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CENSORSHIP/SURVEILLANCE

Zuckerberg Admits Biden Administration Pressured Facebook to Censor COVID-related Content

Mark Zuckerberg said Monday that senior Biden administration officials pressured Facebook to censor content related to COVID-19 during the pandemic and that he regretted not being more outspoken about it.

EN



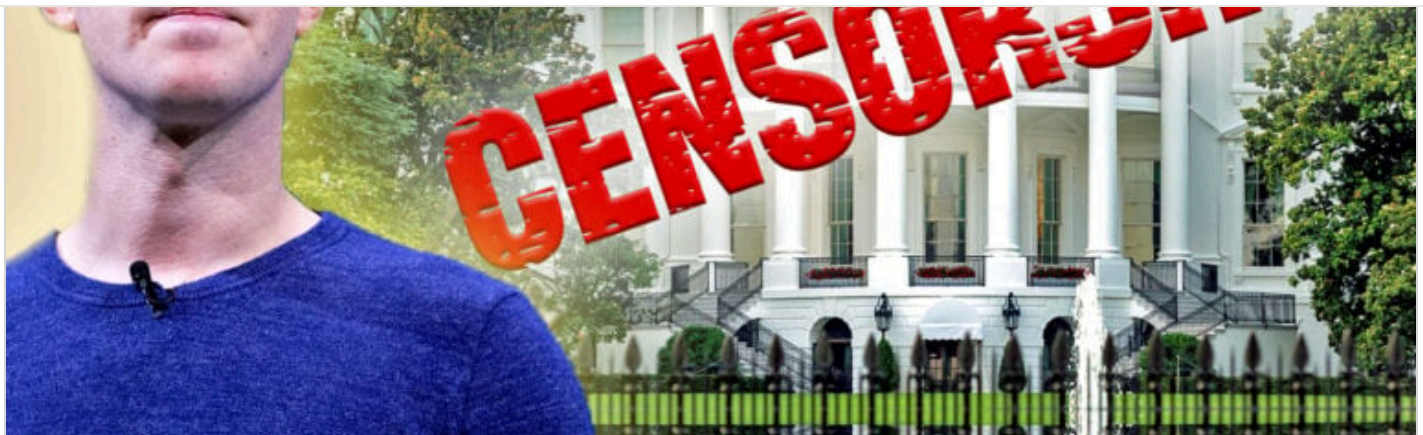
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Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said Monday that senior Biden administration officials pressured Facebook to censor content related to COVID-19 during the pandemic. Zuckerberg said he regretted not being more outspoken about the issue, and that he planned to push back if something similar happened in the future.

Zuckerberg made the comments in a letter to U.S. House Judiciary Committee Chair Jim Jordan. The committee shared the letter on X, commenting that **Zuckerberg “just admitted”** the “Biden-Harris administration ‘pressured’ Facebook to censor Americans.”

Jordan, in April, sent Zuckerberg **a letter** reminding him of a subpoena he had received for documents — including Meta’s communications with the executive branch — as part of the **Judiciary Committee’s investigation** into how and to what extent the Biden administration “has coerced or colluded with companies and other intermediaries to censor lawful speech.”

In his letter, Zuckerberg said:

“In 2021, senior officials from the Biden Administration, including the White House, repeatedly pressured our teams for months to censor certain **COVID-19** content, including humor and satire, and expressed a lot of frustration with our teams when we didn’t agree. ...

“I believe the government pressure was wrong, and I regret that we were not more outspoken about it. I also think we made some choices that, with the benefit of hindsight and new information, we wouldn’t make today. ...

“... I feel strongly that we should not compromise our content standards due to pressure from any Administration in either direction — and we’re ready to push back if something happens again.”



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The **White House responded** in a statement that the administration encouraged responsible actions to protect public health.

“Our position has been clear and consistent: we believe tech companies and other private actors should take into account the effects their actions have on the American people, while making independent choices about the information they present,” it said.

President Joe Biden said publicly in July 2021 that social media platforms were “**killing people**” with misinformation surrounding the pandemic. At the time, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy **warned that health misinformation** is “a serious threat to public health,” and the administration held meetings with the social media giant.

Zuckerberg didn’t provide specific examples of **ensorship** that Facebook engaged in behind the scenes.

However, extensive documentation of Facebook censoring content at the government’s request was gathered through discovery by plaintiffs in the **Murthy v. Missouri** (initially **Missouri v. Biden**) and **Kennedy v. Biden** lawsuits. Both lawsuits allege the Biden administration coerced and encouraged social media companies to censor free speech.

Jordan’s congressional investigation, the “**Facebook Files**” series he subsequently released and **other investigations** also cite examples of government officials or **agencies** pressuring Facebook to flag or remove content.

