COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTERVIEW OF: KATE STARBIRD

Tuesday, June 6, 2023

Washington, D.C.

The interview in the above matter was held in room 2237, Rayburn House Office Building, commencing at 10:00 a.m.

Present: Representatives Jordan and Bishop.

Appearances:

For the COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY:

[redacted]

For the SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SURVEILLANCE:

[redacted]

For the SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE,

REGULATORY REFORM, AND ANTITRUST:

[redacted]

For KATE STARBIRD:

PRESTON BURTON, PARTNER

TIFFANY ROWE, SENIOR ASSOCIATE

ORRICK HERRINGTON & SUTCLIFFE LLP

2001 M STREET NW, SUITE 500

WASHINGTON, DC 20036

[redacted]. Can we go on the record?

This is a transcribed interview of Dr. Kate Starbird. Chairman Jordan has requested this interview as part of the committee's investigation of how and the extent to which the executive branch has coerced and colluded with companies and other intermediaries to censor speech.

Would the witness please state your name for the record?

Ms. Starbird. Kate Starbird.

[redacted]. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you for appearing here today to answer our questions. The chairman also appreciates your willingness to appear voluntarily.

Ms. Starbird. Thank you.

[redacted]. My name is [redacted], and I'm with Chairman Jordan's staff. I will now have everyone from the committee who's here in the room introduce themselves as well.

[redacted], Chairman Jordan's staff.

[redacted], House Judiciary Committee, Mr. Jordan's staff.

[redacted] with Ranking Member Nadler's staff.

[redacted], chief oversight counsel with House Judiciary Democratic staff.

[redacted] with Mr. Nadler's staff.

[redacted] with Chairman Jordan's staff.

[redacted], Chairman Jordan's staff.

[redacted], counsel for Chairman Jordan's staff.

[redacted], Chairman Jordan's staff.

[redacted] [redacted], Chairman Jordan's staff.

[redacted]. I would like to now go over the ground rules and guidelines that we will follow during today's interview.

Our questioning will proceed in rounds. The majority will ask questions first for 1 hour, and then the minority will have an opportunity to ask questions for an equal period of time if they choose. We will alternate back and forth until there are no more questions and the interview is over.

Typically, we take a short break at the end of each hour. But if you would like to take a break apart from that, please just let us know.

Ms. Starbird. Okay.

[redacted]. As you can see, there's an official court reporter taking down everything we say to make a written record, so we ask that you give verbal responses to all questions.

Do you understand?

Ms. Starbird. Yes.

[redacted]. So the court reporter can take down a clear record, we will do our best to limit the number of people directing questions at you during any given hour to just those people on the staff whose turn it is.

Please try and speak clearly so the court reporter can understand and so the folks down at the end of the table can hear you.

It is important that we don't talk over one another or interrupt each other if we can help it, and that goes for everybody present at today's interview.

We encourage witnesses who appear before the committee to freely consult with counsel if they so choose. It is my understanding that you are appearing today with counsel.

Is that correct?

Ms. Starbird. Yes.

[redacted]. Would counsel please state your name for the record.

Mr. Burton. Yes. Preston Burton, Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe. I'm here with my colleague, Tiffany Rowe, R-o-w-e.

[redacted]. Thank you.

We want you to answer our questions in the most complete and truthful manner as possible, so we will take our time. If you have any questions or if you do not understand one of our questions, please just let us know. Our questions will cover a wide range of topics, so if you need clarification at any point, just say so.

If you honestly don't know the answer to a question or do not remember, it is best not to guess. Please give us your best recollection, and it is okay to tell us if you learned the information from someone else. Just indicate how you came to know the information.

If there are things you don't know or can't remember, just say so, and please inform us who, to the best of your knowledge, might be able to provide a more complete answer to the question.

You should also understand that although this interview is not under oath, that by law you are required to answer questions from Congress truthfully.

Do you understand that?

Ms. Starbird. I do.

[redacted]. This also applies to questions posed by congressional staff in an interview.

Do you understand this?

Ms. Starbird. I do.

[redacted]. Witnesses that knowingly provide false testimony could be subject to criminal prosecution for perjury or making false statements under 18 U.S.C. 1001.

Do you understand this?

Ms. Starbird. I do.

[redacted]. Is there any reason you are unable to provide truthful answers to today's questions?

Ms. Starbird. No reason.

[redacted]. Finally, I would like to make a note that the content of what we discuss here today is confidential. We ask that you not speak about what we discuss in this interview to any outside individuals to preserve the integrity of our investigation.

For the same reason, the marked exhibits that we will use today will remain with the court reporter so that they can go in the official transcript. Any copies of those exhibits will be returned to us when we wrap up.

That is the end of my preamble.

Is there anything that my colleagues from the minority would like to add?

[redacted]. We just thank the witness for traveling across the country to join us today.

Ms. Starbird. Thank you.

[redacted]. The clock now reads 10:03. We will start the first hour of questioning.

EXAMINATION

BY [redacted]:

Q Can you tell us your current job title and where you work?

A Yeah. I'm an associate professor at the University of Washington in the Department of Human Centered Design & Engineering.

Q And is the University of Washington public?

A It's a public university, yes.

Q And can you tell us your educational background, starting with college?

A I have a bachelor's of science in computer science from Stanford University, and I have a Ph.D. in technology, media, and society from the University of Colorado.

Q And your employment history?

A My employment history --

Q You don't have to tell us, like, little jobs before college or anything like that.

A Okay. From approximately the age of 21, from graduation of college, to about age 30, I was a professional basketball player in several capacities. I could name off the teams if you would like me to.

At 31, I went back to university, got a Ph.D., and then my only employer since then has been the University of Washington.

Q Okay. And can you tell us about your work at the University of Washington, what you teach -- well, assuming you teach. Do you teach?

A I do teach. Yeah, I do teach. Currently, I'm teaching a class on human-computer interaction, which is how people use computers and how the ways that we use computers change how we socialize, communicate, and interact with each other.

Q And what other courses do you teach?

A I teach experimental methods to master's students. I've taught classes, a couple special topics classes on the methods of analyzing social media data and on online rumors and misinformation.

Q Can you expand a little bit on the online rumors and misinformation? What does that mean exactly?

A Online rumors and misinformation, sure. I think there's a couple different

definitions here.

So online -- so rumors, actually the definition of rumors goes back -- you start to see research on that in around World War II really kind of take off. Actually it has a longer definition.

But rumor means sort of information that's not verified, that's traveling through informal channels. And rumors can turn out to be true. Rumors can turn out to be false.

So rumor is just sort of, like, uncertain information. They often occur during crisis times. And my original research at the University of Colorado was on the use of social media during crisis events. So rumors are common during crisis events.

Misinformation is information that's false. So a false rumor, you could categorize that as misinformation. And misinformation is not intentionally false.

And then disinformation is a variation of misinformation that's intentional, so someone is intentionally spreading false or misleading information for some sort of objective.

Q And when you say false, either in the context of mis- or disinformation, how do you decide what's false?

A I don't -- well, there's -- I don't even know who -- that's a hard question to answer. I don't necessarily decide when things are false. I think these are the terms that we would use to classify things.

Q Do you rely on other third parties to --

A In my research? In my teaching?

Q Well, both. Can you tell us each?

A Yeah. In my research we tend to look towards official sources and fact-checking organizations to determine veracity, although it's not often that I'm

classifying information as misinformation or not. We're just sort of talking about -- we're talking about the ways that information flows and how people make sense of things.

And we tend to more recently kind of go back to the rumor definition because it's a lot easier to work, especially in real-time, because you're not sure about the veracity of information. And so we tend to use the word "rumoring" in the research.

And especially in our historical research and some of the research projects that we may talk about today, we've used the term "misinformation" and "disinformation." And for misinformation, usually if we're working in a real-time capacity, we'd be trying to use official fact-checking organizations.

Q Are there any specific fact-checking organizations you work with frequently?

A I don't work directly with them. I just use their information. I would go online --

Q I see.

A -- and check different fact-checking organizations to see what they say.

Q I see. Okay.

And you mentioned that you do research. Can you tell us more about the kind of research you do?

A Yeah. So starting in around 2010, I started doing research on the use of social media during crisis events; crisis events being mass emergency events, hurricanes, earthquakes, as well as acts of terrorism, looking at how informal information could be used to actually initially -- I have a study in digital volunteerism, how people helped people using social media by helping people find resources, figure out where shelters are, ways to communicate about hazards so people can avoid going towards something that's dangerous, information about how to evacuate, those kinds of things.

So we would actually create these maps in real time to map out crisis events, and then I would study digital volunteerism at the activity that people used to kind of create these maps.

Around 2013, I started to look at rumors during crisis events because rumors became a larger part of the social media record around that time. Hurricane Sandy in 2012 was another case that just started to see rumors become a bigger and bigger part of the conversation that was happening there.

And so 2013, we start to study rumors. Around 2015, 2016, we begin to see that it's not just accidental rumors that we're seeing, it's that people are intentionally spreading falsehoods to try to -- for various reasons that we could try to infer. But we began to see sort of disinformation become pervasive within some pieces of the network of sort of online interactions.

Q And can you tell us about some of your recent research, maybe in the last 5 years or so?

A Yeah. Last 5 years. So 5 years -- so I would say I have a couple of different strong focus points.

So I would -- so one of the things we've been doing was we looked at disinformation campaigns around the 2016 election. We mapped out -- so we've been studying -- one of my students had led a project where we were studying Black Lives Matter discourse, and we had written a paper about sort of both sides of that conversation. We could map out the networks.

And we then learned when Twitter reported out publicly, I think through some conversations with Congress, they ended up getting pressure to point to -- to publish where the Russian troll accounts from the Internet Research Agency in St. Petersburg had been operating accounts impersonating Americans.

And so we did a pretty intensive study mapping those accounts to the Black Lives Matter discourse and actually found those accounts that infiltrated both sides of U.S. discourse and wrote about that.

Another project around the same time we started -- and it probably finished in 2020 -- we looked at a campaign that has Russian, Iranian, and other -- and Syrian Government elements where they were running a disinformation campaign targeting a humanitarian response organization in Syria. And so we have -- one of my students did a dissertation on that. We have several studies on that.

More recently, in the last couple of years, I think in 2020, a lot of my colleagues were really focused on sort of misinformation around COVID, including, like, where people started to get mad at the 5G towers or tell people where to -- that they can drink water and it would make them better, those kinds of things. So we did a little focus on that.

But I ended up spending a little bit more time doing research on the 2020 election.

Q Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

A Yeah. So in real time, my team participated as part of the Election Integrity Partnership to basically use our skills on social media data analysis to help analyze rumors, is what I would call them now, analyze rumors that were spreading in online environments, analyze those in real time, and then try to communicate about them to let people know that these things were spreading in hopes that they could be corrected and that people could get better information about what was going on.

So that included -- so it included real-time activity similar to what I had been doing with the crisis mapping years ago, sort of like a real-time analysis, using our data analysis skills to show how rumors were spreading.

We had four focus areas in that project, in the Election Integrity Partnership.

The first one was on false, misleading claims about when and where to vote that would have caused disenfranchisement.

The second one was on misleading information that would encourage fraud.

The third one, I think, the third dimension, I think, was on false or misleading information that could -- that was motivating violence.

And the fourth one was on false, misleading, or unsubstantiated claims that undermine trust in the election processes, materials, or results.

Q Just to clarify, that wasn't limited to looking at foreign actors, correct? That was also domestic?

A It was looking at information flows through social media spaces. And it is not possible to distinguish between foreign and U.S. actors. As we, you know, when we wrote our Black Lives Matter paper, we thought those were all U.S. actors and then found them to be people impersonating.

And so, yeah, so when you look at social media spaces, those kinds of things are hard to determine.

Q And do you get funding for your research outside of the University of Washington?

A Absolutely, yeah. So my rumoring research and then my early -- I got a career grant from the National Science Foundation. So I have -- early funding for my rumoring research was from the National Science Foundation, and I got a career grant from the National Science Foundation to study disinformation. I think I was awarded that grant in early 2018. And I think 2017 I had some funding from the Navy -- I forget the office there -- to study --

Q Office of Naval Research?

A Office of Naval Research, yeah, to study disinformation. Those, I think,

were foreign disinformation focused.

And then more broadly I get a lot of research now through the Center for an Informed Public, and I can talk about that; from philanthropic organizations, the Knight Foundation, Omidyar Network, Hewlett Foundation, Craig Newmark Philanthropies. I may be leaving one out there.

Chairman Jordan. Ms. Starbird, what percentage of -- thanks for being here today.

What percentage of your funding is directly from the government?

Ms. Starbird. I haven't done the math on that. It depends on what generation.

So the government funding funds very specifically our research, our research stuff. It mostly funds my students to do -- to work on things and occasionally funds a month of my salary in the summer.

The other research I have from the Knight Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, those fund the operations for the Center for an Informed Public, as well as student hours and post-doctoral scholars as well.

I think the amounts of funding for me personally in the recent years have mostly come from philanthropic funding through the Center for an Informed Public, but I do still have funding from the National Science Foundation. I also still have one more grant from the National Science Foundation in the crisis space where I look at crisis events.

BY [redacted]:

Q You're one of the cofounders of the Center for an Informed Public. Is that right?

A I am, yes.

Q And when did you cofound that center?

A We cofounded it in fall of 2019.

Q And who are your cofounders?

A Cofounders are Emma Spiro, Jevin West, Ryan Calo, and Chris Coward.

Q And what was the purpose of the CIP? What was it created to do?

A The CIP has a mission to understand and help address the problem of misinformation and strategic manipulation in online spaces, and we do that through four different dimensions.

One is research, just to understand the problem.

We also have an educational mission and an outreach mission to help people. So we do media literacy kinds of things, trainings.

We also consult, give talks, to help members of the public understand the challenges of online misinformation.

And then we have a law and policy pillar as well. I'm not as connected to that. That's Ryan Calo.

Q But you're very involved in the other three. Is that correct?

A I'm probably most -- like, I lead the research and co-led the research component and the data infrastructure piece because of the data and analyses that we do. But right now I'm the director of the center, so I have a larger view of the other dimensions as well.

Q And, in your opinion, what should tech companies do to combat the misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation? Which you actually defined the first two, but I don't think we talked about malinformation. If you don't mind defining that.

A I don't use that term myself very much.

Q Oh, okay.

A I don't like it.

Q Okay.

A And I know the government uses it. So in a capacity we'll talk about later, I was on a committee that had that in their name, and I tried to remove it from our conversations because I don't care for that term.

Q Why don't you care for it?

A I think it's murky, and I prefer to focus on things that are -- that we can define as on a veracity scale, as opposed to malinformation tends to be information that can be harmful, like harassment and other kinds of things, but is not necessarily false.

And I've really been focused in the sort of, like, rumors and veracity space. And I think when we bring malinformation in, things can get harder to talk about with clear delineations.

Q I see.

So can you tell us what steps you believe tech companies should take to combat misinformation and disinformation? I know that's a very hard question.

A It's a hard question to answer because every day it changes, because we're learning more things all the time. I mean, I'm a researcher, right? And we have to understand this space is extremely dynamic. The phenomenon is changing. People's understandings of it are changing.

In 2016, people had never heard -- they never even thought that someone would be impersonating someone else online and that we could fall for that and have conversations with that.

And then now media literacy, people are actually much more aware of that. I think there's been times where I might have said that sort of we could think about the affordances of the platforms and changing those to kind of change how -- so we kind of think about design and how these platforms actually amplify the problems of

misinformation in part by creating opportunities for influencers to gain influence by purposefully putting malicious content and misinformation, disinformation out in the space.

And so thinking about how the platforms could design the ways that people are recommended certain content, to change some of those dynamics to make healthier spaces.

But my opinions have evolved over time, I would say, and so my opinions today right now, I'm much more focused on the media literacy pieces and also trying to think about how we build tools that actually can give people who are using these platforms information about how the information reaches them so they can make better decisions about what they believe and what they share.

And so one of my recent papers focuses on that aspect, which is how do we sort of support new media literacy. So that's kind of where I would say I am most encouraged about where the research is going now.

Q Can you define media literacy for us, please?

A Media literacy?

Q Yes.

A And we've got a few different terms. We've got media literacy, digital media literacy, information literacy. These fields are evolving so quickly that the language is changing underneath us as we're doing that work.

Media literacy is actually -- and probably used the wrong term there -- media literacy has been focused, it's got a history of kind of focusing on how information moves through media and how we can be better critical thinkers about how we're getting that information.

I think information literacy speaks a little bit more. It combines that but

understands how information is moving through online platforms. And so people have a better understanding of sort of digital information literacy. They can understand a little bit where they may be more vulnerable to mis- and disinformation.

And so there are ideas to improve people's media literacy. Unfortunately, we could teach people all day to say, okay, you don't want to believe someone who is impersonating. But if we don't give them the tools to be able to detect when someone is impersonating someone else, they're not going to be able to use those skills.

So coming up with ways to develop signals within these platforms to help understand information provenance, which is the basis of my career grant, was to help people kind of track -- part of it was to study disinformation. Part of it was to understand those dynamics. And then part of it was to help people figure out how they could track information provenance with this understanding. If we understand better how information moves through systems, we can make better decisions.

And I would say information literacy or digital media literacy is what our Center for an Informed Public is focusing on right now when we've had our conversations in the last 3 to 4 months.

Q Have you worked with government agencies, or do you work with government agencies in your capacity?

A Have I worked directly -- with the University of Washington?

Q Yeah.

A I have recently been sitting as --

Mr. Burton. You mean Federal, because she works at the University of Washington?

BY [redacted]:

Q Yeah, sorry. Federal agencies.

A Yeah. And do we want to start after my crisis work? Because the crisis work, I don't -- I do think I had a grant from, like, NOAA to work in that space, and I would sometimes have meetings with people.

When people ask me to help and lend my insight, I usually say yes. And so I don't know how we're defining "work with." But I've been doing that my whole academic career, starting back, like, after the 2010 earthquake, I would be on the phone sometimes with folks who were asking questions about what we thought was going on.

But more --

Q Tell us as much as you can.

A Yeah. But more recently -- I can focus on more recent because my memory is probably better. I'm on the CISA -- the advisory board for DHS, CISA, external advisory board, and I've been on that since 2021. I'm sure we're going to talk about that. And so in that capacity I've been working with that office.

Prior to that, would I be directly working with anyone in the Federal Government? Not that I know of.

Q Okay.

A Now, indirectly, other folks on the project I was on were -- they were an external partner to a project that I was on, but I wasn't directly interfacing with them.

Q Okay. So as far as -- yeah, let's talk about the subcommittee.

Are you familiar with -- it's CSAC?

A CISA?

Q No, not CISA. The -- I don't know what -- how you pronounce it. The acronym is CSAC.

BY [redacted]:

Q So are you familiar with CISA?

A I'm familiar with CISA now, yeah.

Q And what is CISA?

A I mean, I live in Washington State. All these letters, they don't all make sense to me. We don't have this alphabet soup.

Yeah, the CS -- the CSAC is the advisory board that I'm on, I believe.

Q Yes.

A Yeah, they say that -- it took me a while to figure out what the term meant.

Q And what is that?

A It's an external advisory board that we meet with a group of people. A lot of them come from industry. I think there's two researchers on that group. And we advise Jen Easterly around cybersecurity issues.

So we're going to jump over to, like, most of that is, like, traditional cybersecurity on sort of cyber hygiene kind of initiatives, so how we help people figure out how to protect their devices, use two-factor authentication so they don't fall victim individually to hackers, but also people in companies, to help companies not to get hacked.

And we talk about as a workforce issues. So they have a lot of initiatives around, like, trying to get people into the workforce there. And, yeah, conversations to inform the CISA office on -- we give recommendations. So we don't do anything operational. We just kind of give recommendations on different issues that Jen Easterly has asked to get feedback on.

BY [redacted]:

Q And you're on the MDM Subcommittee under --

A I was on the MDM Subcommittee, right.

Q When did you stop being on it?

A The MDM Subcommittee was dissolved last fall.

Q Oh, I see.

Do you know when it was formed?

A So I think the advisory board was formed in -- I think Jen Easterly first -- so I met her through an email or she reached out to me through an email in 2021 in the fall, and then she asked me to be on the committee.

The committee starts to convene around 2022 in the winter, maybe December of 2021, and around that time she asked me to lead the MDM Subcommittee. And I asked: What is MDM? And then we got -- yeah, figured it out.

Q Did they define the terms the way that you defined them earlier, misinformation and disinformation?

A Their terms are slightly different than mine because there's a lot of -- I'm going to get really into the weeds here.

But these terms are dynamic. So these are problems that are just rising in terms of awareness, in part because of the online systems that we use.

And so their terms on disinformation are very specific, like -- and I have a slightly different term of -- definition of disinformation than they do. But I would say, like, the one I gave you is probably pretty consistent with what the Federal Government uses, which I think is what CISA uses.

