



## One Hundred Seventeenth Congress

### Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol

January 13, 2022

Mr. Sundar Pichai  
Chief Executive Officer  
Google, LLC  
Alphabet, Inc.



Dear Mr. Pichai:

Pursuant to the authorities set forth in House Resolution 503 and the rules of the House of Representatives, the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol (“Select Committee”) hereby transmits a subpoena that compels Alphabet, Inc. to produce the documents set forth in the accompanying schedule by January 27, 2022.

The Select Committee is investigating the facts, circumstances, and causes of the January 6th attack and issues relating to the peaceful transfer of power, in order to identify and evaluate lessons learned and to recommend to the House and its relevant committees corrective laws, policies, procedures, rules, or regulations. The inquiry includes examination of how various individuals and entities communicated and coordinated their activities leading up to the events of January 6, 2021, as well as the influencing factors that fomented such an attack on American representative democracy while engaged in a constitutional process.

Among other areas of investigation, the Select Committee has been investigating the use of social media products to organize the attack, whether social media products contribute to radicalization and/or the spread of misinformation or disinformation, and what these companies know about their use in the attack itself or the spread of extremism that enabled the attack.<sup>1</sup>

YouTube was a platform for significant communications by its users that were relevant to the planning and execution of January 6th attack on the United States Capitol. For example, Steve Bannon live-streamed his podcast on YouTube in the days before and after January 6, 2021,<sup>2</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Chairman Bennie Thompson to Sundar Pichai (Aug. 26, 2021), available at <https://january6th.house.gov/sites/democrats.january6th.house.gov/files/2021-08-26.BGT%20to%20Google.pdf>; Letter from Chairman Bennie Thompson to Susan Wojcicki (Aug. 26, 2021), available at <https://january6th.house.gov/sites/democrats.january6th.house.gov/files/2021-08-26.BGT%20to%20YouTube.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Rashid Umar Abbasi *Steve Bannon’s Podcast Shuttered by YouTube Over False 2020 Election Claims*, New York Post (Jan. 8, 2021), available at <https://nypost.com/2021/01/08/youtube-axes-steve-bannons-podcast-over-false-2020-election-claims>; Lindsey Ellefson, *Steve Bannon’s ‘War Room’ Channel Pulled From YouTube*, The Wrap (Jan. 8, 2021), available at <https://www.thewrap.com/bannon-youtube-war-room>.

live-streams of the attack appeared on YouTube as it was taking place.<sup>3</sup> To this day, YouTube is a platform on which user video spread misinformation about the election.<sup>4</sup> In addition, YouTube took down a video that President Trump posted during the January 6, 2021 attack,<sup>5</sup> and decided to suspend his account on January 12, 2021.<sup>6</sup>

The Select Committee believes Alphabet has significant undisclosed information that is critical to its investigation, concerning how Alphabet developed, implemented, and reviewed its content moderation, algorithmic promotion, demonetization, and other policies that may have affected the January 6, 2021 events. For example, Alphabet has not produced any documents that fully explain non-public moderation discussions and policies that led to President Trump's suspension or that explain whether or why the platform did or did not act regarding President Trump's account in advance of January 6th.

Additionally, Alphabet has not produced documents relating to YouTube's policy decisions that may have had an impact on the planning, coordinating, and execution of January 6th Attack on the U.S. Capitol. For instance, on December 9, 2021,<sup>7</sup> YouTube announced a new election misinformation content moderation policy. While this policy appears to have taken effect immediately, it provided that accounts did not accrue strikes during a "grace period" that was to last until Inauguration Day (January 20, 2021).<sup>8</sup> In the immediate aftermath of January 6, 2021, YouTube announced that it was ending this grace period early, and started permitting accounts to accrue strikes (which "temporarily suspended posting or live streaming," and which resulted in removal if sufficient strikes were accrued in a 90-day period).<sup>9</sup>

The Select Committee initially sought information related to these topics through my letters of August 26, 2021,<sup>10</sup> and through subsequent engagements with Alphabet. However, Alphabet

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<sup>3</sup> Julia Alexander, Jacob Kastrenakes, & Bijan Stephen, *How Facebook, Twitch, and YouTube are Handling Live Streams of the Capitol Mob Attack*, The Verge (Jan. 6, 2021), available at <https://www.theverge.com/2021/1/6/22217421/capitol-building-trump-mob-protest-live-stream-youtube-twitch-facebook>.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., One America News Network Channel, "Christina Bobb: Trump Won. MSM Hopes You Don't Believe Your Eyes" (Nov. 4, 2020) YouTube, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4c5dYDD9xw> (last accessed Jan. 5, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Devin Coldewey & Taylor Hatmaker, *Facebook and YouTube Remove Trump Video Calling Extremists 'Special'*, Tech Crunch (Jan. 6, 2021), available at <https://techcrunch.com/2021/01/06/facebook-and-youtube-remove-trump-video-calling-extremists-special/>; Ina Fried, Ashley Gold, *YouTube Takes Down Trump Video, Bans New Uploads For a Week*, Axios (Jan. 13, 2021), available at <https://www.axios.com/youtube-takes-down-trump-video-bans-new-uploads-for-a-week-f8f6caca-801f-4d2a-917d-fafb6401d9cd.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Mike Snider, *YouTube Ban: Google Extends Suspension of Former President Trump's Channel*, USA Today (Jan. 26, 2021), available at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2021/01/26/youtube-ban-former-president-trumps-channel-remain-suspended/4265336001/>.

<sup>7</sup> The YouTube Team, *Supporting the 2020 U.S. Election*, YouTube Official Blog (Dec. 9, 2020), available at <https://blog.youtube/news-and-events/supporting-the-2020-us-election/>.

<sup>8</sup> @YouTubeInsider, Twitter (Jan. 7, 2021, 12:19 PM), available at <https://twitter.com/YouTubeInsider/status/1347231471212371970>.

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

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Chairman Bennie Thompson to Sundar Pichai (Aug. 26, 2021), available at <https://january6th.house.gov/sites/democrats.january6th.house.gov/files/2021-08-26.BGT%20to%20Google.pdf>; Letter from Chairman Bennie Thompson to Susan Wojcicki (Aug. 26, 2021), available at <https://january6th.house.gov/sites/democrats.january6th.house.gov/files/2021-08-26.BGT%20to%20YouTube.pdf>.

Mr. Sundar Pichai

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has not demonstrated a commitment to voluntarily and expeditiously producing the information critical to the Select Committee's investigation. Accordingly, the Select Committee is transmitting this subpoena for priority documents in the scope of the August 26, 2021 request.

A copy of the rules governing document production definitions and instructions is attached. Please contact staff for the Select Committee at 202-225-7800 to arrange for the production of documents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bennie G. Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Bennie G. Thompson  
Chairman