That documentation has long made public the “**relentless, coercive pressure**” the White House exerted on media companies to censor COVID-19-related information that contradicted the government and mainstream media narrative about COVID-19 origins, lockdowns or vaccines.

Many X commenters concerned with government censorship **celebrated Zuckerberg’s letter**. Those long involved in making this well-known censorship public and holding the administration accountable had more tempered responses.

Jenin Younes, a civil rights attorney representing some of the plaintiffs in Murthy v. Missouri posted on X:

Jenin Younes (former handle @leftylockdowns1)  

@JeninYounesEsq · [Follow](#)

I and others have been screaming this into the wind for 2.5 years, even as we accumulated more and more evidence this was the case, and the mainstream media ignored us.

Jake Tapper  @jaketapper

CNN: "Mark Zuckerberg says Meta was 'pressured' by Biden administration to censor Covid-related content in 2021"

[cnn.com/2024/08/27/bus...](https://www.cnn.com/2024/08/27/bus...)

7:33 AM · Aug 28, 2024 

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In June, the **U.S. Supreme Court ruled** the Murthy v. Missouri plaintiffs didn't have standing to sue because they couldn't demonstrate the administration explicitly ordered their speech censored.

Younes noted that Zuckerberg's statement hedged somewhat, in saying that the company's choices were ultimately its own, even though he admitted it wouldn't have made the choices it did without government pressure.

"It's important to understand that if courts find **Meta effectively acted as an arm of government**, the company can be sued as a state actor and theoretically be responsible for monetary damages based on harm to those censored," she said.

Commenter Mike Benz expressed frustration that Zuckerberg waited until after the SCOTUS decision to make his admission.

Mike Benz 

@MikeBenzCyber · [Follow](#)



Looking at this again now, I can't help but ball my fists in a rage that Zuckerberg waited til after the SCOTUS ruling in Murthy to say this. SCOTUS focused skepticism on the causal relation between gov't pressure & platform action. This letter likely would have swung the case.

House Judiciary GOP     @JudiciaryGOP

Mark Zuckerberg just admitted three things:

1. Biden-Harris Admin "pressured" Facebook to censor Americans.
2. Facebook censored Americans.
3. Facebook throttled the Hunter Biden laptop story.

Big win for free speech.

3:55 PM · Aug 27, 2024



8.8K



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Robert F. Kennedy Jr., lead plaintiff along with Children's Health Defense (CHD) in Kennedy v. Biden, said on X:



The White House targeted Kennedy directly numerous times seeking to have his speech eliminated from social media.

The Center for Countering Digital Hate — a nonprofit that identifies “misinformation” and works with the Biden administration — named Kennedy part of the so-called “**Disinformation Dozen**,” which it said is “responsible for the bulk of anti-vaxx content shared or posted on Facebook and Twitter.” The nonprofit concluded social media “platforms must act” against these individuals.

Kennedy also is chairman on leave from CHD, which the Center for Countering Digital Hate called a tool for spreading “**anti-vaccine messages**.”

CHD is still banned from Instagram and Facebook — both owned by Meta — and Facebook admitted it suppressed CHD’s content, including posts that did not violate the social media platform’s policies.

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Last week, a **Louisiana district court ruled** that both Kennedy and CHD have standing to sue the Biden administration for colluding with tech giants to censor their social media posts. An injunction prohibiting the administration from exerting such pressure is pending in an appeals court.

Facebook also censored individuals and **communities sharing information** about COVID-19 vaccine injuries and posts about **"health freedom."**

Every major **mainstream media organization reported on Zuckerberg's letter yesterday.**

Journalist Matt Taibbi noted these were the same organizations that "spent years scoffing at the idea that Facebook/Meta 'censored' figures like Robert F. Kennedy, Jr."

Taibbi compiled a list of key offenders:

"There's **Poynter/Politifact, NPR** (which rolled eyes at 'the idea that fact-checking ... amounts to censorship'), **Politico** ('there really is no government censorship ... the government neither really coerces nor threatens private citizens or businesses'), **BBC** (censorship claims are among 'examples of Mr Kennedy spreading conspiracy theories'), the **New Yorker**, and countless others."

Zuckerberg also suggested that, acting on information from the FBI, Facebook censored the Hunter Biden laptop story. He also said regretted that his investment, through his philanthropy the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative "benefitted one party over the other," and he planned to stop such investment.

The admission comes as governments globally move to double down on censorship of social media and other communication platforms. This past weekend, Telegram founder **Pavel Durov was arrested in France** for alleged crimes that users committed using the platform.



Brenda Baletti, Ph.D.

Brenda Baletti, Ph.D., is a senior reporter for The Defender. She wrote and taught about capitalism and politics for 10 years in the writing program at Duke University. She holds a Ph.D. in human geography from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a master's from the University of Texas at Austin.

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