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The Department of Infrastructure,
Transport and Regional Development,
Communications and the Arts,
GPO Box 594
Canberra ACT 2601

17th August 2023

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

I am writing to strongly oppose the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

The current form of the bill endangers freedom of expression and democratic values in Australia and grants excessive authority to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). This raises concerns of government censorship and overreach and ultimately compromises individual rights. Excluding government-approved and professional news content from similar oversight also raises bias concerns, privileging specific narratives and hindering diverse viewpoints. Likewise, favouring endorsed content risks silencing dissenting voices and stifling community engagement.

In a landscape where information dissemination is influenced by a wide variety of interests, relying solely on a central authority to arbitrate truth can lead to skewed perspectives and the suppression of dissenting views. Additionally, the presence of corporate entities with vested interests in content regulation raises concerns about their ability to accurately assess information without being swayed by financial motivations.

The establishment of a framework to ensure transparency in content regulation decisions is of utmost importance. Any entity that benefits from such content regulation should be required to disclose their affiliations and interests, thereby enabling the public to easily identify and evaluate potential biases. The public also has a right to know what material has been classified as misinformation or disinformation, and easily challenge these decisions.

For instance, consider the guidance provided by the Australian government to the population regarding Covid-19 vaccination. Initially, this advice was heavily influenced by recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO). Notably, the WHO receives substantial funding (as high as 88% of their total funding*) from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Bill Gates subsequently personally benefited by amassing enormous revenues, exceeding \$200 billion USD, from the sale of Coronavirus vaccines. This situation exposed an extreme conflict of interest which unfortunately the Australian media and governing bodies still have failed to sufficiently address.

The Australian public recently endured excessive and unjustified government censorship of many important issues, without regard for fact. Evidence of the kinds of misinformation censorship that have already occurred was published on page 4 of "The Weekend Australian" 22-23 July in an article titled "Banned Covid Posts 'totally factual'" by Chris Kelly (please see article attached at the bottom of this letter). This article states that many of the 4000 social media posts secretly censored by the government during the pandemic, despite containing factual information, were indeed heavily censored online.

This is the kind of censorship that can be extremely dangerous, as in this case the suppression of "factual" information may have resulted in the inadvertent harming of many people. For example, the suppression of such factual information may have resulted in both community and government support for extreme policy decisions, such as those that ultimately lead to the population being forced to choose to vaccinate against Covid 19, despite their personal wishes and beliefs, just in order to keep their job, run their business, enter a building or simply participate in everyday society.

By acknowledging the potential for conflicts of interest and taking proactive steps to mitigate them, we can work towards a more transparent, accountable, and fair information ecosystem. This approach would preserve the essence of diverse viewpoints and democratic principles while striving for accurate, unbiased information dissemination.

I implore the government to recognize the dangerous overreach in this legislation, withdraw the bill, and protect free speech and democracy in Australia. Thank you for considering my objection.

Kind Regards

Jen McNab

*<https://www.euronews.com/next/2023/02/03/how-is-the-world-health-organization-funded-and-why-does-it-rely-so-much-on-bill-gates>

Banned Covid posts 'totally factual'

EXCLUSIVE

CHRIS KENNY

Many of 4000 social media posts secretly censored by government during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic contained factual information and reasonable arguments rather than misinformation, new documents reveal.

Digital posts released after Freedom of Information applications show the censored information shared facts such as the ineffectiveness of vaccines in preventing Covid-19 infection and transmission or argued against measures such as mask mandates and lockdowns.

For instance, the then Coalition government sought the removal of an Instagram post in April 2021 that claimed "Covid-19 vaccine does not prevent Covid-19 infection or transmission".

That statement clearly was accurate yet the official intervention via the Home Affairs Department claimed it breached Instagram's community guidelines because it was "potentially harmful information" that was "explicitly prohibited" by the platform.

This is gravely concerning for all Australians who care about freedom of speech.

ALAN ANTE
LIBERAL SENATOR

A large proportion of posts the government targeted for removal by the digital platforms promoted wild conspiracy theories and misinformation but many others simply questioned the effectiveness of lockdowns and masks, shared information now accepted as accurate, and urged people to protest against pandemic measures.

An April 2021 tweet was challenged because it claimed "Covid-19 was released or escaped from Wuhan laboratories in China and that it was funded by the US government".

The Home Affairs Department claimed this was "explicitly prohibited" under Twitter's rules because it might "involve a deliberate conspiracy by malicious and/or powerful forces", yet American intelligence agencies have found the most likely source of the virus was the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and it has been revealed that some work at the laboratory was funded by the US.

Over three years up until last month, the federal government paid World Service Australia, an arm of London-based digital communications firm MRC Saatchi, more than \$1m to monitor Covid-19 posts online and alert it to controversial material.

INSIDE

The more power and money governments get - and we've never given them more of either - the less concerned they seem to be with the truth and their basic responsibilities.

CHRIS KENNY MP

It has previously revealed how the federal government, under the Coalition and later Labor, intervened more than 4000 times seeking the removal of social media posts by digital giants such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, using the companies own community standards as the trigger.

The information came to light as a result of FOI applications by Liberal senator Alan Antle.

Questions on notice from Senator Antle have now produced details of these interventions, revealing extensive efforts to suppress even factual information.

Senator Antle said this had confirmed his worst fears.

"During the Covid period, Home Affairs actively sought censorship of true statements such as 'lockdowns are ineffective' and censored social media comments to 'positively dissent' from the government's position," Senator Antle said.

"This is gravely concerning for all Australians who care about freedom of speech."

One Facebook video post in January 2021 was targeted for removal because it encouraged "civil disobedience".

It depicted a "recognised misinformation influencer" in Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens "blatantly walking up to signs that ask people to maintain physical distancing and hiding them from view".

Many other social media posts were censored for opposing mask mandates and questioning the effectiveness of lockdowns and vaccines.

This was censorship on an industrial scale, with the private contractor tasked to trawl through social media posts 24/7.

Senator Antle said the revelations were "gravely concerning" to all Australians who cared about freedom of speech.

He said this amounted to a "censorship industrial complex" and raised fears about this type of intervention being expanded under the proposed Misinformation Bill that would allow for the issuing of multimillion-dollar fines against platforms found to be hosting "misinformation or disinformation".

"It's never been more important that we protect freedom of speech in Australia and expect this

GOING VIRAL

Social media posts and the reasons the federal government sought to censor them

The Covid-19 vaccine does not prevent infection or transmission
"Potentially harmful information explicitly prohibited by Instagram"

Covid-19 was released or escaped from the Wuhan Laboratory in China and was funded by the US government
"False or misleading information about the pandemic of Covid-19 vaccines that involve a deliberate conspiracy by malicious and/or powerful forces"

A vaccine so safe you have to be threatened to take it ... for an illness so bad you have to be tested to know you have it
"Potentially harmful information ... that contribute(s) to vaccine rejection"

Lockdowns are ineffective
"False or misleading information"

Covid-19 has a 99.9% recovery rate
"Designed to undermine public confidence in Covid-19 vaccination programs and related public health measures"

Covid-19 can be easily cured using the drugs Ivermectin and Hydroxychloroquine
"Unverified medical advice"

No masks
"Contradict official government advice on the mandated wearing of face masks in certain environments"

Face masks are ineffective against Covid-19
"Contradicts official information on the efficacy of face masks in preventing Covid-19 infection"

The Covid-19 vaccine does not work and masks, social distancing and lockdowns have not worked
"Contradict official information on the proven efficacy of the imposed public health order, and undermines public confidence in the Covid-19 vaccine"

Extracts from a Department of Home Affairs spreadsheet

Kennedy warning on 'censoring' powers

EXCLUSIVE

ADAM CROFT (TPA)

senator@tpa.gov.au

Democrat presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr warned Australia of the risks of empowering the federal government to police speech on social media, saying "totalitarian elements" in liberal societies were amassing too much power.

Mr Kennedy, a free-speech advocate and long-time vaccine critic, said democracies were "very rare in human history and difficult to maintain", when asked about looming bills in the UK and Australia that would empower governments to censor "misinformation" and "disinformation".

"Every country that wants to

needs to understand the inclination of powerful institutions - elements to which I want to leverage money, concerted or real, in order to eliminate constitutional basic rights, and increase their power and wealth," he told *The Weekend Australian* on Friday (AEST).

Mr Kennedy, first cousin of US ambassador to Australia Caroline Kennedy and nephew of assassinated US president John F. Kennedy, was speaking after a *Green* congressional hearing at which he was called by Republicans to talk about alleged conspiracy of him by the US government during the pandemic.

Congress Democrats aggressively targeted Mr Kennedy, who came under attack this week as a racist and anti-Semitic after comments he made at a dinner on Capitol Hill in April on a platform of ending the

'Powerful totalitarian elements in society ... want to leverage "crazies", concocted or real'

ROBERT F. KENNEDY
DEMOCRAT CANDIDATE

Covid-19, which could have been a bioweapon.

"I have never uttered a phrase that was either racist or anti-Semitic," he told the *Washington Post* after the hearing, set up by Republicans to probe alleged ties between conservatives within the federal government.

Mr Kennedy, an environmental lawyer turned trenchant critic of Covid-19 vaccines and mandates, launched his campaign in April on a platform of ending the

capture what he calls "regulatory capture" of US government agencies by large corporations.

A Louisiana court this month struck down the US government's ability to pressure or request social media companies to take down "misinformation", citing the First Amendment of the US constitution, promising a political freedom and an appeal by the Biden administration.

"I'm aware that the case thing is happening in the EU, and I'm aware that in fact the US has signed a national security order that encourages Western nations to coordinate cross-border messaging," he said, referring to the growing number of new and potential laws in the West seeking to curb certain "disruptive" speech.

"I should not, I should not," he added, when asked for his view on Australian digital liberties, re-

fers from Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a Republican challenger for president polling about the same level as Mr Kennedy in the opposite party.

The government has proposed a misinformation and disinformation bill, along the lines of similar bills in the UK, that would give it power to order social media companies to censor speech it believed posed a threat to Australian health, the environment, or any economic or financial harm.

Mr Kennedy, 69, said Western societies were becoming more like China, which strictly controls online speech.

He had been polling just under 20 per cent nationally among Democrats, but a recent poll in New Hampshire, a critical early state in the primary calendar next year, put him at 57 per cent.