Q Okay. So how does your definition of disinformation differ from theirs?

A Oh, mine has -- mine acknowledges that the role of unwitting agents in the spread of disinformation, going back to sort of, like, reports -- sorry.

So 2016, we kind of become aware of this term, and some of us had used it before. We didn't really understand what it meant, disinformation, and how it has a history of a certain technique via Russian intelligence starting in the -- probably even before World War II. Thomas Rid has a great book about that.

And the disinformation is intentional, but that a large portion of the people that spread disinformation do not always realize that they are witting participants in that -- or so they're not -- they don't always realize that it's disinformation, so they're unwitting participants in the spread of disinformation.

And so my definition kind of suggests that even when disinformation is spreading and a person doesn't know it, it's still disinformation. They just happen to be an unwitting conduit.

Q Right.

A Whereas CISA draws a line where you have to be -- it's misinformation if you don't know it's --

Q I see.

A If you don't know it's not true, it's misinformation. It's just sort of semantics.

Q Okay. So according to CISA, it could sort of originate as disinformation, but then other people --

A Then it comes misinformation as it spreads, yeah. And there's actually a little bit of academic, like, we're still trying to figure out what it means, right?

Q Yeah. What was the primary purpose of the subcommittee?

A The primary purpose of that subcommittee was to address what they perceive to be as one of the hard -- the biggest challenges for election officials, local and State election officials. In fact, I'd been to a couple of conferences prior, which is probably why I said yes to this, where election officials said that, like, the thing that was hardest in their jobs was dealing with misinformation.

And I think Stephen Richer had said: Dealing with misinformation is my day job. Running the election is my night job.

Q Who is Stephen Richer?

A Stephen Richer is -- happened to take over as recorder in Maricopa County in 2020, which Maricopa County is 3,600 -- we're going off to the side here -- but we have, like, 3,600 different jurisdictions for voting in the United States, but that one happens to be a very big county in a swing State, and so gets a lot of attention.

And in 2020, they had perceived problems with Sharpie pens. And in 2022 -- well, in 2020, Stephen Richer took over as -- he wins that election as a Republican in Maricopa County and becomes the recorder there. And there were a lot of false claims about the validity of the 2020 election there related to Sharpie pens. I'm happy to talk about it.

And he is dealing with all that kind of fallout from that as he takes over. And he begins to say that misinformation is, like, overtaking his job because it's so hard to deal with all the misinformation that he's confronting.

Q And what about malinformation? How did the subcommittee define malinformation, or CISA?

A I don't know how they defined it. In our work we just tried to avoid it. So when we gave recommendations, we tried to take malinformation off of the recommendations and just make recommendations about mis- and disinformation.

Q I see.

A And we were working pretty much specifically in elections context. We were asked to give recommendations possibly more broadly, and we thought that we would focus our energy, especially leading up into the 2022 midterm election with this sort of -- the acute problem of misinformation that election officials were experiencing -- we focused our attention on just thinking about that particular problem.

Q Did you attend meetings? Were there meetings?

A There were meetings, yeah, yeah, really exciting ones.

So I attended I think -- I think I've been in three in-person meetings with the full group, the full advisory board, which has some 20-some members maybe. In fact, it's got more. They added a bunch in the last round.

And then there would be, I think, biweekly meetings. From maybe February or March of 2022 until September of 2022 we had biweekly meetings, like 1-hour meetings remotely.

Q I see.

A Yeah.

Q And --

[redacted]. Sorry. Just real quick.

[redacted]. Okay.

BY [redacted]:

Q You mentioned the full committee expanded since the last round?

A Yeah.

Q What did you mean by that?

A I think they invited additional members onto the advisory board.

Q Okay. And was that -- what do you mean? I guess what do you mean by round?

A It was like the completion of a year. So when -- so it had been -- it was at the year date. And I mean round because we have the meetings at the same time each year.

So it was a December meeting that we had, like, a first meeting, and it was the next December of that day that they changed the committees, they changed around the subcommittees, and they added more people to the larger committee.

Q And are people asked to serve for 1-year terms?

A I think it's 2 years, yeah.

Q What are the other subcommittees?

A I don't know all the other subcommittees. But in the first year my memory is there was like a cyber hygiene around like trying to protect individuals and companies by two-factor authentication and other kinds of things.

There's some kind of technological advisory committee. There was a committee on trying to improve, like, the workforce or grow the workforce. And I honestly don't remember the other committees.

BY [redacted]:

Q You said that the MDM Subcommittee disbanded?

A After the first year, yeah.

Q Do you know why?

A I don't know why. She said that our work was over, the midterms were done, and that was it.

Q Okay.

[redacted]. Who is "she"?

Ms. Starbird. Jen Easterly, Director Easterly.

BY [redacted]:

Q And who are the other members? I know you said there were lots of --

A I can't remember.

Q Yeah. So the ones that you can remember?

A Yeah. I can name the members of my subcommittee.

Q Yeah.

A So that was Alicia Tate-Nadeau.

Q Can you tell us where they came from, where they worked?

A Where they came from?

Q Yeah.

A Okay. Alicia Tate-Nadeau I think is maybe Illinois emergency response. Suzanne Spaulding, I think she is -- I can't remember the letters. There's C's and I's and S's, but I don't know which order, and she is the director of an organization, I believe. And then Vijaya Gadde, whose name I might be mispronouncing, she was at Twitter at the time.

Q And some of these people were from government, right, from Federal Government agencies?

A On the actual committee?

Q Yeah.

A I don't believe the actual committee had people from Federal Government agencies. I could be wrong.

Q Okay. Did people besides subcommittee members attend the meetings?

A Yeah. So these are online meetings, and they were run in Microsoft Teams, and I could not always see who all was there.

My understanding is that some individuals that are on these committees could bring a second, so a person to help them. I learned that too late to have brought my own. It would have been nice to have a notetaker. So there is seconds.

And then there were staff from CISA who would help us -- staff from CISA who would, like, help us take notes. They would help produce an agenda and minutes and those kinds of things.

And then there were folks -- in our subcommittee there were folks, Kim Wyman and Geoff Hale, who would come from the CISA office -- not always, they would show up

when they could make the meetings -- that could be a resource for us to ask, like, what -- basically we would ask them how things worked, so then we could kind of think about if there was something that could be different or kind of blend that into our recommendations. So they were resources for us to ask questions of.

Q Okay. And what was typically discussed at the meetings, I guess more specifically than just MDM?

A Yeah. So we were put on this committee to give advice to Director Easterly around -- initially she gave us a set of questions, and they're probably in the minutes notes. She gave us a set of questions around how they should scope their work and what their work should be and how they should go about it.

And we, our goal was to create what she said is a short, readable set of recommendations that she could then review and then decide whether or not to integrate those recommendations into their mission. And so all of our work was focused around making those recommendations.

Q And how are those recommendations decided? Like, did you discuss and then vote? Or was it just --

A Well, there was four of us, and it was often only a couple of us made it. Vijaya was actually very busy, didn't come to all the meetings. And Alicia Tate-Nadeau was unable to come to a lot of those meetings as well. So Suzanne Spaulding and I probably did the bulk of the work.

But we talked to each other. And then we would also interview outside experts at those meetings. We interviewed some outside experts -- including, I think, Stephen Richer, which is why I have the quote from him -- to ask them what their experiences were and what they thought -- I don't know if all of them answered it -- but just how they were going about their work, what their problems were, what they were dealing with, so

we could kind of ideate on how CISA might be able to support them.

Q Do you know what CISA did with the recommendations? Did they always adopt them? Did they --

A So we only gave -- we gave recommendations at two different periods. One was in June of 2022 and one was in September of 2022.

The June ones, she accepted some and didn't accept others. And the September ones I honestly don't know because I couldn't go to the meeting because I had COVID. And I don't remember looking through and seeing exactly which ones were accepted or not.

Q Do you --

A Or actually maybe her -- maybe that came later. I missed -- whatever it is, I missed the meeting where she described that. And, to be honest, they sent me a document for how to see how she was going to accept the recommendations, and I couldn't open it, and so I never did.

[redacted]. Do you recall who sent you that?

Ms. Starbird. I don't.

[redacted]. Was it someone from CISA?

Ms. Starbird. Yeah, it is. And it's probably public. I think it's public. You could probably look it up.

BY [redacted]:

Q What were the recommendations?

A I can't remember exactly all of the recommendations.

Q That's okay.

A But our big focus was on trying to really focus their mission as a communicative mission. So communication around sort of PSAs, around digital media

literacy or digital information literacy. I think we might have called it civic media literacy. We were trying to play with those words a little bit.

But recommendations on sort of, like, how they could communicate generally about how people can be more aware of their vulnerabilities, and then working with State and local election officials to help them identify when there's rumors about their processes and procedures and help them proactively communicate with the right audiences in the right ways to be able to address false rumors; again, for instance, about when and where to vote or around the integrity of their processes.

Q And what specific recommendations would you make about that, how to address that problem?

A I mean, I think it's really important for them to be able to -- and the problem is, is that local and State election officials, they don't have resources. They don't have the resources that have a communications team to be able to communicate this, which is why they're suffering so much.

Our recommendation was that there could be information sharing to help the local and State election officials understand what was -- the kinds of things -- understand when there's a rumor spreading and especially kind of make a determination of whether or not -- there's a whole thing about whether or not to respond to rumors, depending on how visible they are. And so to give them the support they need on making those determinations around how to respond.

And it was a communication response. So it's about -- we didn't put the details in the thing. But the example is Sharpie pens in Maricopa County in 2020.

So the Sharpies were bleeding through the ballots, and people began to think that they were -- that their ballots weren't getting counted correctly because the Sharpies were bleeding through.

And it was a legitimate concern that they had. It turns out the ballots were developed in a way that if they bleed through, the readers aren't reading the part that's bled through. They're only reading the front side of the page. So it wasn't actually affecting their votes, but they thought it was affecting their votes.

And so the trick is, like, how do we help these local and State election officials identify that quickly on election day as it's happening? People were getting really upset. There was confrontations at the polls. People were bringing other pens in.

They start to have these confrontations at the polls. And so if the local and State election officials have been able to sort of get ahead of that and say, "No, we designed them that way and that you can't bring your other pen because these pens don't dry fast enough" -- well, this is actually a felt tip pen.

But if it was an ink pen, the ink pens don't dry fast enough and they smear the readers when you put them in there. And so the ink pens actually cause another problem.

But they weren't able to understand that this was happening and communicate fast enough. And so you end up with a bunch of people that thought they had been disenfranchised, who truly thought they had been disenfranchised with those things.

Q Did the subcommittee deal with topics other than elections?

A We talked about the fact that there could be other places where critical infrastructure could be affected by the spread of mis- and disinformation. For instance, in emergency response you could see, like, if you have an earthquake, you could see a foreign adversary trying to get into that information space. And people are supposed to be evacuating, going to shelters over here, and trying to get people to go towards the hazard or whatever.

So you could see, like, places like emergency response was one that we thought

about adding. And I know that we talked a little bit about financial services where people might spread falsehoods about financial services to kind of create runs on banks or different kinds of things.

Another one is -- so if you think of CISA's core mission is as a cybersecurity outfit, so when the pipeline was hacked and then the pipeline went off I think in 2022 -- 2021 maybe -- you can see a disinformation attempt to try to get people to all go fill up their gas tanks, which can actually amplify the problem.

So there are all these places where critical infrastructure intersects with mis- and disinformation in ways that we thought we might think about, but we really, because of the timing, because of the acuteness of election misinformation and thinking about 2022, we focused our recommendations almost totally on that.

Q What about COVID? Was that ever discussed?

A We didn't talk about COVID.

BY [redacted]:

Q Are you serving on a different subcommittee now or once MDM Subcommittee was disbanded --

A I'm serving on a different subcommittee now.

Q And which one?

A It's the technical advisory committee. I've been to one meeting. I'm still trying to figure out how all the things work and what the new acronyms are.

Q Do you know if any of the subcommittees covered concerns related to mis- or disinformation related to financial services in light of, like, the recent bank failures?

A No, I don't know. I haven't heard any conversation about that in the context.

Q You mentioned a couple names. Kim Wyman?

A Yeah.

Q Who is she?

A Close to my heart. She's the former Republican secretary of state of the State of Washington, and she now works for the CISA office.

Q And what's her current position with CISA?

A I don't know exactly what her title is, but it has something to do with elections.

Q And who is Geoff Hale?

A Geoff Hale is someone who also works at CISA, and I don't know his title.

Q You mentioned that there was CISA staff that helped with the logistics?

A Yeah.

Q Did they, did any of the staff members play a substantive role in your meetings?

A No. They were mostly a resolving door of people, so I can't remember all their names because they would change every couple of weeks.

But they would just come -- it was virtual. Sometimes they would have a meeting with me beforehand for 15 minutes. They would say: What do you want to be on the agenda? What are we going to do?

And so they would create an agenda with me, and then they would open the meeting and then step out of the way and then let me lead the meeting. They would then close the meeting. And then after the meeting, they would send me meeting notes to give a thumbs up to.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 1

Was marked for identification.]

[redacted]. This is exhibit 1. If you can just take a look at it and let me know when you've had a chance to.

[Pause.]

Ms. Starbird. All right.

[redacted]. At the bottom of page 1, the first bullet point, it says: "Dr. Starbird thought CISA might have a role based on the Subcommittee helping to define the narrative so the 'whole of government' approach" -- which is in quotes, whole of government -- "could be leveraged."

What did you think CISA might have a role in exactly?

Ms. Starbird. I have no idea what I meant by that.

[Laughter.]

So for me this meeting was just completely educational. I have never worked in government, and I don't know how things work. And I was actually trying to understand, A, what the FBI does in this context, where the line is between what the FBI does versus what CISA does work.

And I'm still trying to figure out what CISA did at this point because a lot of that was a little bit opaque to me even as a person who's on the committee. So I was probably asking an open question.

I actually don't use the word "whole of government," so that may have come from someone else in the conversation or just been sort of a summary from the person who was writing the minutes notes.

[redacted]. Go ahead.

[redacted]. What's your understanding of what role the FBI plays in this space?

Ms. Starbird. From this meeting, which is the majority of my education on this, is that they're very focused on two types of actors. One is sort of foreign actors, and one

is criminal actors. And that they don't do anything on a content base, and they're just looking at foreign and criminal actors. And those were very strong delineations for them.

[redacted]. On the next page, so it's 2, the -- well, I guess you would call it the first bullet point on that page: "Ms. Dehmlow was asked to provide her thoughts. She stated we need a media infrastructure that is held accountable."

Do you recall any of that discussion and what was said about that?

Ms. Starbird. I don't recall, no.

[redacted]. In your research, do you have -- have others discussed how to hold the media accountable?

Ms. Starbird. Hold the media accountable? Not -- I mean, in my research -- how to hold the media accountable. I don't think so. I think accountable in the sense of, like, yelling at them when they do the wrong thing maybe. But I don't think, like, there's any -- that I've ever discussed, like, what media should do.

[redacted]. A little bit later on, it's the bullet point starting with: "Ms. Kim Wyman identified a study out of Stanford University and stated a recommendation was for social media companies not to promote MDM actors, which would reduce the promulgation of information from these people."

Do you agree with that statement?

Ms. Starbird. Do I agree with that statement?

Mr. Burton. Do you agree that this accurately reflects what this person said at the time?

[redacted]. No. Does she agree with the sentiment --

Mr. Burton. Or do you agree with the sentiment that's being attributed to this person?

[redacted]. Yeah, yes.

Ms. Starbird. I think when you think about some of what we're experiencing in terms of our online environment and some of the trends we've watched around the pervasiveness of mis- and disinformation, part of what we're experiencing is because the design of social media systems has changed how we get our information and who we get it from.

And part of that, there's a lot of research on the displacement of gatekeepers, that we used to have gatekeepers who were these mainstream media outlets. And that was problematic in any number of ways. We had very limited viewpoints that we could get access to.

And social media changed that in ways, it democratized information in ways that have been largely celebrated, especially in the early 2010s.

As we start to realize there are these other kinds of problems in the information space, because there's no gatekeepers, in some ways, anything goes. We have access to all of this different information, but it becomes much harder to determine what we should trust and whom we should trust.

And more recently there has been sort of a redistribution -- this is just kind of coming out in the research -- where it's not anything goes. It's not really that we all have an equal voice in these online environments. There's a few people who have figured out how to manipulate the system to gain larger and larger megaphones.

And part of that -- I mean, there's been history of, like, using bots, using paid accounts to kind of amplify their things. And so people can take advantage or game the system to gain outsized influence.

And in my, like, my research I have really focus on, like, what could the platforms do to counter that to get back to where we have this more democratic discourse where

we have access to ideas, we can share ideas, but there's less ability for a few people to game the system. A lot of because how they game the system is gaming our psychological vulnerabilities, which is giving us a lot of what we want to hear, but is exactly where we're vulnerable to spreading and believing mis- and disinformation, which can be harmful to us individually and harmful to us as a society.

And so my personal views from my research is that it's an open question on how we intervene in that system in order to create healthier democratic discourse, but that there could be some ideas around the platforms reconsidering how they become these spaces that a few individuals can manipulate for representational gain that allows them to manipulate us at scale.

BY [redacted]:

Q You mentioned there was an open question about how we intervene. Who are you referencing?

A We as a society. I think about solutions on all different scales. There's intervening in the sense of, like, you create educational initiatives.

My colleague, Jevin West, has a class on "Calling Bullshit" that teaches people how to identify when they're being lied to by a data visualization. And we can teach people to better recognize when people are impersonating accounts and trying to infiltrate our online communities, to become part of our group and then manipulate us from there.

We can think about, again, like I talked about building tools that give people the signals of where they're getting -- how information is getting to them so they can make better decisions about what they should trust.

And so there's intervening all along the ways.

There has been a lot of talk -- and I'm sure you want to ask about this -- around platform moderation as part of that. Personally, I think the research is still out on

whether that's successful or whether it's useful.

Initially, I was not a real proponent of labels. Then I got a little bit more excited about them. And then I got a lot less excited about them after looking at the research come in.

But, yeah, so there's all different levers that could be -- that could have sort of interventions. But me, personally, I talk about what can society do. When I say "we," there's like a global we there. But what can society do? And as a researcher, I might have impact on what society does by giving a talk or by being on an advisory board or by teaching my students to go out there and design better platforms.

Q And you said this meeting was educational to you and you were learning about what the FBI --

A Yeah, because I had no idea how the FBI works, yeah.

Q Did you have the sense that the FBI and CISA had similar understandings of what each agency's role was?

A I don't know if I could answer that question. I mean, it's a Teams meeting. I can't even see everybody's faces. So I don't know that -- there didn't seem to be -- and the CISA folks weren't talking. We were talking -- our committee was talking to Laura Dehmlow.

And so I didn't really get any -- I don't remember getting any feedback from the CISA team on how they were interacting with her comments.

Q Do you recall who brought the FBI to this meeting, if it was one of the subcommittee members or someone from CISA?

A We created the invitation list. I would not have known to invite her. It must have been one of my colleagues. And I would assume that it was Susan Spaulding because she would probably be the person to have more knowledge about how different

government agencies worked and whom we should talk to.

[10:57 a.m.]

BY [redacted]:

Q And whenever someone brought a second -- or an expert that you referenced earlier, would that make it into the meeting notes?

A I believe the meeting notes had a list of the people that attended, but I don't know that for sure.

And an expert -- the experts would have been in the meeting notes because they would have been the focus -- whenever an expert came -- and I think we had three or four -- about half of the meeting would be spent talking to them. And then they would leave, and then we would sort of discuss among ourselves what we learned.

Q And did everyone on the subcommittee have an opportunity to review the meeting minutes?

A They were sent them -- I reviewed them -- I'm a busy person, so I probably didn't review them as closely as one could. But I reviewed them, and then they were circulated to the rest of the subcommittee. And I'm not sure that they read them either.

Q Just to clarify, you said you had an opportunity to review. Was it your understanding that others on the subcommittee had an opportunity to review as well?

A No, no. I reviewed, and then they went out.

Q Okay.

A Yeah. That's my understanding.

Q We can take these back.

A Okay.

[redacted]. This is exhibit 2. You can take a look, and let me know when you're finished.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 2

Was marked for identification.]

Ms. Starbird. All right.

BY [redacted]:

Q On the page marked 2, which is Bates No. 5374, it says that you asked what should be the limitation -- sorry. It's actually the next sentence.

You asked if rumor control should be a project within CISA and what it should look like.

What do you mean by "rumor control"?

A My understanding is that CISA was using the term "rumor control" internally as part of their work prior to us having this committee convened. I think it might have been in the list of questions that were given to me as a -- when we were asked to sort of -- here's your questions to give us feedback on. I think that this question was one of them. It was like, is rumor control -- should that be part of what CISA is doing?

