

THE WICKER REPORT

By: United States Senator Roger Wicker



Wicker: Big Tech Has Crossed a Red Line

Wave of Censorship Confirms Need to Confront Tech Monopolies

This month, powerful tech companies took unprecedented steps to censor free speech. In the days after the deadly Capitol Hill riot, Facebook suspended President Trump’s account, saying it posed a “risk of further violence.” Twitter went a step further and permanently banned the President’s account, along with 70,000 others they described as a security risk. Snapchat also closed the President’s account while platforms like Reddit and Twitch began limiting Trump-related content. In addition, Parler, a platform popular among conservatives, was forced offline after Apple, Google, and Amazon removed the platform from their app stores and withdrew support services.

This tidal wave of censorship crosses a serious threshold. Conservatives have long complained about censorship on social media, but these companies have never gone this far. Their actions drew sharp criticism from our European allies, the President of Mexico, and even the liberal ACLU, who recognize this could lead to further suppression of speech. I am concerned these acts of censorship will set a dangerous trend that could threaten free speech

and divide our nation further.

The Internet Is the Public Square

In the internet’s early days, most online discussions were confined to chatrooms and blogs. These forums made up a very small part of the “public square,” which had been dominated by local newspapers, television, and our personal interactions. If censorship ever occurred online, it did not affect most of our lives.

More than 20 years later, the situation has changed dramatically. The internet is now a major center for public discourse, and the public square now includes the vast terrain of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other platforms. Because so much of our discourse now takes place online, platforms have an obligation to promote and protect our tradition of free speech. Tech companies are increasingly failing at this, and their recent actions against the President and thousands of users represent a new low.

Tech Monopolies Must Be Challenged

These acts of censorship would not be so consequential if tech giants had real competition. Unfortunately, they do not. An elite handful of giant tech companies now

dominates the marketplace beyond anyone’s wildest imagination. Their footprint in our society is so massive and their resources so vast that they can snuff out any small competitor, like Parler, that threatens their hold on the market. This monopolistic behavior, coupled with the worsening restrictions on free speech, calls for congressional action.

Last year, I convened the heads of three major tech companies – Facebook, Twitter, and Google – for a hearing that addressed online bias and censorship. Senators had the opportunity to grill these CEOs and discuss potential changes to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which protects online platforms from being sued over content posted by users. I have drafted legislation that would modify Section 230 to give platforms strong incentives to protect free speech. I will introduce this legislation soon as the lead Republican on the Senate Commerce Committee.

Congress should go further and take a serious look at anti-trust issues surrounding these tech firms. I am encouraged that the House and Senate Judiciary Committees have already begun doing this. Tech companies who take collective action against competitors, like Parler, need to know that they are playing with fire and positioning themselves for trust-busting. We must fight to promote competition in the technology sector so that our nation can benefit from the best ideas new innovators have to offer.

Companies push incentives to get workers vaccinated

Associated Press

As vaccinations continue across the U.S., some companies are offering financial incentives to encourage their workers to get the shots.

Dollar General is one of the first major companies to announce extra pay for workers who get vaccinated. The Goodlettsville, Tennessee-based retailer, which operates nearly 17,000 stores in 46 states, said Wednesday it will give employees the equivalent of four hours of pay if they get the vaccine.

Dollar General said the extra pay is intended to compensate for the travel time, mileage and child care expenses that employees will incur to get the vaccine.

“We do not want our employees to have to choose between receiving a vaccine or coming to work,” Dollar General said.

The retailer said it’s encouraging workers to get the vaccines, but not requiring them. In its annual report last February, the company said it had 143,000 employees.

In this Aug. 3, 2017, file photo the Dollar General store is pictured in Luther, Okla. As vaccinations continue across the U.S., some companies are offering financial incentives to encourage their workers to get the shots. Dollar General is one of the first major companies to announce extra pay for workers who get vaccinated. The Tennessee-based retailer said Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2021 it will give employees the equivalent of four hours of pay if they get the vaccine. (AP Photo/Sue Ogrocki, File)

A vaccine advisory panel at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control voted late last month on recommendations for vaccine distribution. The panel said grocery workers — which would include Dollar General’s employees — should be in the second group to receive shots after health care workers and nursing home residents.

Firefighters, police, teachers, corrections workers, postal employees and others are in that second group, along with people 75 and older. There are around 50 million people in that group.



U.S. Attorney Mike Hurst announces departure from Department of Justice

Press Release

Mike Hurst, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi, announced on Thursday, January 6, that he has submitted his resignation to President Donald J. Trump and Acting Attorney General Jeffrey A. Rosen and will leave the Department of Justice on January 19, 2021.

“Serving as the Chief Federal Law Enforcement Officer for over half of our state has been the highest honor of my professional career. During my time as U.S. Attorney, I have tried to do everything within my power to make our neighborhoods safer, support our law enforcement, engage and empower our communities and citizens, protect victims, prevent and reduce crime, and uphold our constitutional rights. The secret to the success of this office is its people – hard-working, tenacious, and full of integrity, they are committed to seeing that justice is always done, every day. I wish them all the best in their continued service to our fellow man and to this noble work,” said U.S. Attorney Hurst.

“Mike Hurst is the ultimate public servant. He has routinely taken on tough fights in order to preserve the rule of law – because he believes in it. He has been a champion for the people of Mississippi, and we wish him well in his next adventure,” said Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves.

“Mike Hurst has served the people of Mississippi with honor and distinction as U.S. Attorney,” said United States Senator Roger Wicker. “He’s a talented lawyer and dedicated public servant. I wish him well in his next chapter.”

“Mike Hurst has served as the consummate U.S. Attorney, serving Mississippi and our nation extremely well. Like so many in our state, I am grateful for his achievements in the Southern District of Mississippi to prosecute crimes and to bring special focus on fighting human trafficking and illegal drug trafficking. I wish him and his family all the best as he leaves office,” said United States Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith.

“The Mississippi Sheriffs Association offers its gratitude to Mike Hurst for his service as United States Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi. Since October 2017, Mike has faithfully served the State of Mississippi and supported Mississippi law enforcement officers. The Mississippi Sheriffs Association appreciates his service to Mississippi and the United States and wishes him the very best,” said Jasper County Sheriff Randy Johnson, President of the Mississippi Sheriffs Association.

“It is imperative the many levels of criminal justice to work as a team to be successful. Having worked with U.S. Attorney Mike Hurst for nearly 4 years, I have seen firsthand his passion to put swift, fair and just efforts into providing justice for victims. Mike is a law enforcement-

Biewer Lumber building new sawmill, creates 150 jobs

Associated Press

A new sawmill is coming to a north Mississippi city and will create 150 jobs.

Biewer Lumber is expanding its business in Winona.



“My family’s passion for the lumber industry has prompted this expansion in the south. There is no better place to grow the business than the fiber-rich state of Mississippi” Tim Biewer, President & CEO of Biewer Lumber, said in a news release Wednesday.

The \$130 million investment will have the ability to produce 350 million board feet of lumber per year, WTVA-TV reported.

Biewer Lumber, headquartered in St. Clair, Michigan, operates five sawmills: two in Michigan, two in Wisconsin and one in Newton, Mississippi. The facility in Newton employs 175 people, operates two saw lines and produces 350 million board feet per year.

The new sawmill is expected to be complete and operational by January 2022.

“The growth of companies like Biewer Lumber in Mississippi sends a strong message that our state has a supportive business environment and a skilled workforce,” Gov. Tate Reeves said.

**Fish Day!**

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