

## United States Senate

September 26, 2020

Mr. Sundar Pichai  
Chief Executive Officer  
Google LLC  
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai:

This week, Axios reported that Google has informed advertisers that, after polls close on November 3, it will block advertisements that mention a current state or federal office holder or candidate, political party, or ballot measure.<sup>1</sup> This brazen act of censorship once again illustrates how Google will use its market power to manipulate our democracy. I strongly urge Google to reverse course and privilege the free exchange of ideas over whatever internal agenda – or outside pressure – is pressing it toward the limitation of democratic debate.

It was reported that Google will block all advertisements related to the election “running through Google’s ad-serving platforms, including Google Ads, DV360, YouTube, and AdX Authorized Buyer.”<sup>2</sup> This would effectively prevent the free flow of information to millions of Americans, and stifle views that may not otherwise be covered by media outlets. Moreover, it is marked extension of Google’s already deeply concerning censorship policies. No longer is Google content to censor political advertisements and messaging prior to an election with the ostensible goal of ensuring a fair contest, it must now censor political advertisements even after every ballot has been cast. Moreover, it is unclear how this policy works in regards to elections that will indeed take place after November 3, including potential run-off elections in Georgia and a newly scheduled, February congressional election in Minnesota.

In 2019, the Subcommittee on the Constitution held a hearing at which I showed to you a document from Google entitled “The Good Censor.” That document stated that “tech firms [were] gradually shift[ing] away from unmediated free speech and towards censorship and moderation.”<sup>3</sup> At the time, Google pressed back against this document and its content. But since that date, it has become increasingly clear

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.axios.com/google-to-block-election-ads-after-election-day-4b60650d-b5c2-4fb4-a856-70e30e19af17.html>.

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

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.c-span.org/video/?462661-1/senate-judiciary-hearing-google-censorship>

that Google has turned its back on American principles of free speech in favor of a robust censorship regime—and it has done so with great haste.

Given the importance of the marketplace of ideas both during and after an election, the Subcommittee requests a response to the following questions no later than Monday, October 5, 2020:

- Will Google remove advertisements from news outlets that report and editorialize regarding federal office holders or candidates, political parties, and ballot measures? If not, why not?
- During the period in which it bans election-related advertisements, will Google or any of its subsidiaries take any action related to the election? If so, what?
- To whom does Google believe it is accountable for its decisions to censor election-related advertisements?
- How many advertisements and other exposures would this policy have precluded had it been applied during the 2016 and 2018 election cycle?
- How will this new policy affect advertising on Google platforms after November 3, in anticipation of additional run-off and special elections, both those foreseeable already as well as those which will emerge in the weeks and months to come?

Regards,



Ted Cruz  
Chairman, Constitution Subcommittee  
Senate Judiciary Committee