And my understanding of how they ran that -- rumor control was mostly as a place of communicating about what rumors were spreading. And so -- and I said, from my research in rumoring, that terminology is not -- and that kind of approach to rumors is probably not as -- you know, may not be the best thing. And so I was kind of asking if rumor control was the right approach.

[redacted]. Okay. Our first hour is up.

We can go off the record, please.

[Recess.]

[redacted]. It's 11:15. We can go back on the record.

EXAMINATION

BY [redacted]:

Q Dr. Starbird, thank you, again, for joining us today. I appreciate you taking the time to fly out here and join us voluntarily.

A Happy to be here.

Q You were asked in the earlier hour about the grants you had received?

A Yes.

Q And you mentioned that you had received some grants from the National Science Foundation?

A Absolutely, yeah.

Q Can you -- are you familiar with the process that people go through to get an NSF grant?

A Yes. I've served on panels. Of course. Yeah.

Q Okay. Can you describe that process to us?

A Yeah. You write a proposal that outlines sort of the intellectual contributions. It's got, like -- so what are the intellectual merits, the broader impacts of that work, and you write a proposal -- 10 to 15 pages, depending on the size of the grant -- to basically articulate what you're going to do, what the methods are, and how that's going to enhance science and enhance what we understand about something that we care about.

And then -- again, there's these two criteria. One is the intellectual merit, the scientific contribution. One is the broader impact. And that is essentially, like, how does this help society?

Q And then, on the NSF side, are you familiar with the process --

A Yeah.

Q -- that NSF undertakes to review and decide whether to make a grant award?

A Yes. They bring in other researchers, experts in that field and related fields. They have a strenuous review process. They've got all these different review criteria. You'll have three or four experts, like, review those grants. Then they rank those grants from not competitive to low competitive to competitive.

And then, from there, they -- the NSF program officers make determinations of how to get the ones that the panel decides need to be funded -- how to get those funded.

Q How long does the process usually take?

A It takes usually about a year from the time that you submit a grant to the time that you receive the funds.

Q Would you describe this as a fairly rigorous process?

A Extremely rigorous. It's very hard to get a National Science Foundation grant, yeah.

Q And compared to, for example, other grants that you've received, would you say NSF is one of the most rigorous?

A Absolutely. Other grants, we can write, you know, a page or two depending on if the funder knows -- like, philanthropic grants, they know us. They know what we do. We might write a page or two. We'll have some conversations. And they might, you know, fund the Center for an Informed Public.

National Science Foundation, it's a peer-reviewed process. And so it's not any one individual. It's other -- it's other researchers who then say that this work has value.

Q Okay.

A Yeah.

Q And you also mentioned that you received a grant from the Navy, and I didn't write down the name of the actual grant program. Do you recall that?

A Yeah. It's the O- -- Office of Naval Research -- ONR.

Q Okay. And you only received one grant from them, correct?

A I think I might have been on two grants from them.

Q Okay.

A Yeah. One was -- I received it, and one was -- I was contracted to do some work on it.

Q Were you part of the process for applying for those grants?

A Was I part of the process for applying for the grants? Yes, but I don't remember the process very well.

Q Okay. Understood.

A Yeah. It was in 2017. Yeah.

Q Okay. So it was a while ago?

A Yeah. And it wasn't very much money compared to other things. They were very small projects.

Q And you said that they were fairly limited in scope for what you could use the grant money for?

A Yeah, yeah. They were very kind of delineated around -- around -- and the first one was foreign disinformation.

Q Okay.

A Yeah.

Q Earlier in your career -- taking a step back. Earlier in your career, you said you graduated -- that you obtained your Ph.D. in 2010, correct?

A No. My Ph.D. in 2012.

Q 2012. I'm sorry.

As part of your process of getting your Ph.D., did you conduct any research?

A Yeah, I did a lot of research. So my research as a Ph.D. student was mostly

focused -- there was another strand initially on the education and computer science, but I moved over to focusing on the use of social media during crisis events.

And we studied that in a couple of different ways, but we collected a lot of data from social media platforms, including Twitter back when we were able to do that. No longer true today.

But we collected a lot of data from Twitter, public data that was publicly shared and publicly available, and we looked at how people were sharing information about a crisis event like the Haiti earthquake. There was an earthquake in Chile, floods, Red River floods, all sorts of different kind of crisis events, and looked at how people shared information, looked at the value of, like, understanding a crisis event by the information that people were sharing with the opportunity that we have to learn more about how a crisis event is unfolding both in real time and as researchers after the fact.

And then I also started digital voluntarism, which is how people come together to help other people during crisis events using social media platforms. As part of that -- and the discovery of the online volunteers actually happened through a project that my team was doing that I led part of it as a Ph.D. student, which is really common. I led a project to do real-time crisis mapping based on information that was coming through Twitter. We would take that information, process it, do quick data analysis, and create maps of an unfolding crisis event.

And then other volunteers online sort of helped us create those maps, and then I started to study the online voluntarism that people would do to try to help each other by creating informational resources during a crisis event. And that was my -- my dissertation was in that.

Q Okay. Did you also do work tracking the use of social media in the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill?

A So I did two things in Deepwater Horizon around that event. One was this real-time work. So I created this way of sort of automatically taking tweets -- if people put them in a certain format, I could automatically take them and add them to a map. And so what I was doing was creating these live crisis maps of events.

And so, for the 2010 oil spill -- the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, we would map -- like, people would take pictures on the beaches. We were mapping the impacts of that event sort of in real time.

Now, years later -- 2 years later, we came back to all that -- so, in order to do that data, I had to collect data from Twitter in order to do the real-time mapping. So, when I started my job at the University of Washington, I went back to that dataset and started studying the online sense-making process that people were going through to make sense of what was happening. That was with, I think, a NOAA grant with two or three other collaborators at the University of Washington to start kind of thinking about, in particular -- it was a really quirky thing we were focused on, but, like, how people processed the use of dispersants -- the dispersant technology -- as one of the options to clean it up. There was a lot of controversy around whether or not to use dispersants, and so we studied how people made sense of that controversy.

Q And what's the value of understanding how people make sense of that type of controversy?

A Well -- what's the value? The scientist in me is like, everything is valuable. We're curious. We want to answer these questions.

I think one of the -- it's interesting -- it's been a focal point of a lot of research in crisis events because sometimes those discourses can go right and can lead us towards, you know, understanding what's happening in ways that are enlightening and useful and help for responses. And also, those sense-making processes can go wrong. And so

there's a lot of research on collective sense-making or sense-making within organizations, which are related but not exactly the same concept. But there's a lot of research on sense-making.

And so we saw this opportunity with this new kind of data to look at sense-making in real time. To look at sense-making not through conversations -- through interviews later, but we could look at actually people making sense of things through their social media posts as these events were happening. And so there's this kind of new window of insight into this, like, very human process of how we process a disaster event.

In the case of Deepwater Horizon, like, the people there -- there were all sorts of people talking about it. It's a platform that's global, right? But there were a lot of locals that were really sort of processing this, like, horrific event that was happening to them that was marring these beaches that they really cared about. They were worried about health, the health impact, and those kinds of things. And some of that, you know, was really valuable to start working through it.

And they also were very vulnerable to rumors and conspiracy theories that we remarked on -- in our research in 2012-2013, we started to remark on that -- on how they were really vulnerable at those times due to those kinds of anxieties. But we know that anxiety and uncertainty makes us vulnerable to rumors. That's part of why rumors spread during crisis events. That's why we, as researchers, study those events as opportunities.

Q When you talk about individuals being vulnerable to rumors --

A Yeah.

Q -- and conspiracy theories, is that -- would you agree that that poses a risk to those individuals or it poses a risk to society at large if people are susceptible to kind of -- for example, in the case of Deepwater Horizon, if they are believing in -- I don't want

to say false rumors because I understand that rumors may or may not be false --

A Yeah, well --

Q -- but whatever the right terminology would be?

A Well, rumors do turn out to be false, right?

So let me give you an example. So we were doing that live crisis mapping activity around Deepwater Horizon. And I'm on Twitter, and I'm mapping things, and some people would -- these volunteers would share things. And one of them -- because I was a researcher -- I was still a Ph.D. student, but, you know, I was the leader of this project.

This digital volunteer reached out to me via my DMs in Twitter, and she said: I'm really worried about this article that I read.

And I guess I'd seen it kind of bouncing around.

I said: Well, can you send it to me?

She sends it to me. And it's this article where they've interviewed two scientists, and it turns out to be Russian scientists, but I didn't catch it at the time.

And they had said that they -- there was this article featuring them, and they said that they thought the ocean floor was going to collapse because all the oil was going to be taken out of it, sending a tsunami onto shore, and, like, basically wiping out the population.

And I said: Well, there's something about this article I don't quite understand. I don't think it's probably true.

But she was like: Well, I'm really worried.

It was clearly making her anxious, and she was asking my expert opinion whether or not she should go and move in with her daughter in a different place for a few months. And I said: Well, it probably couldn't hurt to be with your daughter for a few months.

But in that case, like, disinformation -- which we later learned was Russian

disinformation, but I didn't learn that until many years later when I went back and looked at that data and was, like, oh, my goodness.

But when we -- at the time, it probably didn't hurt her to do the wrong thing, but her emotional stress that she was -- the stress that she was experiencing due to some of those false claims and conspiracy theories -- and, in this case, disinformation really was having an impact on her acutely and I imagine was affecting a lot of the population there. I mean, she's just one person, but that article was spreading around a lot of the locals and the activists that were -- that were participating in collective sense-making around that event. Yeah.

Q And I want to actually look at the ways that there can be harm from kind of false rumors in the election context.

A Yeah, for sure.

Q So I think you've done some work on election rumor -- false rumors, I guess, pertaining to individuals impersonating election workers, right?

A Impersonating election workers --

Q Or online accounts that would be falsely impersonating an official election account?

A I personally don't think I've done any work with someone who's impersonating -- I think a project I was on did identify that, and so that is part of -- the Election Integrity Partnership, I do think had, like, one of those cases, but I didn't work directly on it, so I don't remember it.

Q Okay.

A Yeah.

Q Would you agree that, if somebody was impersonating an official account, it could potentially harm the process?

A Absolutely. I think one of the most acute worries in the election context -- the first and foremost one is that false information about when and where to vote can confuse people and can disenfranchise voters. And that can be accidental false information.

So one of the things that happens in online spaces -- because we have 3,600 different jurisdictions or something close to that -- that the rules in one place are not the same as rules in others. Times are different, when your mail-in ballots are due are different, those kinds of things. And so information that's true in one place may be false in another.

And so just, like, accidentally seeing the information about another State and then thinking, "Oh, my ballot doesn't count anymore because I sent it in too late," when really, in your State, it did still count, is actually a potential for disenfranchisement.

We've also seen people intentionally mislead about when and where to vote. Sometimes they say it's a joke, but in other cases, there have been, like, intentional efforts to disenfranchise people through false information as well. And so that's one -- certainly an acute threat in that space.

And there's others as well of just sort of -- eroding trust in the processes and procedures and results can have sort of meta-level effects on trust in democracy.

Q And I think you used the example of Sharpiegate earlier?

A Yeah.

Q And how that -- if people used the wrong type of pen because they believed the rumor that Sharpies didn't work, then that actually could ruin the ballot, right? Or make it unreadable?

A Right. So a couple of different things on the Sharpiegate.

So using -- using the wrong pen -- so using an ink pen at home didn't matter

because it had time to dry before it got mailed in. So it really doesn't matter what pen you used at home.

But, on Election Day, in the election facilities, if you feed those things into the election -- you fill out your ballot and feed it in, it could -- if you use the wrong pen, it could harm the reader -- the optical reader of the ballot. And so Sharpie pens were recommended in Arizona -- not recommended. They were -- Sharpie or felt-tip pens were the pens that you were supposed to use in the election facilities.

What happened was a rumor that the ballots weren't counting because they were bleeding through -- the Sharpies did bleed through, and that was concerning to the people that were voting, especially people that thought that they might be -- they heard that they could be cheated. And so they were kind of predisposed to kind of interpreting this: Oh, this is a problem. You know, this isn't going to work. Maybe I'm being cheated.

And so there was sort of this misinterpretation that happened based on that, which became really acute. We could actually see it -- it goes into a second stage the next day where people start going online to check the status of their ballot, and it says that it's canceled, and all these people begin to share "my ballot is canceled," except when you look at it, it's actually the status of their mail-in ballot, which was canceled when they went to vote in person. But, again, they misinterpreted that as having their ballots canceled.

And so these people really did begin to -- and you can see that they're feeling anxiety, and they're very upset because they really did think that their ballots didn't count. And that led to a lot of consternation, as you can imagine, from people who really care about the democratic process. Yeah.

Q And that could lead people to potentially lose faith in the democratic

process?

A Absolutely, yeah. Lose faith in the process.

On Election Day in Arizona, it led people to going into the facilities and demanding to use and to bring their own pens, which were potentially harmful to the system, which could have caused downstream effects. We actually -- there's also a possibility that the problems in 2020 caused Maricopa County to use thicker printed -- thicker paper in 2022, which caused a whole other set of problems. And so they're even worse off this year because then the paper didn't print properly, and they didn't -- it has downstream effects.

So, actually, those rumors can make the process less secure and less -- you know, less functional, where false rumors begin to pick at how things work.

Q I want to look at another rumor and kind of use this as a little mini case study.

A Yeah.

Q Are you familiar with something known as the Sonoma County ballot dumping allegations?

A Yes.

Q Okay. Can you broadly explain your understanding of what that is?

A Of what happened?

Q What happened?

A So I think it's in September of 2020. There -- so let's go back and explain this. Because election officials know this happens a lot.

It turns out the law is that you have to -- if you're an election facility, you have to recycle or get rid of the ballots from the last election 20 months later or something -- 22 months later. Some amount of time later. So not quite 2 years.

And, when they do that, those ballots go into dumpsters or recycling units, and

people often mistake those for actual election -- it's not actually ballots, but ballot envelopes. And people can mistake those for election materials.

What happened in Sonoma County in 2020 is someone saw a bunch of what they thought were ballots in a dumpster, and they -- again, they're hearing that there's going to be -- there was a dominant narrative around the -- that voter fraud was occurring. And they see these ballots and think, oh, this is an example of voter fraud. And they don't trust the mail-in ballot processing.

So they take a picture, and they send it to apparently some -- a couple different media influencers, and those media influencers post about it. So one post is from a reporter from The Blaze, and another goes out -- and the article goes out through The Gateway Pundit, which --

[redacted]. And I just want to pause you right there because I want to introduce --

Ms. Starbird. Yeah.

[redacted]. -- as exhibit 3 the post from The Blaze, and then -- or I'm sorry. The tweet from --

Ms. Starbird. Yeah.

[redacted]. -- Elijah Schaffer, who was a Blaze reporter.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 3

Was marked for identification.]

Ms. Starbird. Yeah.

[redacted]. And then I'll introduce as exhibit 4 The Gateway Pundit article.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 4

Was marked for identification.]

Ms. Starbird. Okay.

[redacted]. While she's reviewing the documents, I just want to note for the record that we are joined by Mr. Bishop as well.

BY [redacted]:

Q So is exhibit 3 the Blaze tweet that you were referring to?

A Yeah. So this is the Blaze tweet. And I know this case well because I was doing real-time research as this was sort of spreading.

Q Okay.

A So I was with my team of three or four students studying this particular case, and I've used it in slides since.

What's happening here is that this is a reporter from The Blaze. He's taken this picture that, I think, was sent to him. And he's -- he's sharing it with a large audience. And it says, you know: Shocking, thousands of mail-in ballots have been found in a dumpster.

And he says that they were allegedly discovered at this landfill, and the ZIP Code matches the ballots, and these are original photos, and he says: Big if true -- which is one of these common sort of ways that people -- I wrote a paper in 2016 with a few students around using sort of expressed uncertainty and hedges to be able to spread rumors and misinformation but not have to take responsibility for them. And that's a common technique for doing that. It's a reputational hedge -- or a reputational shield using, like, hedging language. Yeah.

Q So the tweet came out -- I think the time is 12:52 a.m. This might have -- I'm not sure what time zone that is.

But that came out first, right?

A Yeah.

Q And then, after that, there was The Gateway Pundit article, correct?

A Yeah. The Gateway Pundit article comes out about 6 hours later. And, if you actually look, I think you end up with -- this spreads through Twitter -- it mostly spreads, in about 24 hours, something like 25,000 to 45,000 tweets, retweets, quote tweets, and those kinds of things. It eventually starts to die down on Twitter and then hops over on Facebook a couple of days later with the same rumor.

And it turns out that these ballots are not ballots. They're ballot envelopes, and they're not from 2020. They're from 2018. So what's happened is you've taken something out of context to build that narrative that we can't trust the mail-in voting process because ballots are being thrown away when they're actually not. Yeah.

[redacted]. So, in this case, the Sonoma County elections Registrar actually put out a statement -- I'm going to introduce as exhibit 5 an article recording what a Sonoma County Registrar said that day. It's September 25th. There's not a time stamp on this article.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 5
Was marked for identification.]

[redacted]. But sometime that day --

Ms. Starbird. Yeah.

[redacted]. -- the Sonoma County Registrar actually tried to correct the record and said that they're not ballots, the county won't even send out the mail-in ballots for another 9 days, and that these ballots were in fact the envelopes from the prior election.

So I'll give you a minute to look at this article, and then I'm going to ask you why -- if this correction was made the same day, why that didn't have any impact on the spread of the rumor.

And then I'll introduce as exhibit 6 as well -- the County of Sonoma put out a tweet at 4:21 that afternoon. Same basic concept. Not as much detail as is in the article.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 6

Was marked for identification.]

Ms. Starbird. Yeah.

BY [redacted]:

Q Are you familiar broadly with this tweet and with -- maybe not the article itself but the contents of the article?

A I'm not as familiar with the article. I'm familiar with the tweets --

Q Okay.

A -- because I spend way too much time looking at tweets.

Q So these comments came out from official sources, right? It's fair to --

A Yeah.

Q -- qualify the Sonoma County Registrar as an official source, right?

A Well, it's not just the official source. It's the source that actually has the information that would give context to this.

And, yeah, I think that's important to note. It's, you know -- if it's an official voice across the country, it's not as helpful, but this -- they would know what their processes and procedures were. So this would be a credible source in this case, yeah.

Q Okay. So, in this case, we have a credible source showing that the original story is demonstrably false. So the rumor is demonstrably false, I should say.

A Yeah.

Q Is that fair to say?

A Yes.

Q So the credible source was out there with the correct information within hours.

Did you see that this actually slowed the flow -- or slowed the distribution of that

rumor at all?

A It's hard to say whether or not it slows or accelerates it, but we do know that corrections just don't get the same kind of visibility as the originally false claims. And this one certainly didn't get the kinds of retweets or exposure that the original false claims did. And it didn't stop the rumor from coming back a couple days later on Facebook. Yeah.

Q And has your research explored why that is? Why this type of correction is not effective in helping to stem false information?

A Yeah. Because the reasons we spread -- spread things have to do with -- like, they're entertaining. They're novel. They're exciting. And, you know, a correction is not half as exciting or interesting for our audiences as a, you know, claim of potential voter fraud, especially if you're -- you know, one of the things we've seen that plays out in the research is a lot of rumors and misinformation -- we're most vulnerable -- as individuals, we're most vulnerable when rumors align with our priors and when they align with our political or social identities.

And, at this moment, there were a lot of people in sort of -- who qualify as politically right-leaning or conservative who had heard that the election was going to be fraudulent and had heard that you can't trust the mail-in ballot process, and this aligned with those priors. And so they were sort of -- you know, there was that motivation to share it.

There's not the same motivation for anyone to share a correction. Nobody cares. All right. Okay. It wasn't true. Who's going to share it, right? So you just don't see the same kind of viral spread for corrections as we do for false information.

Q Okay. And I understand that, with respect to the Sonoma County tweet, but The Gateway Pundit also -- if you turn to the article at the end, they issued -- they

cited the Sonoma County comments as well.

They issued -- I think in the version that I handed out today, it says "updated," and near the end, it says: The Sonoma County Registrar says this -- you know, decide for yourself, I think.

A Right. And they put the question mark after that.

In our 2016 paper -- which, you know, was written in 2015. I just want to, like, stage that. It's before a lot of the shifts in how many of us view these things. But we noticed that these leading questions were a common technique used to spread false rumors and conspiracy theories.

Q Have you researched what kind of ordinary Twitter users and maybe the public at large understood the Schaffer and The Gateway Pundit tweets to mean?

