



August 23, 2021

## Texas HB 20 Would Force Social Platforms to Carry Domestic Terrorists' Live Streams

*Bill would enable the spread of hate speech, disinformation, and phishing online*

Dear Democratic House Members:

Last week, a radicalized terrorist live streamed a bomb threat at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., declaring a "revolution" and encouraging other radicals to take up arms. Under current law, Facebook was able to successfully remove the content for inciting violence, and block the user from its platform.

But HB 20, a bill currently pending before the Texas House of Representatives, would forbid Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube from censoring "a user's expression...based on the viewpoint of the user or another person" -- **essentially requiring those platforms to leave dangerous content like the D.C. terrorist's live stream online**. This would effectively force platforms to **allow the broadcast, sharing, and reposting of acts of domestic terrorism** – and cause social media services to be overrun with disinformation, hate, and conspiracy theories.

As a tech association devoted to a progressive future, we write to urge your **strong and vocal opposition** in the special session to **HB 20**.

Our organization, the Chamber of Progress ([progresschamber.org](http://progresschamber.org)), is a center-left tech industry coalition promoting technology's progressive future. We strongly support **healthy online communities** -- free of hoaxes, conspiracy theories, hate speech, incitement to violence, election- and vaccine-related disinformation, and email harassment. That's why we strongly oppose HB 20, which **would tie online services' and email providers' hands in the fight against toxic, incendiary content, and allow inboxes to be filled with unwanted emails filled with ulterior motives**. In addition to the mandate for platforms to carry domestic terrorists' live streams, the bill would:

- **Assist scammers and phishers in exploiting the elderly and soliciting inappropriate content to children by granting perpetrators easy access to personal email accounts and devices**. HB 20 would protect bad actors working to defraud senior citizens. Scammers could use the law to stop Internet companies from removing or hiding "**fright mail**" messages that scare seniors into paying money to fake "IRS agents." The bill could also prevent service providers from guarding children from phony gaming software advertisements used to collect personal data and distribute inappropriate content.

- **Give Russian trolls, child predators, and white supremacists the playbook for evading Internet removals.** By requiring each social platform to publicly disclose specific information on how it “moderates content [and] uses search, ranking, or other algorithms,” HB 20 would give bad actors a playbook to spread hateful and incendiary speech without removal. This would allow Russian election trolls, white supremacists, child predators, scammers, and extremists to devise new strategies to evade platforms’ evolving rules.
- **Empower the state’s Attorney General to bring politically-motivated lawsuits against platforms for removing or downranking incendiary speech.** The bill would turn the Texas Attorney General into the political speech police, by giving him the right to bring legal action and impose financial penalties on social platforms. This would allow current and future Attorneys General unchecked power to pressure social networks to allow or disallow certain types of speech, under consequence of legal action.

Technology services have helped advance progressive goals -- democratizing access to goods and information, giving voice to the marginalized, and supporting millions of high-quality jobs. Wikipedia lets anyone with an internet connection become an armchair expert on the topic of their choice. Amazon and eBay brought e-commerce to the masses. And social media facilitated conversations between friends and strangers across vast distances.

But no one wants the Internet to become a wasteland of hate and lies, and that’s why online services must retain the freedom to moderate healthy online communities -- **including taking action against incendiary or hateful content, and preventing fraudulent acts through electronic mail.** In severely limiting services’ ability to remove or downrank the most egregious speech online today, this bill would only **incentivize people to spread hate and lies online.** The bill also has the potential to increase the number of seniors in Texas that fall victim to online scams.

The Republican majority is advancing this measure despite its obvious violation of the U.S. Constitution and First Amendment. In defense of safe, healthy online communities, it’s vital to speak up against the harmful bill.

During this special session we urge you to **stand strong in vocal opposition to HB 20.**

Sincerely,



Adam Kovacevich  
CEO and Founder  
Chamber of Progress