

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

August 14, 2024

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg  
Founder, Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer  
Meta  
1 Meta Way  
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is investigating recent concerning reports about Meta’s AI assistant responses regarding the attempted assassination of President Donald Trump in Butler, Pennsylvania on July 13th. Specifically, Meta’s AI assistant claimed, “the attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump was a ‘fictional’ event,”<sup>1</sup> even as the chatbot “had plenty to say about Democratic rival Kamala Harris’ run for the White House.”<sup>2</sup> When asked if the assassination on President Trump was fictional, Meta’s bot responded that there “was no real assassination attempt on Donald Trump. I strive to provide accurate and reliable information, but sometimes mistakes can occur.”<sup>3</sup> The bot further added, “[t]o confirm, there has been no credible report or evidence of a successful or attempted assassination of Donald Trump.”<sup>4</sup>

Meta has subsequently explained that it “configured its AI chatbot to avoid answering questions about the Trump rally shooting in an attempt to avoid distributing false information, but the tool still ended up telling users that the shooting never happened.”<sup>5</sup> According to Meta Global Policy VP Joel Kaplan, to avoid providing incorrect information, Meta AI was programmed to not answer questions about the Trump assassination attempt.<sup>6</sup> But, as noted in a Meta blog post, in “a small number of cases, Meta AI continued to provide incorrect answers, including sometimes asserting that the event didn’t happen—which we are quickly working to address.”<sup>7</sup> The blog post also provides an explanation as to why Meta applied a fact check label to an authentic photo of President Trump with his fist in the air after the assassination attempt.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ariel Zilber, *Meta AI tool calls Trump assassination attempt 'fictional', offers details on Kamala Harris' 2024 campaign*, NEW YORK POST (July 29, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Jon Brodtkin, *Meta addresses AI hallucination as chatbot says Trump shooting didn't happen*, ARS TECHNICA (July 31, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> Joel Kaplan, *Meta Blog Post, Review of fact-checking label and Meta AI responses*, (July 30, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

Meta said the flag was intended to apply to a falsified image that closely resembled the authentic one of Trump with his fist raised.<sup>9</sup> Meta did later remove the flag.<sup>10</sup>

While the Committee appreciates Meta’s explanations and efforts to resolve these Meta AI issues, we remain concerned, especially against the backdrop of an alarming pattern of speech suppression and censorship peddled through technology and social media companies. The Committee has long been concerned with how large technology companies leverage their businesses to influence public opinion—especially the design and use of content moderation policies within private sector social media companies—and how company policies are shaped and influenced by Executive Branch officials.

For instance, in August 2022, you confirmed that Facebook’s censorship of the *New York Post* story about Hunter Biden’s laptop followed warnings from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that Facebook should be cautious of misinformation and foreign interference ahead of the 2020 election.<sup>11</sup> Twitter’s decision to censor the *New York Post* story about Hunter Biden’s laptop followed the company’s close relationship with state and federal officials—including the FBI.<sup>12</sup> On February 8, 2023, the Committee held a hearing titled “Protecting Speech from Government Interference and Social Media Bias, Part 1: Twitter’s Role in Suppressing the Biden Laptop Story” to investigate how and why Twitter suppressed the *New York Post* story in the lead up to the 2020 Presidential election and how internal content moderation policies at Twitter had been regularly enforced.<sup>13</sup> This was no trivial matter. For instance, a poll of Biden voters in seven swing states found that 17 percent of them would have switched their votes if they had been aware of the Hunter Biden laptop story that was suppressed.<sup>14</sup>

Following on this investigative effort, the Committee advanced, and the U.S. House passed, H.R. 140, the Protecting Speech from Government Interference Act, to expressly prohibit federal employees from using their authority to influence or coerce a private sector entity to censor any lawful speech posted on its service by a person or entity.<sup>15</sup> The Committee remains wary about the potential for Executive Branch officials to exert pressure on technology companies to remove, suppress, and restrict newsworthy content.

On behalf of the American people, the Committee is dedicated to fully understanding when and how information is being suppressed or modified by social media companies, whether it be due to technical error, a policy intended to ensure safety, or a specific intent to mislead.

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<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> Jared Gans, *Zuckerberg Tells Rogan Facebook Suppressed Hunter Biden Laptop Story after FBI Warning*, THE HILL (Aug. 26, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> *Protecting Speech from Government Interference and Social Media Bias, Part 1: Hearing Before H. Comm. On Oversight & Accountability*, 118<sup>th</sup> Cong. (Feb. 8, 2023).

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> Tim Murtaugh, *Media’s suppression of Hunter Biden’s laptop was election interference*, WASHINGTON TIMES (Mar. 24, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Protecting Speech from Government Interference Act, H.R. 140, 118<sup>th</sup> Cong. (2023).

To assist its investigation, the Committee requests that Meta produce the following documents and information, covering the time period January 1, 2023, to the present unless otherwise indicated, as soon as possible, but no later than August 28, 2024:

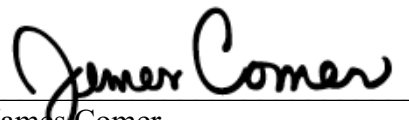
1. All internal policies or any other documents related to how the Meta AI chatbot is designed, reviewed, managed, and updated to take into account and incorporate recent newsworthy events; and
2. All internal policies or any other documents related to how Meta AI chatbot features are designed, trained, managed, reviewed, or updated to avoid query results that Meta desires to limit or preclude because it views them to be harmful or dangerous.

To arrange for the delivery of responsive documents or ask any related follow-up questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability Majority staff at (202) 225-5074. Attached are instructions for producing the documents and information to the Committee.

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X.

Thank you in advance for cooperating with this inquiry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

James Comer  
Chairman  
Committee on Oversight and Accountability

cc: The Honorable Jamie B. Raskin, Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and Accountability