A Yeah. One of the techniques we use -- so it's not what you say; it's what your audience hears. One of the techniques we use is what -- we'll actually look at some of these posts by an influencer. Influencers are often pretty careful in how they say things. They do these reputational shields. They don't want to, you know, put things that are overtly false out there, but they'll put insinuations. We can see what they mean by looking at their audiences' replies and quote tweets.

And so what we'll do is go and look at all of the quote tweets of these comments. And, you know, you'll see, oh, here goes the fraud again. Or, you know, voter fraud 2020 or whatever. So you'll see that their audiences will repost these things with hashtags that show that they're interpreting this as being another example of voter fraud, which is what that data for this case shows.

Q So what are the possible harms, in this particular instance, if voters believe that there are ballots being thrown in the trash? What are the possible harms that would flow from the belief that that rumor could be true?

A There's a couple of different ones. So there's the loss of faith in the process. That you no longer, you know, trust that the results are what the results are. You no longer trust the other party.

One of the things about a functioning democracy -- Henry Farrell has some great stuff about this. In a functioning democracy, you have to have, you know, at least faith that the other party is a legitimate actor. You might not believe what they say; you might not believe their policies or whatever. But you have to think about them as, you know, playing by the same set of rules. You have to have a shared sense of rules of how elections work.

And these kinds of things begin to suggest to folks that the elections are rigged against you, they don't really work, and that you can't trust the other side of the political spectrum because they're trying to cheat you. And that can turn people to do -- you know, have good people then take undemocratic actions based on these sort of misperceptions that the other side -- there's another good study that just came out this week on this.

It's that when you begin to believe that the other side isn't playing by the rules, that you don't play by the rules anymore, right? And so you don't need to play by the rules because the other side isn't. So this can just contribute to sort of the erosion of democratic norms and, you know, kind of ultimately, you know, puts democracy in danger if too many people -- if too many of us begin to get into these patterns.

Q Thank you for that.

A Oh, there was another piece of this that I had in my head, and now it's slipping away.

It's -- oh, in this particular one, what can happen is a particular -- especially with mail-in ballots in particular -- that one political party can begin to believe that mail-in

ballots are not what they want to use, right? And so that has some implications for election day in 2020.

But an example of how it has implications in 2022 is, in Maricopa County, where people have just been kind of saturated in this kind of thing. They do have a case where Democrats are more likely to use mail-in ballots because Republicans no longer trust the mail-in ballot processing. And that actually sets them up for all being -- all voting on election day or voting on election day in a much higher proportion, which, when the machines actually have problems, they're more affected than the other party.

So it can actually hurt your own party by kind of pushing you away from different -- from voting in the way that's easiest and best for you because you're falling for these rumors. So it can be personally harmful and lead to disenfranchisement when you no longer trust the process.

Q Interesting. I want to move on and talk about the CISA advisory committee that we talked about.

A Okay. Yes.

Q Do you remember those questions at the end of the last hour?

A I do --

Q Okay. The MDM -- and I think you -- were you successful in changing it from the MDM to --

A Oh, we didn't change the name. I just -- I just put mis- and disinformation and didn't -- tried not to use the --

Q Okay.

A I didn't always have the last say exactly on how things were written. So it may still end up in places, but I tend to prefer to use misinformation, disinformation.

Q Okay. So the subcommittee that you are the chair of --

A It's still called the MDM Subcommittee. I didn't win that battle. I lose my battles sometimes.

Q You referenced recommendations that you submitted to the CISA Director in June -- on June 22nd, 2022.

A Yeah.

Q Do you remember those?

A I do -- I remember referencing them. I don't have them memorized. So, if someone wants me to talk about them, I'm happy to.

[redacted]. So we're going to introduce those as exhibit No. 7.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 7
Was marked for identification.]

Ms. Starbird. Yeah. It turns out I write a lot of things and can't remember what they all are.

[redacted]. And I actually just want to look at the first page.

[redacted]. Is this exhibit 7?

[redacted]. This is 7.

[redacted]. Yep. Thank you.

BY [redacted]:

Q So this report does make various findings and recommendations, but I want to look actually at the introduction on the very first page.

I'm sorry. Before we get there, did you draft this?

A I drafted this, yes.

Q Okay.

A I had people helping me. I didn't write every word. Often, I'm translating others' words. But I wrote most of this and collaborated primarily with Suzanne

Spaulding but also with Vijaya Gadde in writing this.

Q Okay. And you had final clearance on it before it went out? Is that fair to say?

A Yeah.

Q The fourth paragraph under the introduction -- I'm going to read it into the record. It says: The First Amendment of the Constitution limits the government's ability to abridge or interfere with the free speech rights of American citizens. The First Amendment and freedom of speech are critical underpinnings to our society and democracy. These recommendations are specifically designed to protect critical functions from the risks of MD -- which is a reference to misinformation and disinformation -- while being sensitive to and appreciating the government's limited role with respect to the regulation or restriction of speech.

Did I read that correctly?

A You did, yes.

Q Okay. So is it fair to say that the subcommittee made its recommendations -- the recommendations contained in this document and, I guess, in the September document as well -- with the protection of the First Amendment forefront in your minds?

A Absolutely.

Q Okay. Do you believe that any of the recommendations contained in this document -- and I can give you a minute to look through them again if you'd like -- do you believe that these recommendations respect individuals' First Amendment rights?

A Yes. I mean, we -- our goal was to communicate in a way that acknowledges the difficulty of these challenges but that put the First Amendment first and foremost. And that's why it's in the introduction and acknowledging that, you

know, that's what makes this space challenging. And -- yeah.

Q Okay. So, when you say that was your goal, were there any -- to the extent you can talk through it, when you were -- were there any steps you took through the writing process? Did you consult with First Amendment scholars, for example? Did you -- were there any specific steps you took to make sure these recommendations protected First Amendment rights?

A We had a brief -- I had one brief conversation with Jameel Jaffer, who was a First Amendment scholar, and I think directs the Knight -- the First Amendment organization. I don't know the name of it. But to kind of understand what the limitations are.

And, to be honest, he was like -- you know, with some of the questions that I had -- like, I'm just trying to learn how everything works as a person who's not -- that's not my primary research area, but trying to understand what the limitations are, and there were still some open questions that he said in some of these different areas.

And so we tried to -- a lot of times, we said, you know: If there's an open question and we can't answer it here or it's above this committee, we'll talk about this later.

But the way we crafted this was trying to stay within the lines and also trusting that, if we're outside the lines in what we're recommending, that CISA should be able to figure that out and -- you know, and make those decisions.

And, again, these are recommendations. These are not orders or anything else. We're an external advisory board. We didn't have a lot of power. And in fact, she didn't accept all of our recommendations.

Q Sorry. One second.

So there's been an allegation made, I think, with respect to these

recommendations in particular --

A Yeah.

Q -- that they suggest that the MDM Subcommittee recommended that CISA effectively be placed in a situation to be an arbiter of truth with respect to what is and what isn't misinformation or disinformation.

Are you familiar with that allegation?

A Not directly, but it doesn't surprise me. Yeah.

Q Okay. Do you think that's accurate?

A Absolutely not. I think when we are talking about the role of CISA, it was always around -- if there was a veracity thing, it was around CISA trying to point to the authoritative source in that case.

So, if it's an issue of Sharpie pens in Arizona, they're pointing to the Maricopa County recorder. If it's an issue of the Sonoma County ballot envelopes, they're pointing to the Sonoma County thing.

For -- CISA's role would be to find those authoritative sources and help broadcast their message to make sure it reached the audiences that needed to hear it.

Q I want to look at exhibit 1, which is -- we'll redistribute it because it was taken away before.

This is the advisory -- Cybersecurity Advisory Committee meeting summary 0301 -- 2022 PDF. I'm sorry.

It's a 3-7-2022 email from the Cybersecurity Advisory Committee to a whole list of people.

A Uh-huh. So the meeting notes?

Q The meeting notes. Correct.

A Yeah.

Q And this is the meeting that you had described as educational in nature for you?

A Yes.

Q Okay. What's the value of having these type of educational discussions? How does that inform the work that the MDM Subcommittee did?

A Yeah. I mean, we were just trying to learn the space. Like, who are the actors? You know, who plays what role? What are the limitations of different organizations? And where is the gap -- where is the need that CISA might be able to fulfill in terms of what they're supposed to do and what the needs are?

And, for me, it was, like, figuring out, what does CISA do? You know, what do these other folks do? You know -- and how do they work together, and where are those sort of delineations?

It was really just, like, you know -- and to be honest, you know, 1 hour every 2 weeks is only so much. I understand a lot about how misinformation spreads -- rumors, misinformation, disinformation spread online. Government agencies and how they work and how they work together was something I didn't know a lot about when I started as the subcommittee chair.

Q In the earlier hour, you were asked about what the FBI -- what the FBI's role is with respect to misinformation, disinformation. And you used a phrase that I want to turn back to.

You said they look only at foreign interference and criminal actors, and there's a pretty strong delineation between that and, I guess, other work that could be done. Do you recall saying that? Or could you --

A I mean, that's my understanding. I could be wrong on that. I had a 30-minute briefing from them. I don't have a complete understanding.

But in our conversation, I remember they stressed those two dimensions and that that was a limitation. And, again, that's -- for us, we were thinking about -- okay. They cover that, and they maybe collaborate with CISA when things intersect with that. When things don't intersect with that, they wouldn't be a collaborator in that space.

Q Okay. So your impression is that FBI really doesn't do anything with respect to domestic content moderation. It's solely focused on foreign interference and, you know, addressing criminal activity?

A If it was criminal.

So, in the election space, my understanding is that it's illegal to purposely mislead on when and where to vote. That could be something that could feature into their work. But on just, like, the fourth dimension of the Election Integrity Partnership's work where it's, like, misinformation that undermines trust in the process, that would not be a place where the FBI would be working -- if it was domestic.

Q And that was pretty clearly conveyed to you when you met with them in March of 2022?

A Yes. Yeah.

Q Okay. I want to look next at what's been marked as exhibit No. 2. This is the meeting notes from March 15th, 2022. You were asked a couple of questions.

And I want to look at the -- on what's marked as page 2. The second -- there's a bold bullet point and then some bullet points underneath it. It's kind of like a second section of bullets there.

A Okay.

Q The second one down, it says: Dr. Starbird addressed the highly limited scope for government in terms of social media monitoring.

What does that mean?

A My understanding is that government is not permitted -- except in very specific cases -- to collect private data from U.S. citizens. I don't know where the delineations are from public data. But my understanding is, on the private data, they're not allowed to sort of monitor that kind of thing.

And I think there's some open questions there that -- one of the conversations I had with Jameel Jaffer was to understand, what are the open questions, and who should be answering them? Which is actually, you know, one of the reasons that having a committee like that would be really important, right? Because we should be having those conversations, and we should be having them transparently. And "transparently" meaning -- that's why they come out with the meeting notes and recommendations and kinds of things.

And so my understanding is there is still opportunity to have those discussions. This is something that we probably should be doing as a society.

Q But your understanding right now is that the government not only does not collect that information, but it cannot? It's not allowed? It's illegal for it to do so, correct?

A My understanding is not complete, but that is my understanding.

Q Your understanding?

A Yeah. Again, it's not my area of expertise. But that's my understanding.

Q And then just a couple of quick questions on the social media company platforms. The -- sorry. The content moderation policies.

A Yeah.

Q You were asked kind of a little bit about that in the earlier hour.

You haven't drafted any social media company content moderation policies, right?

A No.

Q Okay. Have you directly advised the platform? In other words, have you been sent a draft of a policy and said, "Can you provide feedback and commentary on this?"

A I have been presented with, like -- I'll have a conversation -- I'll have a conversation with almost anybody. I'll have a conversation sometimes with the platforms or, like, a representative of the platform, and they'll say: You know, this is what we're thinking. You know, what do you think?

And I'll say: Oh, that might work. That's probably going to backfire or whatever.

I don't draft them, but I've had conversations with representatives of several platforms, actually.

Q Okay.

A Yeah.

Q So you mentioned earlier labels and the emerging research on labels --

A Yeah.

Q -- that you used to be -- used to think maybe they were helpful, and now you're thinking, no, they're not helpful. Like, that's not actually a useful technique.

That's something that, if somebody wanted your input on, you'd be able to provide that?

A Yeah. And actually, it's very nuanced. It turns out that labels work in some contexts, and they don't really help in others, and they absolutely backfire in others, right? So it's really contextual.

And those are the kinds of things that I'm happy to have a conversation with a platform about: like, how you might want to go about labeling, which accounts you might want to not bother labeling. Maybe you really only want to label -- you know, I might

advise, like -- you know, you focus labels on the people that, you know, are verified accounts or have large audiences, those kinds of things.

But those would be, again, conversations, and it would be my expert opinion at the time with the knowledge that these are changing because the research is still coming out. The labels on social media platforms are only, like, 2 or 3 years old as a platform affordance, right? We don't even -- you know, we don't even know yet how those things work.

Q But, ultimately, that's your expert advice based on what the research shows?

A Yeah.

Q And platforms are free to say no?

A Yeah.

Q They're free to say: We don't agree. Go take a hike.

Or they're free to accept it, right?

A Absolutely. 100 percent. And -- yeah. And I would actually also tell them that this knowledge is changing at the time. So you have to take my advice with a grain of salt because we're learning something new every day. Yeah.

[redacted]. Okay. All right. We can go off the record. Thank you.

[Recess.]

[12:46 p.m.]

BY [redacted]:

Q Dr. Starbird, we've, I think, referenced this in passing a few times, but can you state what the Election Integrity Partnership is?

A The Election Integrity Partnership, this is a hard question, because we've had two versions of it, and it's different across those two.

I'll start with 2020. If you want to ask me about 2022, I'm happy to talk about that. I probably know more about 2022 than '20 in terms of I was higher up on the leadership infrastructure.

But the Election Integrity Partnership in 2020 was a partnership that at the core were four research organizations that do research on social media data analysis. And then there was a range of other partners.

And the goal was to identify rumors, false, misleading, and unsubstantiated claims specifically around election processes and procedures, and to identify them, analyze them, and rapidly communicate about them with a range of partners and the public at large.

Q And can you say who the main four partners were?

A Organizations? Yeah.

Stanford convened the group, so Stanford University, the Stanford Internet Observatory. And then there was the DFRLab, which is a data analysis lab within the Atlantic Council, I think. And then Graphika, which is an industry partner. And then the University of Washington, particularly the Center for an Informed Public.

Q Okay. And when you say Stanford convened the group, was this an idea initially pitched by them? Was this -- let me ask that way.

A Yeah. When I become aware of this -- I don't know if it had a name yet -- it was from outreach from Stanford who were working on an idea around something in the election space, yeah.

Q And who from Stanford contacted you?

A Alex Stamos.

Q And who is that?

A Alex Stamos is the head of the Stanford Internet Observatory.

Q And had you worked with him in other areas previously?

A I had not worked with him closely. I did a sabbatical at Stanford University in 2019 where I met Alex. I think I met him two or three times while I was there.

Q Did you work with Renee DiResta at all?

A Renee DiResta was part of the Election Integrity Partnership. I also met her, I think, on two occasions when I was at Stanford in 2019. Had not worked with her prior, but knew her, was on panels with her, and would see her at different kinds of conferences and things.

Q And who is she?

A She is a research scientist -- I'm not sure that's exactly her title -- but at the Stanford Internet Observatory.

Q Okay. Do you recall when Stanford first approached you, the University of Washington, about joining this partnership?

A It would have been early July.

Q Of 2020?

A Of 2020, yeah.

Q And how quickly was the partnership up and running?

A I don't remember exactly when we launched. I imagine we were

operational by September 1 or so. And so it would have been between, yeah, July -- first or second week of July and September 1.

And I think there was sort of a running start in the sense that -- I don't even know how to describe this -- but things that the partnership talked about being under the partnership were things -- like our piece, we were already kind of doing some of those things anyways. It was just kind of the kind of thing that we did in terms of some of the real-time analysis.

And so that stuff began to fall under the partnership, and I don't know whether we would have said that in August or whether it started in September.

Q Do you know if there are any organizations who were invited who declined to participate?

A My understanding is that the RNC was invited to decline -- to participate and declined. And I don't know about others. And I only understand that from post communications about it.

Q And where did you gain this understanding, understanding that it was post it occurring?

A I don't know whether it's been in, like -- in just sort of, like, making sense of what happened along the way that we've been doing over the last year. But I seem to recall that they had been a potential partner. I did not know that they had been contacted and declined until afterwards.

Q Okay.

A Yeah.

Q And is it your understanding that the DNC was contacted?

A From my understanding, that they were contacted, yeah.

Q And accepted?

A I think they did, yes.

Q Besides the RNC, the DNC, and obviously the four members who accepted, the four critical ones, do you recall who else was invited to participate?

A I don't have a full list of partners. If you showed me an example, I could say, "Oh, yeah, that's probably who they were."

At the University of Washington we didn't manage the external partnerships except for in one case, the AARP. That's the only one that we managed.

We talked about also bringing in some libraries. They didn't end up joining. It was just too late in the process to include them. But we did have -- we did manage the relationship with AARP, and that's the only external partnership that we managed.

Q Okay. And what was AARP's role with the partnership?

A So I think it was just the northwest branch. And we ran a little project where one of my colleagues who works closely with them did some training with them around recognizing rumors and misinformation in their information diets.

And then they had the potential to, when they ran across a rumor about -- again, rumors, only about election processes and procedures, very scoped -- that they could send a message to our team about that rumor.

And then we would determine whether it met the scope of the EIP project. And if it did, one of our students, who was the lead at that effort, would then add that rumor to our system, or that item. It probably was like an email that we might receive or something. They would add that kind of rumor item to the system that we were using to kind of try to identify false, misleading, or unsubstantiated claims about election processes and procedures.

Q Okay. And you've referenced a couple times your role. And just to clarify, you're speaking of both you as individually and University of Washington and their role?

A Yeah. So that's a great question. I speak as -- it will be good to differentiate these things, because there are things that the Election Integrity Partnership did, there are things that the University of Washington did, and then there's, like, the things that I had directed participation in or direct visibility in. They're all kind of large collaborations.

So the UW's role was specifically around analysis and communication. And communication for us really meant public communication. So we would do social media data analysis.

When we would become aware through the system that we have -- we'll probably talk about it -- become aware through the system that we had that there was a specific kind of rumor, we would do this data analysis based on the methods that my team's been using for now almost a decade of, like, tracking how that rumor was spreading, to see which audiences it's spreading, how far, is it worth sort of writing about or communicating about.

And then we would do public communication. We create visualizations. We create tweet threads, blogs, and eventually research papers based on analysis of the data that was -- based on the analyses that we would do of those false, misleading, or unsubstantiated claims.

Q And when you first were invited by Stanford to join this partnership, was the request to fulfill that role you just described?

A I don't remember exactly what the request was. I just remember coming away from a single conversation with Alex, which was audio or audio-video, I can't remember which one, with the understanding that he recognized that we had a lot of expertise in social media data analysis and that we would be applying that in sort of a real-time way as part of the project.

And I kind of -- and I remember thinking, oh, this is very similar to the work that I did as a graduate student when we were doing that live crisis mapping stuff. First of all, it's really horrible to try to work that fast, just because it's very taxing on students.

So I remember thinking, okay, this would be a really big commitment because of the ways that that kind of work happens and how it's different from the academic rhythms that we have.

Q In 2020, do you recall how many people from the University of Washington were involved with EIP?

A Yeah. I don't have an exact number, because we had people coming in from different ways. But I think we had three faculty members were at least involved in sort of managing these analysis teams. And then we probably had 15 to 16 students or postdoctoral researchers on those analysis teams, and then a couple other students that worked in slightly different capacities. One helped to do the policy analysis.

And then we had our communications. The Center for an Informed Public has a communications -- a full-time communications person, and that person contributed in a couple of ways. And we had a data engineer who would help us do our data collection and occasionally gave technical advice.

Q When you referenced policy analysis, what did you mean by that?

A There was one piece of the project where the students -- I think it was a student-led team, but certainly the UW participant was a student. They looked through all the social media platforms to see what kinds of policies they had around elections, like civic integrity policies, and they documented those and sort of did an analysis, which they published as a blog post, I think, in August or September. And they might have done a follow-up analysis as well.

And one of them ends up writing a paper and getting a published paper a little bit

later, maybe a year later, based on sort of the same analysis.

Q You referenced in the previous round of questioning that some social media platforms would present their policies to you from time to time and you might offer your thoughts. And please correct if that characterization is not accurate.

A Yeah. I've been asked by social media platforms to give feedback on their policies before, yes.

Q Did any of those occasions occur in the context of EIP?

A I don't remember that any did, no.

Q You said there were three faculty members. Is that including you?

A That's including me, yeah.

Q Who were the other two?

A Emma Spiro and Jevin West.

Q Turning back to the central four partners, understanding there were others involved, too, what was your understanding of what role Graphika would serve in EIP in 2020?

