October 19, 2023

Dear Members of the Oversight Board,

I am writing today regarding the threat posed by altered content, specifically “cheap fakes” on digital platforms, including Meta. I support the Oversight Board’s well-founded decision to review an altered and deeply misleading video posted by a Facebook user of President Biden voting early in-person during the 2022 midterm elections. Additionally, I urge the Board to assess the effectiveness of Meta’s policies to prevent further spread of election misinformation through “cheap fakes.”

As you know, flagging and removing altered content on digital platforms such as Facebook and Instagram is critical to protect users from election misinformation, interference, and intentional manipulation. This is particularly important as millions of Americans increasingly look to these platforms to obtain news and election information.

Quickly evolving artificial intelligence (AI) technology makes it difficult for voters to accurately identify fraudulent video and audio material and has rightfully been the topic of much discussion as the technology continues to advance. However, platforms must also remain wary of any doctored content posted on digital platforms, even if not AI was not used to manipulate the content. These “cheap fakes” are easy to make and can be equally dangerous in the spread of election misinformation.

Throughout my tenure in Congress, I have pushed digital platforms to address realistic falsified videos and images, including manually edited “cheap fakes.” Although the video in this case was not altered using AI, I remain concerned that any altered content of elected officials or political candidates poses a threat to our democratic institutions and voters’ ability to make accurately informed decisions. This is especially true of content altered with the intent of removing context or distorting reality.

In the case currently being reviewed by the Oversight Board, Meta’s initial decision not to remove the altered video of President Biden encourages the spread of other “cheap fakes” and other election misinformation – as we saw with the decision to leave an altered “cheap fake” of Speaker Nancy Pelosi on its platform leading up to the 2020 election. Furthermore, the determination by Meta that the content did not violate the company’s policies on manipulated media fails to consider the detrimental impact of the spread of altered content related to elections, regardless of the use of AI.

Meta’s policy on misinformation, as laid out in their Facebook Community Standards, includes the removal of “content that is likely to directly contribute to interference with the functioning of political processes and certain highly deceptive manipulated media.” As the 2024 Presidential election quickly approaches, particularly with one candidate willing to continuously break the bounds of ethical behavior on social media as we saw with January 6, I urge the Oversight Board to use its authority to recommend that Meta ensure their policies on

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manipulated media and misinformation include regulation of any altered content on its platform that seeks to spread election misinformation and disinformation.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress