similar issue, whether intentional or not, will not occur again?

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

3. Searches for President Trump Return News Stories About Vice President Harris

Finally, Alphabet tried to explain to the Committee and Select Subcommittee why Google searches for Donald Trump returned news labels and stories about Vice President Harris.¹³ Alphabet claimed that this error was the result of its algorithm that automatically generates and displays labels about news topics related to a Google Search inquiry.¹⁴ The company also noted that “predictions [] may be unexpected or imperfect, and bugs will occur.”¹⁵ Given the inadequacies in this explanation, for the briefing, we ask that Alphabet please be prepared to answer the following questions:

1. For how long have stories about Vice President Harris appeared in response to searches about former President Trump?
2. What impact has this issue—stories about Vice President Harris appearing in response to searches about former President Trump—had on Americans’ ability to obtain information about President Trump and his campaign?
3. Has Google taken any action to more narrowly tailor news results within Search to a user’s search term? If so, what is the nature of this action, and who implemented it?
4. Which teams or divisions within Google are responsible for managing the algorithm?
5. Does the company seek to elevate liberal news outlets more prominently over conservative outlets in order to favor Democratic candidates? If not, what steps does the company take to audit how the algorithm is functioning?
6. How can the American people be confident that a similar issue, whether intentional or not, will not occur again?

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

Mr. Sundar Pichai

August 5, 2024

Page 6

Pursuant to the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee on the Judiciary has jurisdiction to conduct oversight of matters concerning “civil liberties” to inform potential legislative reforms.¹⁶ In addition, House Resolution 12 authorized the Committee’s Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government to investigate “issues related to the violation of the civil liberties of citizens of the United States.”¹⁷ If you have any questions about this matter, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-6906.

Sincerely,



Jim Jordan
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Jerrold L. Nadler, Ranking Member

¹⁶ Rules of the House of Representatives R. X (2023).

¹⁷ H. Res. 12 § 1(b)(1).