A I actually never got a mapping of what all of the different organizations would do. I sent a statement of what we were going to do, the University of Washington, but I don't think I ever read similar statements from the other groups. So I don't know the scope of their work.

Q Okay.

A Yeah. I'd recognize them as having similar kinds of skills in social media data analysis, so I assumed that that's the role that they would be fulfilling.

Q Okay. And so any familiarity with what DFRLab's role would have been?

A Same thing. I would have seen them as playing a role in sort of the data analysis piece. And they may have also played a role in sort of outreach to potential

external partners, but I don't know that -- you know, I don't know the details around that.

Q And who is leading the partnership? You mentioned that you sent a proposal over.

A Yeah. In terms of who I saw as the leader -- I mean, there's no leader -- there's no proposal. We sent them a statement over just because I wanted to have a clear, like, articulation of what we were going to do. I don't remember them saying a statement of here is the organizational chart or here's how things are going to work.

I can say who I perceived as the leader. And so I would say it was almost a dual -- like, I saw -- if you put it in an academic context, because of the way we work with students, sometimes, like, when I did the work when I was a Ph.D. student, I would be the leader of something, but my adviser would be mentoring me. And so sometimes people would see her as the leader, sometimes me as the leader.

So I saw -- the two folks that I saw leading were Alex Stamos, who I kind of saw as sort of a leader in terms of thinking about how we might work together and reaching out to collaborators. And then there was a student at Stanford who was the -- who was sort of the everyday in the moment helping us organize things, who they might have talked about as like a project manager.

Q And do you know who at EIP was responsible for managing external relationships?

A I don't know who, if it was one person or many. My assumption was that most of those were managed through Stanford, but I don't think that's completely true. There may have been other. I want to give you as completely -- the complete picture.

There may have been other folks that had other relationships, just like we had at UW. We had our relationship with AARP, and we brought that in sort of like on our own

because we were already working with them.

Q Uh-huh.

A Yeah.

Q Was it your understanding that some of the external partners were government agencies?

A It was my understanding that there was one Federal Government agency and that there were other organizations that convened local and State election officials who we saw -- who my understanding was is that we could help them and they could help us figure out what the ground truth was around election processes and procedures. And so that that would be an important part of a collaboration when you're trying to address that kind of misinformation.

Q And which Federal agency was the one that you were referencing?

A The Federal agency that -- is kind of who was -- is the CISA agency, yeah.

Q And do you know who at EIP was interfacing with CISA?

A My understanding is that it was Alex and the student, but there may have been more people there interfacing with them. Again, I didn't have full visibility into their activities.

Q And to the extent you have knowledge or understanding of this, what was CISA's role as serving as a partner or collaborating with EIP?

A I don't know, because I never interacted with them directly. My understanding was that, during the operations, they were primarily a recipient of our information.

So if we were putting out something around -- gosh, there was a case that -- where we had heard from one of our external partners that there was Democratic voters were receiving threats from someone saying that they were the Proud Boys, that

were intimidating them at the polls. And this is not an analysis that happened at University of Washington. But that the folks at Stanford were able to figure out that those emails were not coming from the Proud Boys, they were actually coming from an Iranian disinformation operation. And my understanding is they did interface with CISA around that to let them know that was happening.

There may have been other times that we were, like, helping. Like the products that were coming out of the EIP -- and, again, this is we, the EIP, not we, UW -- the products that were coming out of EIP were informing some of what they may have been calling rumor control at the time at CISA.

But I didn't have a lot of visibility into that. I wasn't looking at their websites, and I wasn't interacting directly with anyone at the CISA office.

Q Do you have a sense of when CISA was brought on as having some sort of partnership with EIP?

A I don't know when, but I remember in the first set of slides they were among the partners that I saw, which would have been in July or August.

Q Did EIP partner with social media platforms?

A My understanding is that we did, yes.

Q And which ones, to your understanding?

A I might not have the complete list, but I know that Twitter and likely Facebook were those partners. There may have been three or four others. I just don't know.

Q Uh-huh.

A Yeah.

Q So as part of your role with EIP, did you ever interface with the social media platforms?

A No.

Q Do you know if anyone from UW did?

A I don't know if they did. I don't know that anyone did from UW. But, again, I don't have full visibility into all the activities of all the people that were as part of that.

Q Do you know who at EIP had primary responsibility for interacting with the social media platforms?

A My memory of the structure of the EIP, I don't know who invited them into the partnership. But the way that the communication would have happened, probably folks at Stanford, and there may have been a group of managers that would have had maybe -- we might have called them on-call managers -- that had direct interfacing with the social media platforms.

Q And who were the managers that you're referencing there?

A I don't remember exactly who they are, but there would have been one person from each of the organizations. I think it was probably Emerson from DFRLab. I don't know who was from Grafika. I am pretty sure that at some point Renee DiResta was a manager, but I'm not sure she was in there initially, because she was on maternity leave. And there may have also been a student as part of the managers.

Q Do you recall if UW had someone that was serving as a manager?

A I recall that we did not have someone serving as a manager.

Q Okay. Do you know if -- well, let me ask it this way first.

Are you familiar with the Global Engagement Center?

A Mildly. Not directly.

Q Do you know if they played any role with the Election Integrity Partnership?

A I don't know if they did or didn't.

Q Do you know if EIP had -- if individuals associated with EIP had separate email domains created specifically for EIP?

A I don't think that we did. But if we did, that would be a surprise to me. But I don't know that.

Q And so is it your understanding, then, that the partnership is loosely formed? Was there an office created or a title for someone to direct, or was it loosely formed?

A No. Loosely formed. There's no paperwork. There was no signatures. There's no office. There is a branding and a shared website, and then some infrastructure for managing the workload.

Q And so, when you're interfacing with Alex, let's say --

A Yeah.

Q -- is it from his Stanford email, to the extent you have a recollection?

A My recollection is I would interface with Alex a little bit over email, sometimes in a phone call, maybe two or three, or they could have been Zoom chats, I can't remember, and then possibly through a Slack chat infrastructure that Stanford managed for, like, real-time collaboration since we were all remote.

Q And what is that Slack chat channel?

A What is it? You want me to describe what Slack is? Is that --

Q Right. Sure. I guess is it --

A Yeah. I mean, it's a --

Q You're referencing that common --

A It's a work environment. And I studied this. Computer-supported cooperative work. It's like the folks that I teach go and develop platforms like Slack.

Yeah, it's a real-time communication platform. It's especially good for distributed work, which was probably happening a lot during 2020. Almost everyone's

either using Zoom or Slack or both at the same time.

And it's organized into different channels. And different people within an organization are invited into different channels. And you might have conversations in a channel with multiple people or you can have individual conversations with someone in the group in sort of like a side conversation.

And those platforms -- yeah, they just -- it's basically textual chat, although you can add other things into the platform as well. If you wanted to add documents and things, they could be added there as well, although I don't remember any documents going through there.

Q Yeah. And Stanford, you said, was the one that --

A Stanford hosted the Slack chat on their infrastructure.

Q Okay.

A I believe they also hosted our, like, blog infrastructure. They hosted a lot of -- the shared infrastructure was hosted at Stanford.

Q Okay. So in addition to email, Slack, how else did partners communicate with one another at EIP in 2020?

A Are you talking about the four core partners --

Q Yeah.

A -- or the broader partners?

Four core partners, it was primarily through Slack and Zoom chats.

Q Okay. And what about external partners?

A My understanding on external partners is that there may have been some Zoom chats where they convened them, but I wasn't -- I don't remember being in any of those, and that the communication during the real-time activities would have happened through a system called the Jira project managing system, which is for software

engineering. And it's pretty much a disaster to use for real-time collaboration. But it's getting -- we're getting better at that.

But the external partners could send something into the system where it would become part of our analysis team, and it would go through our tiers, different tiers of analysis, and that there was a way for us from inside that system to send something out through that system.

So, like, the AARP, they couldn't directly send something into the system. They actually sent it to our student, and then he would enter things into the system.

But there were ways for external partners to enter things into it. And then a somewhat different set, although I don't know exactly the mapping of who had internal -- incoming versus external or outgoing.

Q Okay. Do you recall anyone who had -- any of the external partners who were able to directly submit information into the system?

A To put them in? I don't know how that worked, and I don't know which ones. But I imagine when they list off their civil society partners, that those folks could enter things into the system directly.

And when we're thinking about that, what we're thinking about is people monitoring -- or not monitoring -- well, monitoring -- identifying information from within their own communities.

So when we're talking about the AARP, it's elders and what they're receiving in their emails. When it's the DNC, it would usually be things that their constituents were receiving and looking at.

And so they're kind of seeing what rumors are happening within their own constituents and then putting those into the system so that we can see and take a look and see are those spreading, is it something that -- is there a fact check on it? Is there

something that we should take action on by doing a public communication? Is this something that the platforms might want to become aware of because it may violate one of their policies?

Q And who is managing the Jira system? Is that a proper way to refer to it?

A Yeah. You can talk about it as a Jira system.

Who is managing it? I guess it's a hard question. There's many people using it.

Our technical person may have set it up, because he had some experience with the Atlassian system. But he would -- he never -- he wasn't managing it. He was just making sure it all worked. But he set it up with -- it was -- Stanford hosted it. He just helped them figure out how to configure it.

But in terms of who is managing it from the day to day, again, we had that project manager. That's who -- if I had a question, that's who I would ask if something was going wrong or what's going on in the system or how does it work. But there may have been other people who would have seen themselves as managers of it, but I -- we just didn't talk about it like who is managing it in that way.

Q Okay. And just --

A We were just like users of the system, just like we used Slack.

Q Okay.

A Yeah.

Q And just real quick, you referenced Atlassian?

A Yeah.

Q Who is -- what is Atlassian?

A It's a company that own different kinds of software. So they -- Atlassian owns this platform called Jira.

Q Okay. And would external partners be invited to use Jira? Do you know

how that initial setup process worked?

A I don't. My understanding is they didn't -- they weren't using it, but they could put information in and take information out. But I don't know exactly how that looked. I never saw what an external partner would see.

Q Okay. And what do you mean by using it? So if someone is sending information in but is not using it, what do you mean?

A Yeah. So inside the system, yeah, there would be, like, a workspace where each kind of report of a rumor -- imagine an internet form, and it has like radio buttons and a tech space and we can add comments.

I worked on probably two or three tickets total, and one of them I might attach a link to my visualization or I might attach a screenshot of a visualization to say, "Hey, look, this looks like it's really taking off," or, like, "Oh, this is dying down, let's just ignore it and move on," those kinds of things.

So there's comments about a lot of data analysis that's going on. And it may be touched by ten people or two people or only one person depending on whether it's interesting enough to spend time with. And there's all sorts of different, like, data pieces of it.

So it's just like a multimedia web form, yeah, where, like, real-time analysis was happening, yeah.

Q You mentioned that you worked on two to three tickets.

A Yeah.

Q Do you have a sense of how many tickets there were? We'll start with in relation to the 2020 election?

A Yeah. I've got a bunch different numbers, because when we -- we did a lot of post hoc research where we boiled it down and realized a lot of tickets were

duplicates, or these are the same things, and it kept getting smaller and smaller. At the end of the day, the set we were working with was like -- something more like 350 or 400 tickets.

But I think, total, there was more on the lines of maybe 800 tickets. But that could -- it could be higher. That's just the first time that I kind of looked at the data. There's about 800 tickets. And, again, a lot of that had to be deduplicated.

Q Did you use Jira previously?

A No.

Q You mentioned that there's both input coming in and then an output that would come out.

A Yeah.

Q Can you describe what is being sent out and to whom?

A I believe what goes out is a message, a single message that may have links to say, "Hey, here is one link or a set of links to content that we think is both within scope for us and violates an existing policy that you have at a social media site." So this would only be for the external partners that are social media platforms.

So we could send out a textual description with links to say that here's something that's spreading that is either, again, misleading about election processes and procedures in a way that could disenfranchise someone, encouraging fraud, encouraging violence, or using false, misleading, or unsubstantiated claims to sow doubt in election processes, procedures, or results.

Q And how is this message being communicated?

A I have no idea.

Q Do you know if it was via email?

A I don't know what the -- how that was configured to go out to the other

group, yeah.

Q Do you know who at EIP was responsible for determining how things were being communicated to social media platforms?

A Do I know who designed the environment, or who was pushing the button to send them out?

Q Well, we'll start with either.

A I don't know where the design came in and how that worked. I think it was probably due to the, like, limitations or capacities of the system, which is we're adapting what we do to a system.

How it went? like who decides whether it went out was kind of a layered process. I think what would happen is some analyst would say, "Hey, this looks like it's something -- it's spreading, it could be harmful, it's in scope, and it violates one of these processes." And they could, like, hit a button within that form that says this should be looked at.

And my understanding is that that then went to a layer of managers who were on call, and they decided to hit that final button to push it out.

I could be wrong about that. That was my understanding of how it works.

Q Okay. So, again, to the extent you have an understanding on this, the managers you just referenced in your last answer --

A Yeah.

Q -- is that the same managers you mentioned previously?

A I think that's the group that had access. There may have been other people that had access to that manager status or that capacity. And it's possible that people could push buttons directly from within the system, but that's my understanding.

Q You mentioned that, post election, you were -- you or your team were doing

some research on this. Were the Jira tickets available to you after the election?

A I think we had access to the Jira tickets through about mid-2021 to -- as we were writing the final report and to conduct analysis. And then we pulled down just kind of a list of different data and used that.

But we could have also been invited back into the Jira at different times. Again -- not again, probably maybe the first time -- I didn't go there, but I had -- I was working closely with students. And so they would know more about when we needed to pull data from the Jira versus, like, we put it in a spreadsheet and were able to use it.

We put it in a spreadsheet. What we ended up doing was taking -- so there's those 800 tickets that were sort of like then deduplicated. I don't know where that goes.

But then we took that, and we wanted to analyze it for our research. We wanted to just take a specific set of tickets, and those were the ones in the fourth category, which were the ones about false, misleading, unsubstantiated claims that would have sowed doubt in election processes or results, and so we identified the tickets that had that criteria.

And then we just took those ticket numbers and a description of that, of what each of those tickets were about, and then we tried to create a search string that would go back through other Twitter data we'd collected and find all the tweets related to that ticket. And so we spent a lot of time doing that.

It didn't require us to go back to the initial Jira tickets very often, but every once in a while, for our research, I think there was a reason to go back and see the original Jira ticket. And so we might have been pulled back in, or I might have asked for permission to, "Hey, can you open this up so I can see this Jira ticket?" which I did two or three times in 2021.

Q Okay. And who are you going to when you're asking for permission?

A I probably would have asked Renee DiResta, because I know her best, and she's usually accessible via Twitter.

Q So is Stanford the one with custody of these Jira tickets or --

A Stanford owns the infrastructure and has the Jira data.

Q Yeah.

A Yeah.

Q And is it your understanding if those tickets are still available?

A I have not asked about them anytime recently.

Q If you needed to ask, is it your understanding that they would be available to you?

A I don't know.

Mr. Burton. That's an impossible question.

Ms. Starbird. Yeah, I don't know.

BY [redacted]:

Q When is the last time that you asked?

A 2021, I believe, yeah.

Q Has anyone from UW asked that you are familiar with?

A I don't think they have. In fact, I don't think they would ask directly, because they don't -- my students don't work directly with the folks at Stanford. They would ask me to mediate that relationship.

Q Yeah. Any other faculty members?

A I don't believe my other -- the other faculty members were doing any of this kind of analysis where they would have asked.

Q Okay.

A And I think they would have gone through me as well, because they don't know the Stanford folks. I'm their connection to the Stanford folks.

Q And as a point of clarification, when you're going back and asking for permission, are you reentering the Jira system? Are you reviewing a spreadsheet with archived data?

A We may have had the spreadsheet already with the archived data. We've actually put out a data set with some of that information. But it would just have the ticket number, a description of, like, what that thing was about, and then like a number of tweets and some of the analysis we would have added to categorize different tickets into different buckets.

What was your second part of your question?

Q Just when you were going back and asking for permission --

A Yeah.

Q -- are you back into the Jira system as it was originally when it was active?

A What I would --

Q Is that the right word?

A If I was going to ask, I don't know. It would just mean that I could just put in that ticket -- the link to that ticket -- and I could go see it. I could go see the full form around that ticket.

But in terms of, like, the back end and, like, how many numbers of this and look at all the tickets, I don't know if I had access. I imagine I did, but I would just go look at that one ticket, because I wanted to check: What time did we start working on the Sonoma ballots ticket? I would usually check ones that I had had access to and -- or not that I had access to -- that I had been a part of as part of the analysis to kind of remember what we did in real time.

Q And so when you're reviewing this ticket, are you able to see what -- you said at times up to ten people might comment on a ticket?

A You could see everybody who touched it, including students, yeah.

Q When you were reviewing, was there a way for you to see what was communicated to social media platforms?

A There may have been, but I didn't check it.

Q Okay.

A Yeah. I don't know if you could see whether or not that final thing has gone out. You could see whether another analyst had said that this violates the policy and we should take a look at sending it over to the platforms.

Q Do you recall, in the initial setup, in setting up this Jira ticket system, if there were discussions about how to archive this information?

A If there was -- how to archive it? I don't remember being part of those conversations.

Q Okay.

Mr. Burton. When you say this information, you mean the Jira tickets themselves?

[redacted]. Yes.

Ms. Starbird. Yeah. In 2022, we talked about archiving and talked about how do we do this in a way that preserves what's going on, but that preserves the privacy of the students who were working on this, because that's something that we're really concerned about at the University of Washington.

BY [redacted]:

Q All right. So with respect to -- actually, let me back up.

You mentioned that you were working on this summer of 2021, conducting some

research?

A Doing some post hoc research.

Q And there was a report that came out as well.

Did EIP close shop, for lack of a better word, at some point in 2021?

A We stopped doing any active work in December of 2020. We weren't doing any more identifying rumors or anything else. In fact, we might have stopped in November. The bulk of our operations stopped that Thanksgiving when the Stanford students went home.

Other people may have entered a few more things into the system into December, but we stopped that active period of the real-time work in December of 2020.

In the interim, several of us talked about the possibility of doing something again in a future election if we thought it was needed. And we had conversations about how we might go about that and how we might configure that differently.

Q And who is "we"?

A I think I had conversations mostly -- maybe two or three conversations with Alex and/or Renee.

Q And did the partnership decide to take up -- sounds like the 2022 election?

A We did in a very different way. So we limited it just to the two -- the analysis teams to just the two university partners. And at the University of Washington we decided we wanted to take intake completely into the University of Washington so we could -- because of the research we wanted to do on the data, we wanted to know exactly how it came in and be able to document that. And so we pulled our intake into the University of Washington for 2022.

Q Okay. And, sorry, just to clarify, what do you mean by pulled the intake in?

A So the discovery process where you have students kind of combing through

social media posts to try to identify potential rumors, we pulled all of that -- that was all at Stanford in 2020, and we pulled all of that to UW, or the bulk of that to UW in 2022.

Q And when you say you, do you mean your team or all of EIP?

A EIP became just our team and the team at Stanford. And we just decided we wanted to own intake. They decided they didn't want to own intake, so it was a good thing, because intake is a whole lot of work, and you've got to manage a bunch of undergraduate students.

Q And for 2022, did you have any sort of partnership or collaboration still with Grafika or DFRLab?

A We did not in 2022 have direct -- it wasn't set up the same way where we would be partners with them. There were conversations that if we saw things that were interesting for each other we would have conversations with them, but I don't remember having any of those in 2022. And there was no formal collaboration or informal collaboration with them.

Q Yeah. Do you remember what the reason was to not include them in the same form as 2020?

A I think it had to do with me just being more comfortable with another research group that wasn't university based, because I think I was pushing for that, and they probably know that.

Q And what was the reason for that to the extent you recall?

A I don't -- I don't remember. I don't know if I can articulate it. But I just felt comfortable with sort of, like, having -- if we were going to base a lot of research on it, I wanted to have that research be sort of like coming out of these two academic -- base a lot of academic research on it, I wanted to have it be coming out of two academic research organizations.

And there is just a lot of similarities in sort of the structure, the timing, expectations, understanding of student demands and kinds of things that are shared between universities that don't necessarily overlap with external organizations.

Q Okay. When you're preparing for this 2022 election-related effort, when did EIP reorganize or begin in earnest for this next election cycle?

A Say that again. I'm just trying to think about -- yeah. Say that again.

Q Yeah. Let me reframe it differently.

A Yeah.

Q You said in this kind of second iteration, it's just Stanford and UW.

A Yeah.

Q Do you recall when these discussions took place and when --

A Yeah. So I may have to correct here, because I'm trying to think now. At some point, people talked me on to -- talked me into, like, allowing other sort of -- other partners to be, like, federated partners or something, who could be a part of things. They just weren't a part of the core team.

And so we came up with these different labels, and I don't remember -- I don't think Grafika was in there. DFRLab may have been a broader partner. Again, I don't remember interacting with them directly in the context of 2022.

So I wanted to correct that. Give me that question again, because that's the piece that was bothering me.

Q Sure.

A Yeah.

Q Just when are these discussions occurring and when --

A Yeah. So Stanford and UW committed to doing something similar in 2022, and we wrote a grant proposal for that in January of 2021. And so then we would have

sort of committed to having -- to collaborating on something in that space in January 2021.

And then how we were going to do it comes after that. So here is my memory coming back. How we were going to do it comes after that. And that's where we had that sort of shared grant, and I was sort of advocating let's just keep it to ourselves, and then we have more control of what's happening here. So the conversations would have been starting in January 2021.

Q Okay. And who was that grant from?

A It's from the National Science Foundation.

Q Okay. And do you recall when you were awarded it?

A I think we get it in September of 2021 or October. Something in like the fall.

Q You referenced -- there are a couple different names -- other partners, federated partners.

A Yeah.

Q Do you recall what the final structure was?

A I don't recall exactly what the structure was. Again, it's not formal. It's just like people we agreed to talk to and share information with if we saw something.

But the structure in 2022 looked very different. We didn't have external groups putting information in our system. I think we had one partner who could, but we had them mark it differently, because I wanted to see that our data -- I wanted to keep like a pure data set that I knew exactly how the data came in so we could write research on it and know exactly what the provenance of the information was.

But we didn't have the same kind of external partnerships with election officials or government organizations. And our partnerships with platforms were very thin. I

think we only sent three pieces of content to them in 2022, and they were all things that had, like, an undercurrent of potential violence at the polls.

Q Okay. Do you recall which partner was able to submit content for the 2022 --

A Yeah. It would have been Junkipedia.

Q Okay. And what is Junkipedia?

A I don't know. It's actually -- it seems to be connected to a civil society organization. But what Junkipedia is, is a technical platform that allows people to search content in all sorts of different ways.

I don't even know if they ended up submitting anything. We had talked about whether they could or not, and you'd have to ask someone who knows better than I what the data is there.

But we sometimes use their platform, because it allows you to search not just Twitter data, which we're really good at, but it allows you to search TikTok data and Facebook data and just -- it allows you to search more different platforms. And so it was valuable for us to be able to get a sense of what was happening in other places.

Q Do you recall who from EIP wanted to bring in or invite Junkipedia?

A Probably Renee DiResta.

Q Did Junkipedia play a role in the 2020 version of EIP?

A I remember the fact that we could use the Junkipedia platform. I think that's true in 2020. But I don't know that they were a formal partner. I don't -- again, I didn't manage the partnerships.

Q In 2022, did EIP in any way collaborate or work with CISA?

A No.

Q And you mentioned that there were only maybe three tickets with the social

media platforms.

A Yeah.

Q Were there communications in the lead-up to it to reestablish relationships with the companies?

A My understanding is that folks at Stanford did make an effort to kind of put some of that infrastructure in place, and that we, in the end, decided not to do that and at the same kind of scale. But there were conversations with different social media platforms.

Q Do you know who from Stanford was having these conversations?

A Probably Renee DiResta, but also perhaps one of the more junior folks there, whose names I sometimes get mistaken.

Q Going back to 2020 and this Jira ticketing system, do you know how it was determined who would receive each ticket? It sounds like there were -- actually, let me strike that and go back.

A Yeah.

Q How many people had access to the Jira system? Do you know?

A Well, I think everyone might have had access. I think the 120 students all had access, because they could put information in.

We may have looked at different parts of it. But some people could -- so there's a set of students that are looking through social media posts, and they can create a form, a ticket, like a web form, and they can put information in it.

And then my teams, we did, at UW, we did analysis where we could pick up that ticket and we could manipulate that form and we could push certain buttons. And then there's a group of managers that could also look at those tickets.

So we all had access to it, probably 120 people.

Q So I understand you as far as when the students are researching they identify something.

A Yeah.

Q That individual student or group of students can create a ticket. But you're also receiving input from external parties.

A Yeah.

Q Do you know how it was determined to whom within this group of 120 or so, who receives the ticket first, or how those tickets are triaged?

A Oh, just whoever picked it up when it came in through the system. It was like a real-time system.

And so there's these queues, and if you're on call -- students worked in shifts, this is my understanding of the Stanford system, students are working in shifts. If they're on call, there's a queue, there's a new ticket, or maybe it's not the newest one, it's the one that's been in there the longest. But they can pick up that ticket. They start to work on it.

And they can make a determination: Is this in scope? Many tickets aren't in scope. We would just push a button, and that goes away. If it is in scope, then they would start working on it.

I didn't go through their training. I don't know what their process of what they did for that work or how they prioritized things.

But, yeah, when we did it in 2022, it was the students on call. It was first come, first served. But they weren't taking in external tickets. But when we were in analyst teams, we would pick it up first call, first served.

Q Do you know who did the training?

A The training? I don't. I don't remember. I mean, organizationally, I

remember it was the Stanford folks did the training, in 2020.

Q You mentioned at the very beginning of this line of questioning, sounded like some frustrations with how the Jira ticket system operates?

A Oh, it's just hard to use software engineering, a platform made for software development, for a crowdsourcing project, yeah.

Q Due use Jira for the 2022 iteration project?

A We did, yeah.

Q And what changes, if any, were made?

A Oh, we adapted it to make it -- we adapted it a lot so that we could do a lot more sort of classification and real-time research to, like, put things in different kinds of buckets and to classify whether they were -- remember I said we had those four criteria? To be able to classify which criteria it is or which part of the election process something deals with, and whether it's about pens bleeding through ballots or something else.

We took a lot of what we learned in 2020 and we sort of embedded that in the system so we could more quickly kind of sort of categorize the information and then put out sort of weekly reports on the kinds of things that we were seeing.

Q Did you keep the same four categories or criteria that you referenced from 2020 to 2022?

A I believe we did, yeah. And we talked about adding a fifth one, which we might have added, but we didn't spend a lot of time on that. And that was misinformation or things based on misinformation that were invoking specific threats to election officials.

Q And you mentioned it was a much -- it sounds like a much smaller number. Three tickets, I think you said, were ultimately sent to --

A We sent only in three tickets, yeah. Only when there was like a sort

of -- something about violence. One was an example of there had been a bomb threat at a school that was near an election facility, and people were saying that that bomb threat was trying to scare off voters, and it just wasn't true. And then there were a couple others that had some kind of intersection of violence at the polls with misinformation.

Q And do you know what process was in place to archive these tickets? Could you conduct similar research post election like you did in 2020?

A Yes.

Q Okay. And what was the archival system or access system that --

A Well, Jira keeps track of the things that happen within it. And so there is -- yeah, that Jira system is keeping track of -- and you can export things into spreadsheets and different kinds of things to see the intersections.

Q Do you know whether that information is available to you today?

A Is that information available to me today? Yeah. We're still doing analysis on 2022.

Q And is that -- for 2020, you mentioned that Stanford was the organization that had this information.

A Yeah.

Q Is it still Stanford?

A I think they're still housing it, yeah.

Q Is there a way for the system that you used in 2022 to see tickets from 2020?

A I don't think so. I think they have different log-ins.

Q Okay. Do you know how many personnel from UW were involved in the 2022 version of EIP?

Mr. Burton. I'm sorry. Could you repeat that?

[redacted]. Sure.

How many people from UW, the University of Washington, were involved in the 2022 version of EIP?

Mr. Burton. Thank you.

Ms. Starbird. I'm going to say something more on the order of 40, because we brought in sort of -- maybe even -- maybe more like 50, because we tried to bring in, like, 30 undergraduate students to do the intake, so we had a much bigger team.

The overall project is much smaller, but UW had a much bigger team. And we're studying the collaborations. That's what our grant is for, to study the collaborations. And so we're watching and studying how those students are using the system.

BY [redacted]:

Q Okay. Do you know how many people total were involved in the 2022 version of EIP?

A I don't know what Stanford's size team was. I think it was more on the order of 20, or it could even be fewer. They had a much smaller team.

Q All right. Are there plans to have a similar partnership in the lead-up to the 2024 election?

A Well, I think there's still a need, and I think we still have skills to participate there. And I am hopeful that we'll be able to do the same kind of thing and provide that service to society.

Q Have you had these discussions with Stanford?

A We have, but we haven't had the final discussions of where, when, who, how, how is it going to work? We're still really processing 2022 at this point. And we'd be, if we were going to start, probably thinking about supporting this kind of activity in the primaries in 2024.

Q And to the extent these conversations have occurred -- or let me ask it this way.

Would it be your preference if the model used for 2024 was closer to what was used in 2022 or in 2020, and specifically referring to the use of external partners?

A Yeah. I think my preference would be not to be reporting to platforms. I don't think that's very useful. My preference and I think something I've been advocating for since, for about a year and a half now, is that our outputs are all public, that when we do any output anybody can read it. If Twitter policy people want to read it, great, but it's also going to be public for any one of us could read it when we had an output. I think that's the model we're going to move to in 2024.

And then I still think there would be a lot of value to be able to work with local and State election officials so we can contact them to see whether something's true or false and so we can, if they see something that's affecting them, we can try to help.

I don't know how that's going to work. But I think that would be something where we could really provide something that would benefit society.

Q Do you recall -- in 2020 there were external stakeholders you said who could provide input.

A Yeah.

Q And that, if it was outside the scope of EIP, you guys would throw it out.

A Yeah. We'd just -- we would say closed, and it just wouldn't become part of our -- it would be marked in a certain way that it wouldn't become part of our analysis.

Q Yeah. Do you know -- do you recall if there were any external stakeholders who were sending more requests than others that were outside the scope of EIP?

A Again, I haven't done the data analysis. I do remember post hoc being like there were certain things that were higher quality and closer to what we wanted to do

than others, and the ones that weren't high quality and didn't help, we just didn't pay attention to.

And it's just about -- my interpretation was that that partner just didn't really understand what we were trying to do. But I can't remember a lot of examples.

Q Do you remember if any of the partners -- do you have any recollection one way or the other if any of the partners stood out as having a better understanding or a poorer understanding of what EIP was aiming at?

A I don't, no.

Q Okay.

A And, to be honest, like a lot of the external partners only submitted like two or three things, and some didn't submit any. It was variable.

Q On the ticket itself, could an analyst see who sent the report?

A I believe they could. But I don't know that for sure. I don't think I picked up an external -- I don't think my team, while I was watching, picked up a ticket that came in from an external partner. I think 70 percent of our tickets came in internally.

And at the times that our team was working, we were working while a Stanford shift was live with doing intake, and so almost everything we were picking up was coming directly from their analysts.

Q Do you recall if there were issues related to, for lack of a better word, borderline content?

So let me take a step back. You referenced that there were the four categories --

A Yeah.

Q -- of election procedures and processes.

A Yeah.

Q Do you recall if there was a sub area or topic that was difficult to navigate

about whether it fell into the category or not?

A I don't recall anything like that happening. It could have, but that's not something that I saw.

Q Okay.

A I mean, qualitative classification by people can always be challenging, but I don't remember, like, "Oh, this is an edge case that we keep running into we're not sure what we're dealing with." I never -- I don't think I remember any communication about that.

Q In 2020, obviously COVID is going on. Is it your understanding that States -- some States chose to change certain election procedures during the calendar year of 2020?

A Is it my understanding? that's my understanding, yes. Yeah.

Q And I guess the lead-up to this question. Certainly people are voicing opinions on how things should change, if they should change.

Who is making the determination as far as what was a false statement as opposed to, we'll say, an opinion or a stance on an issue?

A I guess I'm not kind of sure. I would love to get an example of what you mean by the two different cases would be.

The cases that I saw were really focused on not this is how it should work, but here's the -- here's a claim about ballots in a dumpster. Like the cases that I saw weren't -- I guess I'd need more information about what you mean in terms of that.

Q Sure. it seems like some cases are not too difficult to categorize or put this in that.

A Right.

Q But you mentioned that there were hundreds of tickets. You only worked

on two or three to the extent you recall?

A Well, directly in real time, I wasn't working on that many, yeah.

Q Yeah. Do you have a sense of how many you were able to review or had a sense, just as a point of clarification?

A How many that I've reviewed?

Q Well, if you only directly worked on two or three.

A Well, in real time, I was only working -- I could only remember two or three that we spent a lot of time with. Post hoc, we've done a lot of research across all of the different tickets.

Post hoc, what we've done is we've taken -- we identify one of these claims, and then we'd go look at all of the tweets related to that claim. And if all of the tweets with a claim -- if about 50 percent of them -- or if a majority of them are false or misleading, then we would kind of classify that as spreading a rumor, even though not every particular piece of that might have been making it.

Just like in the case that they showed, there is sometimes where the initial information doesn't directly say something that's false, but you can look at what the audience says about it.

And so, if the audiences were picking up those claims to say, "Oh, it's another case of voter fraud and this is voter fraud," then we would interpret that as part of like a false rumor when there was no evidence of voter fraud to be in -- or false or unsubstantiated rumor when there was no evidence of voter fraud in those cases.

[1:45 p.m.]

BY [redacted]:

Q Do you have a sense of what the reason was for the tickets that didn't fall within the EIP scope, why they were thrown out?

A You know, each analyst may have been making a different decision. And, to be honest, we don't have quality control across every decision that each one of these students made, and the students, you know, were trained, you know, for a week, maybe two. But I couldn't tell you about each one because they're all made by different people.

Q And, if you needed to go conduct further research on this, who would you contact to see if those tickets were still available?

A I would probably contact Renee just because she now is the person that I contact at Stanford when I want things. But I don't know who -- they've had a lot of other turnover there, and she's the only person that's been really consistently still there, even though I don't think that she was involved in that early part of the training because Renee was on maternity leave until I think September of 2020.

[redacted]. Great. I believe the hour is up.

Can we go off the record, please?

[Recess.]

[redacted]. It is 1:55. We can go back on the record.

Dr. Starbird, we just spent about an hour talking about the Election Integrity Partnership --

Ms. Starbird. Yes.

[redacted]. -- which is also referred to as the EIP.

I'm going to look a little more closely at the circumstances around EIP's creation.

Ms. Starbird. Okay.

[redacted]. So I want to introduce as exhibit No. 8 an email chain that's dated July 15, 2020, through July 2l, 2020. And this is University of Washington Bates number 5314 to 35.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 8

Was marked for identification.]

BY [redacted]:

Q And I'm introducing the whole chain for completeness, but I'm only going to talk about the very first email as it's the last in time email. It's the first email on the page.

A Yeah.

Q And this is exhibit NO. 8. So this is an email from you to [redacted], who is, it appears, a Stanford individual, and then there's a number of other individuals in the cc line. Correct?

A Yes.

Q Okay. And it's dated Tuesday, July 2l, 2020, 14:01:55. Correct?

A Yes.

Q And the subject line is "SIO Elections Monitoring Warroom Kickoff." Right?

A Yes.

Q Do you remember this email?

A I do, yes.

Q Okay. So, in this email, you're talking about how excited you are to join the team. And I want to look at the second paragraph.

A Right.

Q So it says -- you wrote, "We foresee" -- and "we" refers to UW and your participation. Correct?

A UW's Center for an Informed Public, as well as my colleagues there.

Q Okay.

A Emma Spiro and Jevin West. I was speaking on behalf of them.

Q So you wrote: We foresee our primary role as contributing to the near real-time analysis, particularly with visualizations and large-scale quantifications (network graphs, topic models) that can inform and complement more qualitative/forensic analyses. We are also setting up rapid-response teams to do qualitative coding (of posts or accounts or media outlets). Our analyses rely heavily on Twitter, Google, and You Tube. We're developing some expertise with Crowdtangle data on Facebook groups as well. Data sharing is something we might all want to talk about, and we can about how we might contribute there.

Did I read that right?

A You did.

Q So this language is incredibly technical --

A Yes.

Q -- and kind of flows over my head a little bit, so I want to break it down a little bit.

A Yeah.

Q What does "visualizations and large-scale quantifications" mean here?

A Right. So we often rely on Twitter data, so let me kind of do it with that. So we may take 50,000 or 100,000 tweets and create a graph on them. We could graph them a couple different ways. One of the things we do is graph sort of tweets over time to see, you know, if there's a couple of search terms that represent a rumor, you can see

if that rumor is growing or shrinking.

We also created a kind of novel visualization technique where we can see the influence of individual users in the sort of trajectory and see, like, when it hits an account that has a large following, that spikes. Right? So one of the things that we've learned to recognize about misinformation and rumors -- not misinformation, but rumors is that influencers can grow their influence by spreading them, but also they play a big role in amplifying them. So when it hits a large influencer, that's a time where you might want to react when you -- you know, if it hadn't hit any large influencers, it might burn out. You might not want to react to it. So building a large-scale quantification would be to help us see the sort of the patterns at scale.

And then network graphs are another important part of what we do is we can map out -- so, within our social media interactions, we may interact with different people in different ways. And some of the -- one of the common techniques we use is to create a retweet network graph where you see the accounts that retweet each other, and they'll be structurally separated from the accounts that don't retweet each other. So you can see different kinds of audiences.

If you think about an epidemiology model of, like, how things spread, things are going to be more likely -- once they hit a network, they're going to spread through that network pretty strongly.

So we can map out those networks, and structurally sometimes, because of the ways that we interact as people online right now, a lot of our political conversations will kind of end up into two different structural networks where people of like minds will basically retweet each other and not retweet people from the other side.

We create other kinds of network graphs as well, but -- I don't need to tell you about them all, but we have other ones that show, like, which kinds of media domains are

cited by the same kinds of accounts, and so that that also can get sort of different kinds of structures that can reveal sort of political orientations of different pieces of a conversation, but not just politics. Other kinds of things can come up there. Geographic location and other things can kind of be inferred from some of these network graphs as well.

Q Okay. And then you say: We are also setting up rapid-response teams to do qualitative coding (of posts or accounts or media outlets).

And I think rapid response kind of in the political world probably means something very different than it does here.

A Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q So I'm hoping you can explain what that means there.

A So, right. So, if we have -- you know, one of the things that's really hard in social media environments is to figure out what kind of account you're looking at, whether it's like an individual account, an organizational account, whether it's a legacy media or a new kind of media. And sometimes your analysis -- like if I created a network graph of different domains that are cited together, it might be really valuable to see, okay, these ones are organizations, these ones are election officials, these ones are sort of like web media outlets.

And so we had talked about -- I don't think we ever used them -- having students rapidly go qualitatively code to differentiate the different kinds of accounts, or whatever research question emerged at the time, so that a group of three or four students, we could develop a qualitative coding scheme or a categorization scheme, and they could quickly go through the data to mark those up so we can create some more interesting visualizations that also can let us see different kinds of patterns at scale.

So it's just like a -- this is like doing traditional qualitative methods but at a rapid

pace, which is kind of what our special sauce is at our research lab.

Q And then you refer to data from Twitter and Google and YouTube --

A Yeah.

Q -- and other entities.

So, in the prior hour, there was a lot of discussion about what material was, I guess, flagged, for lack of a better word, for social media companies and the like.

A Yeah.

Q But really your focus was really kind of on the data analysis, right, and kind of taking all of this data and mapping it and graphing it. Is that fair to say?

A We're trying to understand the patterns of how things spread and where that can inform -- again, when you're thinking about how to respond to something in real time, especially a rumor, there are a lot of considerations about whether you want to give more attention to something that's going to die out or not. And so being able to analyze how it's spreading, you can say: Okay, this one is going to die out. Let's not draw attention to it.

We have all of these examples -- the NyQuil chicken, or whatever, all of these examples of things we shouldn't have drawn attention to. Right?

And so, in doing these analyses, you can say: Okay, this one is going to die out, or, you know, this one is about to hit. It's hit one influencer. It's about to hit a few more. Let's probably think about a global strategy for communicating about it. Or look this one is really just spreading among politically oriented people in a very specific location because they really are concerned about Sharpie pens. Well, then you want to create a different kind of message to target it towards a different kind of person.

And so these kind of analyses can help kind of inform the right communication strategy to help people get to the truth when they're, you know, kind of misinterpreting

things or being misled.

Q And the communication strategy might not involve going to social media platforms at all. Right?

A For our team, no. We really thought about political communication -- public communication, right, like how do we communicate this publicly? Again, we did tweet threads, blogs. I've created so many interactive graphs. My, like, home page is full of them. Right? Like -- I don't mean home page, but my web environment of graphs that people could go to and see how things were spreading and who was spreading things. So, for us, we were really focused on public communication.

[redacted]. I want to introduce as exhibit No. 9 a July 27, 2020, post from the EIP. It's announcing the EIP.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 9
Was marked for identification.]

[redacted]. And if you want to take a minute to review it.

Ms. Starbird. I will. Thank you. Yeah.

BY [redacted]:

Q So down at the bottom, the -- like I guess it's the second to the last mini paragraph, it says: We would like to thank the Knight Foundation and Craig Newmark Philanthropies for their support of this effort.

Do you see where it says that?

A Yes.

Q Are you familiar with the Knight Foundation?

A I am.

Q What's the Knight Foundation?

A It is a philanthropic organization that gives funding to a variety of entities. But they gave us the foundational granted for the Center for an Informed Public and as part of our effort to fund research at the intersection of information, integrity, and democracy.

Q And they're a private entity. Right?

A Indeed.

Q Okay. No connection to the government?

A No.

Q Okay. Are you familiar with the Craig Newmark -- I'm sorry -- with Craig Newmark Philanthropies?

A I am, yes.

Q And what are Craig Newmark Philanthropies?

A They're a philanthropic fund that is associated with Craig Newmark, who was the founder of Craigslist, and he gives money to a lot of causes, including information, integrity, and democracy, among many others, yeah.

Q And that's also a fully private philanthropic entity. Right?

A It is, yes.

Q No connection to the government?

A None, no.

Q So, to the best of your knowledge -- and the EIP, kind of the bulk of its work was July 2020 to November of 2020, right, until like Thanksgiving 2020?

A I would say we were still writing our report through December, yeah.

Q Okay.

Mr. Burton. And that's, just to be clear --

Ms. Starbird. But the live activities were --

Mr. Burton. But it's this EIP?

Ms. Starbird. In 2020.

[redacted]. In 2020, correct.

Ms. Starbird. Yes.

Mr. Burton. Correct.

[redacted]. The 2020 EIP.

BY [redacted]:

Q So, during that time period of the 2020 EIP, to the best of your knowledge, did EIP receive any funding from any government entity?

A I can't speak for the other groups. The University of Washington, my understanding is that our funding did not come from the National Science Foundation or any other Federal entity for our real-time work in -- with the Election Integrity Partnership.

Q I want to look at the second paragraph of that post. It says: The Election Integrity Partnership is a coalition of research entities focused on supporting real-time information exchange between the research community, election officials, government agencies, civil society organizations, and social media platforms.

Now, we touched on this just a minute ago, the type of communications. It's not just sending information to the social media platforms; it's public communications as well.

A Yeah.

Q This reference to real-time information exchange, is that also a reference to ways to push information out?

A Yes. Yeah, information exchange was just -- yeah. I don't know exactly where that comes from. My assumption is it's, you know -- I don't even know how to

answer that question. I didn't write that sentence, so I, you know --

Q Understood.

A I mean, information exchange, it's about, you know, like us calling up and asking during the Sonoma ballots case, I do believe one of my students called up the folks in Sonoma County to ask them about this picture to understand whether or not it was true or not. I think it's that kind of thing where we can kind of have a conversation about: Oh, yeah we're seeing this thing spread. Okay, it's about to take off, or, like, that one isn't going to take off. Don't make it the next, you know, NyQuil chicken. Right? Like don't put a lot of attention -- that kind of thing.

That's my understanding of why -- of why that configuration of a partnership would be valuable here.

Q Yeah.

A And I think -- I think it aligns with some of the traditional ways that cybersecurity information sharing is happening. So cybersecurity is really about being hacked or different kinds of things. Like an organization like Microsoft might discover a vulnerability in their tools and they'll want to communicate that with government, and they'll want to communicate that with other industry members so they can see if they have the same vulnerability and clean it up. Right? So I think it comes from that kind of orientation around thinking around information sharing.

Q Okay. And my point is like it seems like it's more flow, information flow more generally. Again, it's not -- the purpose of EIP wasn't to report things to platforms necessarily. It was about broader discussions, broader information flow. Is that fair to say?

A Absolutely that's fair to say. When I joined this project, I did not think about it primarily as a way to inform social media platforms. In fact, I thought that that

was probably the least interesting piece and possibly the least valuable piece of the project. That's why at the University of Washington we were so focused on public communication and trying to get these things out publicly.

Q The post continues -- and I think this gets into kind of the four -- the limited scope in the four areas that you were looking at.

So it says: Our objective is to detect and mitigate the impact of attempts to prevent or deter people from voting or to delegitimize election results. This is not a fact-checking partnership to debunk misinformation more generally. Our objective explicitly excludes addressing comments that may be made about candidates' character or actions and is focused narrowly on content intended to suppress voting, reduce participation, confuse voters as to election processes, or delegitimize election results without evidence.

So those last four that I just read I want to go through each of those in turn.

A Okay.

Q To the extent that you recall, what did "content intended to suppress voting" refer to?

A I can make an inference here about what I think we meant by that, but I don't remember exactly the conversations that would have gone into that.

But, for instance, content that scares people away from the polls, so false rumors that there's going to be violence at the polls, for instance, might suppress votes, and people might not go to the polls to vote because of it. So that was one of the kind of specific cases that we would think about around voter suppression in this -- when it intersects with misinformation.

Q What about content that would, quote, "reduce participation"?

A I think similarly, something that would cause people -- well, if you don't think

your vote is going to count, if you think you might -- if you think that it's going to be -- that there's going to be fraud and, you know, you're not going to be considered -- you know, it's not going to be counted, that might reduce participation. Other kinds of things, anything that might, you know, using false information cause a person to think that they don't want to vote, whether from fear or from lack of agency or something else, that would be kind of reduced participation.

Q What about the reference to content that would confuse voters as to election processes? What did that refer to?

A I think that means kind of the content about confusing people about when and where to vote, which may actually cause them to make a mistake and not vote at the right time and the right place and cause them to be disenfranchised by not understanding how the processes work.

Q Okay. And what about content that would delegitimize election results without evidence?

A This is claims that are not based in factual evidence. For instance, that voting machines are changing your vote or that, you know, that your votes -- that somebody is cheating, so unsubstantiated claims and false claims of voter fraud that cause people not to believe in the results of the election.

Q And so all of these are scoped to ensure that voters can have their votes registered and count and ensure that they're not scared away from the polls. Is that fair to say?

A Many of them apply to that, yeah, yeah.

Q Okay. And the EIP specifically made clear in its introductory post that it did not intend to address comments about characters' character -- about candidates' character or actions. Correct?

A Yeah.

Q Was that important to you to have the area that the EIP was looking at to be narrowly scoped to just specifically areas that are designed to protect voters from being disenfranchised?

A Yeah. I think we wanted -- scope helps in any kind of project just because it helps you not to get too broad. But I think in the sense that we were doing collaborations with certain -- with certain, you know, different partners, it was really important to have a very narrow scope to things that were really like in the wheelhouses of those organizations and that were something that had the sort of shared societal awareness that, like, delegitimizing election results without evidence is a problem. Right? And so scoping to those kinds of things where you don't want to get into a tit for tat about, you know, candidates' children or whatever it is. Right? So we really wanted to really focus on misinformation just about the election processes and procedures, which is why I probably repeated that over and over again today.

Q Now, after -- after the active part, I guess, after post-December 2020 --

A Yeah, yeah.

Q -- let me put it that way, the EIP put together a report. Right?

A Yes.

Q And it's entitled "The Long Fuse"?

A Yeah. It's a long -- it's a long report too.

Q Did you help to draft that report?

A I did.

Q Okay.

A Mostly in the chapters 4 and 5.

Q I'm going to introduce the cover page and the executive summary. As you

said, it's a long report. I think it's like 300-some pages, so --

A Yeah. We warn you in the title that it's going to be long. And, in fact, it was probably 1,000 pages when first drafted because you have 120 people helping to draft.

[redacted]. I'm sorry. Yes, this is exhibit No. 10.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 10
Was marked for identification.]

BY [redacted]:

Q All right. And I should say the way -- I printed this out so that it has the cover page and the executive summary. That's actually -- if you print out the entire report, there's table of contents. I think there's some acknowledgment pages, so that is cut out, so the whole report is available online. This is not an accurate representation of what it looks like in the first couple of pages.

And I'm going to start by asking you about the "What We Did" section, if that's --

A Okay.

Q So, under this "What We Did" section, it says -- it describes the scope of your work across the four categories.

A Uh-huh.

Q And I think we have touched on that a little bit, but I want to look at them again in the context of the post hoc analysis piece.

A Uh-huh.

Q So it says: To identify the scope of our work, we built a framework to compare the policies of 15 social media platforms across four categories.

And then you list procedural interference, participation interference, fraud, and delegitimization of election results.

Now, in the earlier discussion, there was some question about, you know, what was the work on platforms. This was really just an analysis of that, of those platforms' policies. Right?

A Yeah. We built the framework to compare the policies was just we took their publicly available communication about their policies, and our students did an analysis and a write-up of that with help from some of the researchers and faculty members.

Q And is that publicly available?

A It is, yeah, I believe so.

Q Okay. And so it's not like you were having discussions with the social media platforms about how to form their policies in the context of the EIP?

A I don't believe we were. I think this is just students doing their analysis of the platforms.

Q Just a publicly available analysis?

A Yes.

Q Okay. And then moving on to the key takeaways part, the very first key takeaway is that misleading and false claims and narratives coalesced into the meta-narrative of a stolen election, which later propelled the January 6 insurrection.

Are you familiar with this key takeaway broadly?

A Yes.

Q Okay. Can you explain what's meant by a meta-narrative?

A A meta-narrative is -- so a narrative is a story, and we can think about the individual claims and rumors. Many of them may be kind of related into a larger narrative. And so we saw different kinds of larger narratives. One is that, you know, the voting process -- with Sharpiegate, the voting process was intentionally marred by

people giving certain voters certain kinds of pens, and that might be a sort of larger narrative of people sort of deterred from voting at the polls. There could be other narratives about so the mail-in balloting process was rife with fraud, these kinds of things. They were all wrapped into a larger meta-narrative that there was widespread and systematic fraud that would lead to the conclusion that the election was stolen.

And so this meta-narrative of a stolen election is a combination of all of these different narratives. And, if you can unpack the narratives, there's a bunch of different rumors or claims that feed into different narratives.

Q The third bullet down says that the meta-narrative of a stolen election coalesced into the #stopthesteal movement, encompassing many of the previous narratives. And the previous narratives above reference destroyed ballots, misleading framing of real-world incidents, things like that.

Can you describe how -- to the extent you're familiar with it or the extent you can recall sitting here now, how the research showed that these narratives coalesced specifically into the #stopthesteal movement?

A Yeah. We could see the "stop the steal" hashtag actually starts to be added to different tweets within, you know -- step back. So we took all of the different tickets, and we de-duplicated them, and then we identified all of the ones that were related to claims that delegitimize the election processes, procedures, or results and into this sort of false misleading or unsubstantiated claims. We threw out ones that didn't meet those criteria. And then we did these analysis, and we did very close analysis in some cases and meta analysis in others. And we can see that the "stop the steal" hashtag begins to be added to false, misleading, or unsubstantiated rumors on election day in the morning. And over time, if you watched that happen, other rumors come up, especially sort of the ones around Dominion voting machines, and other kinds of things that begin to grow in

attention after election day. And you can see that the "stop the steal" narrative gets added -- the "stop the steal" hashtag gets added to these different claims and kind of all wrapped together, and then they begin to mobilize protests and rallies. And some folks used it to try to fundraise, combining, you know, the "stop the steal" hashtag with these rumors and false claims.

Q And the research showed that as the "stop the steal" narrative was spiking, there were also increasing calls for violence or civil war. Is that right?

A Yeah. That doesn't come directly from our work, but you can see that -- our work at the University of Washington, but that happens a lot in more of the private groups and other places that we don't spend a lot of time in. But you can see there's sort of Stop the Steal private Facebook groups we weren't in, but my understanding is that the violent language, calls to action increase over time. We have studied sort of calls for other -- different kinds of mobilization, and my understanding is that intersects as well with research from Facebook itself and other places that they could see the rise of those kinds of more violent language in combination with the calls to action.

Q And sorry. Did you just say that you did see -- your research did identify other calls to mobilization?

A Yeah. We saw other kinds of calls to mobilization, right. So there's -- to file affidavits, so there was a lot of effort, as people are -- in the Sharpies -- I spent way too much time in that case. But, with the Sharpie pens, you can see even as people are just trying to see: Oh, I used the Sharpie pen, and it didn't work.

They're, like: Oh, file an affidavit, file an affidavit.

Well, they used that to get into lawsuits, and later we see people say: Oh, look, there was so much wrong. Look at the lawsuits.

Right? So there's this kind of cyclical thing between the lawsuits and the individuals.

So there was actually this sort of infrastructure and support for people to talk -- to share what they saw as evidence of voter fraud, and then there was an effort to connect them with lawyers to file affidavits as part of that process. And then we can also see mobilization into things like to rallies and to protests.

Q I want to move on from the key takeaways and look at the key recommendations section.

A Yeah.

Q Which -- again, just the executive summary. I know there's a much longer recommendation section in the report itself, but for brevity, we're going to look at the key summary.

So, under the Federal Government, the EIP recommends the development of clear authorities and roles for identifying countering election related mis- and disinformation and creating clear standards for consistent disclosures of mis- and disinformation.

Do you know what "disclosure" means here?

A No, I don't have the -- I didn't write that, and I don't know what they mean by that.

Q Do you think it could be a reference to putting out more information?

A My understanding is probably more from the work I did later at CISA, and that was the focus of trying to broadcast these messages when people find -- you know, be able to connect local and State election officials and to corrective information that they have with the audiences or help them to reach their audiences.

Q Okay. And, putting aside what exactly "disclosure" means, there's nothing in here that recommends that the government take any steps to remove content

containing mis- or disinformation. Right?

A No.

Q And it doesn't recommend that the government be involved in any actions to remove accounts, for example, that spread misinformation or disinformation. Correct?

A No.

Q Okay. And so EIP really didn't make any recommendations about content moderation at all with respect to the Federal Government. Right?

A No.

Q Okay. I want to talk about some kind of myths that are circulating, or maybe rumors is the better way to phrase it, around the Election Integrity Partnership?

A Yes.

Q Are you familiar with a journalist named Matt Taibbi?

A Vaguely and mostly through the last few months of reading some of the things that he's written about us.

Q Okay. Mr. Taibbi has claimed that EIP has, quote, succeeded in getting nearly 22 million tweets labeled in the run up to the 2020 vote.

Are you aware of that statement?

A Yes.

Q Is that an accurate statement?

A No.

Q Okay. Do you want to say anything further about that?

A I think he's conflating the real-time work where the Election Integrity Partnership helped to label things or helped to advise or make the platforms aware of things that they might want to label, to be honest, is how we approached it. He's confusing that work with our much later work to analyze how these different rumors

were spreading on Twitter using, like, search strings that we developed. And it was like our -- he's conflating our post hoc empirical research with our real-time efforts to draw attention to the platforms to things that might violate their policies.

Q Okay.

[redacted]. I want to introduce page 183 from "The Long Fuse," and this is from a section about the way you did your work.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 11

Was marked for identification.]

BY [redacted]:

Q I just want to look at the paragraph -- 1, 2, 3 -- it's the fourth paragraph down, right above "Facebook and Instagram Data Collection." It begins "In total."

So that paragraph reads: In total, our incident-related tweet data included 5,888,771 tweets and retweets from ticket status IDs directly, 1,094,115 tweets and retweets collected first from ticket URLs, and 14,914,478 from keyword searches, for a total of 21,897,364 tweets.

So this is actually -- the 21 million -- it's not 22. It's almost 22 million --

A Yeah.

Q -- is the total data set that was collected, right, that you looked at?

A Yeah. It's the total data set of all of the tweets that we could map to tickets, yeah.

Q Okay. So that's not the total number of tweets that were --

A No.

Q Yeah. It's not the total number of posts, I should say, that were flagged. It's the total number that were mapped --

A Yes.

Q -- that were looked at?

A Yeah.

Q Okay. On March 17, 2023, the Stanford Internet Observatory posted a blog post. It's entitled "Background on the SIO's Project on Social Media."

Have you reviewed that?

A I didn't read it closely, but I'm aware of it.

[redacted]. We'll introduce it as exhibit 12.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 12

Was marked for identification.]

Mr. Burton. Did you mark this as a separate or is it just a --

[redacted]. That's separate. That is exhibit No. 11, and this will be exhibit No. 12.

Mr. Burton. Okay. Thank you.

BY [redacted]:

Q And this is a blog post that I printed out, and so it's not a page number, but I am going to look at what is the third page, the very bottom, the last -- it begins: Is it true that EIP censored 22 million tweets and labeled them as "misinformation."

That paragraph.

A Yeah.

Q Okay. So Stanford says that, as part of its nonpartisan research related to the 2020 U.S. Presidential election, EIP analyzed 22 million tweets that contained key words or URLs relevant to EIP's scope of work. EIP identified 2,890 unique tweet URLs in potential violation of Twitter's stated policies. EIP provided its factual analysis to the relevant platforms, which were then responsible for each platform's own content moderation decisions.

So, according to this, Stanford is saying that of the 22 million tweets that were all of the tweets in the database, only 2,890 were potentially in violation of policies, within the scope of your research.

Is that fair?

A Um, can you ask that question again?

Q Sorry.

A Yeah.

Q So Mr. Taibbi has said that EIP flagged 22 million tweets to be labeled.

A Right.

Q What Stanford is saying is that the number was actually about 2,890.

A Yes.

Q Does that sound right to you?

A That sounds right to me.

Q Okay. So that's a -- I did the math last night. That's about .01 percent of the entire data set?

A Yeah.

Q Okay. And this references Twitter's stated policies. That's a reference to Twitter's publicly available policies on what is and is not allowed on its site. Correct?

A Right.

Q Okay. So, to the extent that you know, would an account of an individual who is impersonating an actual election worker likely violate Twitter's policies?

A I don't know that to be explicit, but I think that's probably part of their policy. But I don't know that to be specifically true.

Q What about a post that incites others to commit violence, would that be in violation of Twitter's policies?

A Yes. I believe so, yeah.

Q Okay. So those are the type of items that may have been within that 2,890 subset. Correct?

A Yes.

Q Okay. And I know we don't have them in front of us, but just to --

A Yeah. There's -- yeah, confusing people about when and where to vote would be the one that I would have anchored on and -- yeah.

Q So, if a post said polls open at 10:00 a.m. and they, in fact, open at 7:00 a.m.?

A Yeah.

Q Something like that?

A And in the Sharpiegate case and the Sonoma ballots would also have been within those things that may have had pieces of it that could have been reported. Sharpie, it would have been a little bit harder, but --

Q Okay.

A -- Sonoma ballots would have been reported.

Q And when we say were reported -- when you're saying that the posts were reported, all that happened was they were sent to the social media platforms with an explanation. Correct?

A My understanding is that they would send the posts and sort of an explanation for why that analyst thought it might violate their policy.

Q Okay. And you had no control over what Twitter or Facebook or anybody else did with those reports once they were received. Right?

A Not at all.

Q Okay. And you couldn't --

Mr. Burton. When you're saying "you" --

[redacted]. Sorry. Fair clarification.

Ms. Starbird. Yeah, right.

Mr. Burton. -- could you distinguish between her versus EIP?

Ms. Starbird. Yeah.

BY [redacted]:

Q Did you personally have any control over what Twitter did with those reports once they were received?

A No, I had no control over what Twitter did with those reports once they were received.

Q And the same with posts sent to any other social media company?

A With any social media company.

Mr. Burton. Or whether she was involved in communicating to the posts.

Ms. Starbird. I also didn't communicate with anybody, but that's -- for EIP, let's go for EIP.

BY [redacted]:

Q Yeah.

A My understanding is that Twitter and other platforms, that they got to choose what they did with what we gave them.

Q Right.

A And sometimes they took action on it, and sometimes they didn't.

Q Right.

A When they did take action, the majority of time they put labels on things.

Q Okay. So all that EIP was doing was sending these reports over. After it left your hands -- after it left EIP's hands, it was up to the platforms to decide what to do

with the posts. Correct?

A Yeah. We were using our powers of communication to let them know that we thought this thing violated their policy and they could do with that what they may.

Q Okay. Are you familiar with what's been referred to as the Hunter Biden laptop story?

A I'm familiar, yes.

Q Okay. So this is a reference to an October 14, 2020, New York Post story about a laptop purportedly belonging to Hunter Biden. Correct?

A Yes.

Q Okay. Did EIP analyze the laptop story as part of its work?

A No.

Q Okay. And this story was actually completely outside the scope of EIP's work. Is that fair to say?

A It was outside the scope of EIP's work, yeah.

Q Okay. Mr. Taibbi also conflated in his Twitter Files reporting something called CIS with CISA.

Are you familiar with CIS?

A Familiar only through this project, and I didn't connect with them directly. But I understand the difference between the two organizations, yeah.

