

Facebook's leadership must reconsider their policies regarding political speech, beginning by fact-checking politicians and explicitly labeling harmful posts.

As early employees on teams across the company, we authored the original Community Standards, contributed code to products that gave voice to people and public figures, and helped to create a company culture around connection and freedom of expression.

We grew up at Facebook, but it is no longer ours.

The Facebook we joined designed products to empower people and policies to protect them. The goal was to allow as much expression as possible unless it would explicitly do harm. We disagreed often, but we all understood that keeping people safe was the right thing to do. Now, it seems, that commitment has changed.

We no longer work at Facebook, but we do not disclaim it. We also no longer recognize it. We remain proud of what we built, grateful for the opportunity, and hopeful for the positive force it can become. But none of that means we have to be quiet. In fact, we have a responsibility to speak up.

Today, Facebook's leadership interprets freedom of expression to mean that they should do nothing - or very nearly nothing - to interfere in political discourse. They have decided that elected officials should be held to a lower standard than those they govern. One set of rules for you, and another for any politician, from your local mayor to the President of the United States.

This exposes two fundamental problems:

First, Facebook's behavior doesn't match the stated goal of [avoiding any political censorship](#). Facebook already is acting, as [Mark Zuckerberg put it on Friday](#), as the "arbiter of truth." It monitors speech all the time when it adds warnings to links, downranks content to reduce its spread, and fact checks political speech from non-politicians.

This is a betrayal of the ideals Facebook claims. The company we joined valued giving individuals a voice as loud as their government's -- protecting the powerless rather than the powerful.

Facebook now turns that goal on its head. It claims that providing warnings about a politician's speech is inappropriate, but removing content from citizens is acceptable, even if both are saying the same thing. That is not a noble stand for freedom. It is incoherent, and worse, it is cowardly. Facebook should be holding politicians to a *higher* standard than their constituents.

Second, since Facebook's inception, researchers have learned a lot more about group psychology and the dynamics of mass persuasion. Thanks to work done by the [Dangerous Speech Project](#) and many others, we understand the power words have to increase the likelihood of violence. We know the speech of the powerful matters most of all. It establishes norms, creates a permission structure, and implicitly authorizes violence, all of which is made worse by algorithmic amplification. Facebook's leadership has spoken with these experts, with advocates, and with organizers, yet they still seem committed to granting the powerful free reign.

So what do we make of this? If all speech by politicians is newsworthy and all newsworthy speech is inviolable, then there is no line the most powerful people in the world cannot cross on the largest platform in the world - or at least none that the platform is willing to enforce.

President Trump's post on Friday not only threatens violence by the state against its citizens, it also sends a signal to millions who take cues from the President. Facebook's policy allows that post to stand alone. In an age of live-streamed shootings, Facebook should know the danger of this better than most. Trump's rhetoric, steeped in the history of American racism, targeted people whom Facebook would not allow to repeat his words back to him.

It is our shared heartbreak that motivates this letter. We are devastated to see something we built and something we believed would make the world a better place lose its way so profoundly. We understand it is hard to answer these questions at scale, but it was also hard to build the platform that created these problems. There is a responsibility to solve them, and solving hard problems is what Facebook is good at.

To current employees who are speaking up: we see you, we support you, and we want to help. We hope you will continue to ask yourselves the question that hangs on posters in each of Facebook's offices: "What would you do if you weren't afraid?"

To Mark: we know that you think deeply about these issues, but we also know that Facebook must work to regain the public's trust. Facebook isn't neutral, and it never has been. Making the world more open and connected, strengthening communities, giving everyone a voice -- these are *not* neutral ideas. Fact-checking is not censorship. Labeling a call to violence is not authoritarianism. Please reconsider your position.

Proceed and be bold.

Sincerely, some of your earliest employees:

Meredith Chin, Adam Conner, Natalie Ponte, Jon Warman, Dave Willner, Ezra Callahan, Chris Putnam, Bob Trahan, Natalie Trahan, Ben Blumenrose, Jocelyn Blumenrose, Bobby Goodlatte, Simon Axten, Brandee Barker, Doug Fraser, Krista Kobeski, Warren Hanes, Caitlin O'Farrell Gallagher, Jake Brill, Carolyn Abram, Jamie Patterson, Abdus-Salam DeVaul, Scott Fortin, Bobby Kellogg, Tanja Balde, Alex Vichinsky, Matt Fernandez, Elizabeth Linder, Mike Ferrier, Jamie Patterson, Brian Sutorius, Amy Karasavas, Kathleen Estreich, Claudia Park