Q So what is your understanding of what CIS is?

A I think CIS is a nonprofit organization that helps communicate information among local and State election officials.

Q Okay. And it's entirely private. Right? It's not a government entity?

A My understanding it's not a government entity.

Q Okay. And are you familiar with CISA?

A I am familiar with CISA.

Q And what is CISA?

A CISA is a -- I'm familiar with it now that I've been on the board -- is a cybersecurity agency within the United States Government whose primary role is to build resilience among -- in our country around cyber attacks.

Q Is it fair to say that CIS and CISA, or CISA, are two very different entities?

A They're very different entities.

Q Okay. Did CIS send content to EIP to analyze?

A My understanding is they did, yes.

Q Okay. Did CISA, or CISA, ever send content to EIP to analyze?

A Again, my understanding is they did not.

Q Okay. Did the EIP, to the best of your knowledge, ever flag content for social media platforms on behalf of CISA?

A No. To the best of my knowledge, we did not.

Q Okay. There was a reference earlier to CISA being a partner of EIP. That took place between July 2020 and November, December 2020. Is that right?

A I think that's the range of it. But, again, I didn't have a lot of visibility of when that started and when that ended.

Q At the time that -- during that time period, so let's say July to November, December 2020, do you know who the Director of CISA was?

A Yes. It was Chris Krebs.

Q And who was Chris Krebs?

A Chris Krebs is -- my understanding is he was a Republican who was an appointee of Donald Trump.

Q Okay. And CISA is an agency that's under the authority of the Department

of Homeland Security. Correct?

A Yes.

Q Okay. During, again, this relevant time period, July 2020 to November, December 2020, DHS was run in an acting capacity by Chad Wolf. Correct?

A I'll take your word for it. Again, I don't know how everything works, but I will take your word for it, yes.

Q And it was -- Mr. Wolf was an appointee of President Trump as well. Correct?

A Yes.

Q Okay. So, to the extent that there was a partnership between EIP and CISA, it was in the context of CISA being run by a Republican appointee under the authority of another Republican Donald Trump appointee. Is that right?

A That's true, yes.

Q Okay. There have been allegations that EIP's work targeted Conservative political speech. Are you familiar with these allegations?

A I am.

Q Are those allegations accurate?

A Those allegations -- well, it depends on how you define "targeting," but we did not purposely go to look for Conservative political speech. What we were studying were rumors about election processes and procedures. Unfortunately, around the 2020 election, those were more predominant in right-leaning discourse and social media than in left-leaning discourse. Now, there were ones on the left too, and we reported on things on the left and the right, but there just is -- a larger proportion was on the politically right leaning, within those networks.

Q Okay. And I want to get back to that in a second.

A Okay.

Q But, before I do, you mentioned the outreach to the RNC.

A Yes.

[redacted]. I want to introduce as exhibit -- I don't know what we're up to now.

[redacted]. 13.

[redacted]. -- 13, an email dated July 3l, 2020. It's part of a chain that began as a calendar invite dated July 30, 2020, and then there was a followup email sent on top of that.

And we're only going to look at -- I mean, they've got the calendar. It's just a calendar, but we're only going to look at the email on the first page. And this is Bates stamped UW-5152 to DW-5153.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 13

Was marked for identification.]

BY [redacted]:

Q So this was sent from an individual at Stanford to you and a number of others. It begins by thanking the recipients for joining the July 30th meeting, and then it lists a number of next steps.

On the number -- underneath next steps number 1, it's meetings on the calendar for next week.

Do you see where it says that?

A I do.

Q And then there's a whole list: NASS, NASED. Those are election directors. Right?

A Local and State election officials, yes.

Q Okay. Common Cause, Twitter, ASD, CIS, DNC, and then it has the RNC

listed here. Right?

A Yeah.

Q So there was active outreach to the RNC right at the very beginning of the EIP. Is that fair to say?

A Yes, it is fair to say. And that was communicated to me when it was pitched to me is that they were reaching out to the RNC. They wanted them to be a partner.

Q Okay. And do you know if this meeting took place?

A I don't know that it did or did not. My understanding is that it did not.

Q Okay. Because the RNC chose not to --

A It chose not to participate.

Q Okay. I want to look at the question of how bias might impact research kind of in a general way.

A Yes.

Q Are you aware of the risk of bias impacting research, generally speaking?

A Yes. It's something that we talk about as researchers all the time, yes.

Q Are there particular steps that can be taken to account for that during the research process?

A I think one of them is we make ourselves aware of the biases we have, and we, you know, talk about how to make sure that, to the best of our ability, we don't let that guide our process, because we want to get towards the truth. We want to get an accurate vision of what's going on. And so, in my field, you acknowledge your positionality, you acknowledge that you're political leanings might be in a research project, not individually. We don't go around the room saying what we are, but, you know, if we think that we might have sort of a bias we acknowledge that, and we try to

counter that.

For instance, leading up to election day around our work, I had a talk with all of my students, and I advised them that, you know, it is quite possible that Donald Trump will win, and if you are -- if you, you know, begin to see -- and if he does, we are likely to see a rise in misinformation on the left to say that there's voter fraud, to not believe the results. And I expect you all to be just as committed to, you know, working on those tickets as you would be to working on tickets where it was -- where that information was spreading on the right.

So we had those kinds of conversations among our team.

Q And what about kind of at the post hoc analysis stage? I think there has been -- you hear references to cleaning the data, for example. Are there ways to look at the data after it's been collected to ensure that bias is either accounted for or minimized or addressed in some way?

A Yeah. I mean, we can go look back over things. I think with this kind of research and we knew, you know, that it could be something that's quite visible, I think as a researcher I was extra careful with the results after the fact, to go back and just make sure that we had been kind of handling things in an evenhanded way; that, if the same kind of misinformation that was spreading, for instance, accusing the DeJoy Post Office of intentionally slowing down the process, which was a very common theme on the left, that we treated that in the same way as someone talking about mail-in ballots in the trash can on the right. Right?

So we were really -- and I tried to be very careful, also removing any noise that got in there and delineate it and really make sure that, if there was a claim that we were featuring in some of the things that we were counting, that it was the majority of communication about that was, like, false, misleading, or unsubstantiated. Because

sometimes you actually get -- there's a rumor, but most of what you see is just a correction of that rumor, and we didn't want to count that the same way as we counted something else. We were just very careful before we did our peer-reviewed research to really make sure that everything was -- you know, that there was no bias. And, fortunately, our peer-reviewed research that we did after that process aligns almost exactly with the research that we did, you know, a little bit earlier that we put out in reports. But I was just, you know, really cognizant that there might -- not just bias but just like validity issues, yeah.

Q So you took, it sounds like, a fair number of pretty rigorous steps to try to account for or minimize the impact of bias?

A We did.

Q And, even in light of that, at the end of the day, is it fair to say that EIP identified more misinformation spreading among right-leaning audiences than left-leaning audiences?

A It is fair to say that, yes. And that also aligns with other research. It's not aberrant. It's not an outlier with other research that I have seen from other independent researchers that are not in our group, yeah.

Q Did your research explain why more misinformation was spreading through right-leaning than left-leaning audiences?

A I think there's two main reasons that we can kind of look at. One is that President Trump himself was pushing this idea that there would be widespread voter fraud, and his followers were and supporters were believing that and actually misinterpreting things that they were seeing in the world in some cases through that lens, and so there was sort of a concerted effort to push that narrative.

And the second piece is that Donald Trump lost. Had Donald Trump won, I think

we would have seen more on the left, not maybe more overall, but I think we would have seen like a larger -- you know, an increase of misinformation on the left.

Claims of voter fraud have not historically only been on one side. It depends on how the election goes. So those two factors together, both the sort of intentional effort to spread that narrative before the election and certainly afterwards by Donald Trump and his supporters, was a big part of why we saw more there, but also had he won, we might have seen a different pattern.

Q Thank you.

And I just have a handful of wrap-up questions.

A Okay.

Q So we spoke in my first hour, so I guess the second hour here, about some of the negative real-world impacts of misinformation and disinformation. We talked a little bit about the impacts on election workers, but I think we've not -- I just want to talk about that in a little more detail.

Has your research or through your work with the CISA advisory committee, did you examine the impact that kind of these misinformation or misleading narratives have on election workers themselves?

A We talked a lot about that. And, in part, Kim Wyman has very personal experiences that she had as a secretary of state in Washington in 2020 and the experience -- her personal experiences of how misinformation about the election turned into threats to her family. And she also had stories from other election officials who had experienced similar things. We brought in a couple of election officials, brought in remotely for one meeting, Stephen Richer and I think someone else from Maricopa County, and they talked about the threats that they faced on their family and other things that sort of, like, the false rumors and disinformation have led people, you know, who

begin to believe those things to threaten them because they think of election officials as dirty and cheating and taking away their democracy. And so, yeah, we talked about those real-world impacts on election officials.

Q Do you have concerns that this might cause individuals to be unwilling to do the work of election workers in the future?

A Absolutely. I think we've seen a trend where people have left -- Kim Wyman left her secretary of state job in part -- my understanding is in part because of that, and that's just one -- you know, that's just one person. We have seen conversation about a trend of election workers leaving because of the harassment or the threat of harassment.

Q Would you agree that a lack of election workers, really the people who keep the polls running, for example, could have serious implications for our democratic processes in the future?

A Yeah. Again, this is another case where the rumors and misinformation actually make a less secure process.

Q You've also been placed in the public eye, not because of your work, but more because of discussions of your work in the Twitter Files and other outlets. Correct?

A Yeah.

Q Have you also faced negative consequences through these discussions in the Twitter Files and other misrepresentations of your work?

A I have.

Q What impact has that had on you?

A It's been distressing, yeah.

Q Have you faced threats to your life or safety?

A Yes, yeah.

Q Have you felt the need to take precautions because of that?

A I have.

Q Are you able to tell us anything further about that?

A Um, yeah. I've taken cybersecurity kinds of actions. To be honest, at this moment, I'm worried that this video will be leaked out and used to increase those things, so I'm very careful about what I'm saying, but trying to scrape my name from the internet, my address, changing the lock on my doors, meeting with, you know, the UW police around, like, very specific threats that I received.

Q I'm sorry.

A No, that's all right.

Q Do you think the fact that you've been -- that your work has been misrepresented, that you have been brought into this investigation, for example, do you think that might limit your willingness to do public-facing work in the future?

A I mean, quite frankly, I don't have kids. If I did, I would no longer be doing this work. I'm worried about my students. I know they're worried about doing this kind of work because of these kinds of threats and what they see that I'm going through. And, at the same time, I just think the work is so important, and I want to make sure it keeps going. So I don't -- I don't want to step off that stage. I don't want -- I think we have, like, special skills that can be really useful and helpful and help make our country stronger and -- but this is having a chilling effect, and it's not just me. Other researchers are experiencing the same thing.

[redacted]. Thank you.

We can go off the record.

[Recess.]

[2:56 p.m.]

[redacted]. Back on the record, please.

BY [redacted]:

Q In the previous round of questioning there were some questions about CIS, the Center for Internet Security.

A Yeah.

Q Was CIS one of the external partners that worked with the EIP?

A My understanding was that they were.

Q Okay. And did you ever interface with them directly?

A I don't remember having any direct interface with CIS.

Q Okay. Do you know if they were one of the external stakeholders who could submit tickets?

A My understanding is that CIS could submit tickets.

Q Okay. Do you know where CIS gets its funding?

A I don't.

Q Okay. Do you know if it receives Federal funds?

A I don't know their funding.

Q Okay. Would it surprise you if they receive funding from CISA?

A No.

Q Okay.

A From CISA or Federal?

Q From CISA.

A I don't know if it would surprise me. But, yeah.

[redacted]. Okay. I don't remember which exhibit number this was.

[redacted]. 12.

[redacted]. 12?

BY [redacted]:

Q So exhibit 12 is the response of the Stanford Internet Observatory put out in March of 2023?

A Yeah.

Q If I could call your attention, it looks like it would be the fourth page. And there's a question in the middle of the page asking if EIP received direct requests from CISA. Do you see that?

A Yeah.

Q And then a couple lines down is the answer. It says that the reports were channeled through the Election Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center.

Do you know what that center is?

A The EI-ISAC?

Q Uh-huh.

A My understanding is that that is a group of local and State election officials. And they might -- my understanding is they have some connection to CIS, but I don't know what it is.

Q Okay. And do you know if that group has a connection to CISA?

A I don't know that they do.

Q Okay. Was the center viewed as a separate stakeholder from CIS, or is that one and the same?

Mr. Burton. Which center?

[redacted]. EI-ISAC. The center referenced in the answer. EI-ISAC.

Ms. Starbird. I'm not sure that I would be the best source of information on this

particular part of the relationship. I just don't know a lot about the structure of EI-ISAC, CIS, or how they were interfacing with the EIP.

BY [redacted]:

Q Okay. And who at EIP would have been the best point of contact?

A Again, I think Stanford managed a lot of our external partnerships, and I would probably direct questions to them.

Q Okay. And who --

A This is their statement, so this is -- yeah.

Q Sure. Sure.

A Yeah.

Q And who at Stanford?

A If I were to ask this question, I would probably ask Alex.

Q Okay. And if CISA and CIS were to jointly manage the EI-ISAC, would you view that as a direct request from CISA?

A I don't understand the question.

Q Okay. When receiving a request from EI-ISAC in the Jira ticket, would that -- would the Jira ticket show that the request came from EI-ISAC?

A My understanding is it would say that it came from -- I actually don't know. I don't know how those would look. I haven't looked at those tickets.

Q Okay.

A Yeah. So I don't know whether it would say CIS or EI-ISAC.

Q To a response to a separate question, you mentioned that you were not in favor of sharing tickets with the social media companies directly? Is that an accurate summary of your --

A No, I would say that I don't think it's a good use of my time. And as a

researcher, I think there are other ways to have a bigger impact.

And so I was -- it was not something that I thought was the best use of my time or my students' time to be working to inform the companies on a piece-of-content by piece-of-content basis.

Q Yeah. And do you recall who at EIP did think it was a good use of time?

A I don't know who thought that that was an important part of the project. I don't know when it became part of the focus -- the focal point. Not focal point. I don't know when it became part of the workflows, and I don't know who made those decisions.

Q Okay. Do you recall ever having the opportunity to voice your viewpoint on this?

A The only time I voiced my viewpoint was probably indirectly when asked to be part of the managers team that would be helping to direct content to the platforms, and I declined. I declined to provide someone from UW to do that. It would have probably been me, and I declined.

Q And why did you decline?

A I declined because, again, I just didn't think it was the best use of my skill set or time. I think -- my opinion has been that the social media companies should do their own moderation and that I'm not going to do free work for them, and I'm not going to take any money from them. So it puts me in a position where I'm not going to do that kind of work.

Q Okay. If I can call your attention to page 3 on the same exhibit. So one page earlier.

The last sentence -- or really after the semicolon. The second-to-last line at the bottom of the page. It says: "EIP did not make recommendations to the platforms about what actions they should take."

Do you know if that statement is true?

A I have no reason to believe it's not true. But I did not -- again, I didn't use that part of the platform that looked at what those comments would have been.

My understanding is that individual analysts could write in those boxes, and it's possible that some analysts made different kinds of comments there. But my understanding was that they were trained to just say that this violates the policy.

Q Okay.

A But not say you should take this down or you should do this or that.

Q Okay. And those communications would have been captured in the Jira ticket, is your understanding?

A My understanding is those would have been captured in the Jira ticket and written by individual analysts who could have been undergraduate or graduate students.

Q Okay. And those communications, again, this is what was going directly to the social media platforms?

A Those would have gone up to a manager -- my understanding is this would have gone up to a manager, and the manager would have sent those on to a social media platform and may have made decisions about which ones to send and not send.

Q Yeah. You mentioned earlier the managers -- it sounded like multiple of them were not students. They were either at --

A My understanding, at least one manager was a student and other managers that I know of were probably not students. They were at the different organizations.

Q So there were instances where the social media companies are receiving these communications from someone who is not a student?

A Yes.

Q And you said --

A But the students' names would be on the tickets themselves.

Q Okay. And --

A Every student that touched it is on the ticket.

Q And so the social media companies could see anybody who worked on the ticket?

A No. The social media companies could probably -- I don't know this for sure. I think the social media companies could see a message. I don't know if they had access to the ticket with the individual names.

But if the Jira -- you said the Jira system still has it. If the Jira system has it, it has that record, and it probably is connected to student names in there or analysts' names, whether they'd be students or not.

Q Yeah. So you're not sure whether the social media companies would be aware of any personnel who worked on it other than whoever was sending the communications?

A Yeah. I don't know how the social media company -- I honestly don't know how the social media company would have seen it, whether it would be -- whether it would have the student name on it that pushed the button in the system to send it up to the manager, or whether it would just have the manager on it, or whether it would have everybody who touched it. Like, I don't know what those records looked like.

Q Yeah. You mentioned when it comes into the system, the analysts, the students, can see that it came from an external stakeholder and who the external stakeholder was?

A My understanding is that you could see within the system that -- yeah.

Q Do you know if whatever is being sent out directly to the social media companies, if they could see --

A I don't know if they could see or not.

Q Okay. Did you work on the Virality Project?

A I managed -- a couple of students managed -- I advised a couple of students who worked on the Virality Project. And two of our postdocs worked on the Virality Project for a couple of weeks, maybe up to 4 or 5 weeks, and then stopped. And I had conversations with them while they were working on the Virality Project. I never had my hands in the data or the actual information streams of the Virality Project.

Q Were there any faculty members at UW who worked --

A No, I don't believe there were.

Q Is there a relationship between the Election Integrity Partnership and the Virality Project?

A I think the Virality Project tried to use some pieces of the model. If you think of it as a research project within a university. They try it once. Okay. It's got these things. Okay. Maybe we can improve it in this way.

And so they tried to use some similar elements of the model for the Virality Project, but they made some key changes, too. And I don't know exactly what all of those changes were, but I think the workflows were definitely different for the Virality Project.

Q And understanding that it sounds like you didn't work on it directly --

A Directly on it. I just didn't have capacity. Yeah.

Q What is your understanding of what some of those changes were, just at a high level?

Mr. Burton. The changes the Virality Project wanted to --

[redacted]. It sounds like it adopted --

Ms. Starbird. Yeah, I don't think they had external partners putting in tickets. I

think that's one of the differences. But I don't know that to be 100 percent true.

But that was my understanding, is that they didn't -- they did not have external partners, and if they did, it was far more limited than in the Election Integrity Partnership.

Some of the work streams were different in terms of how they collected information. There was far fewer people. It didn't have the same kind of structure. And how they -- even how they reported out was different. We weren't doing, like, tweet threads, or they weren't doing -- they didn't have the kind of visualization stuff because we didn't have our team supporting that. Yeah.

But I don't know exactly how it worked. I know that they had some briefings that they would do periodically of what they were kind of looking like at scale.

And in the next version of the EIP, we turned that into just, like, weekly public reports. So it's just more like summarizing the research they were doing.

That's what I'm aware of as kind of the major differences?

BY [redacted]

Q So you didn't work on -- I think some of them were weekly. You weren't working on those?

A No, I didn't work on the weekly things. The only thing I did is I had an undergraduate student who did some writing for the final report, and I edited her writing to make sure it was accurate and well written. And I think I would have read the final report for, like, just a cursory review.

Q Do you know if the Virality Project is ongoing?

A I don't believe it is, no. I think it ended sometime before that final report came out.

Q Okay. And do you know if there's any discussions regarding to -- similar to the EIP -- how it kind of reorganized later?

A I don't believe I've heard of any of those discussions, no.

Q Okay. Do you know how many people worked on the Virality Project?

A I don't know.

Q Do you know how many people from UW?

A Yeah. I would say two postdocs, three students, five people total. Different levels of commitment over different time periods.

Q And is it your understanding that the Virality Project used this Jira ticketing system also?

A I think that's true, but I could be wrong.

Q To the extent you know, would it be a separate system, then, from the EIP tickets?

A I would assume it would be a separate iteration, but I don't remember -- I don't know -- I don't remember how they set that up.

Q Okay. When conducting your research post election in 2020 and 2022 and you were either working in the tickets or the spreadsheet, do you recall if there were Virality Project tickets in the mix, or was it a pretty discrete category, it was just the EIP tickets?

A EIP was just EIP. There was nothing about COVID-19 in our -- unless it had to do with the election processes and procedures, it wouldn't have been in our dataset.

Q Okay. Do you know if any of the initial partners of EIP, like Graphika or DFRLab, have supported the Virality Project?

A I don't know if they did or not. I don't remember. I probably knew at the time, but I don't remember.

Q Okay.

A They had additional partners.

Q Were you -- and I think you said this -- you were invited to participate --

A We were invited at the University of Washington. Aspirationally, we said, "Oh, yeah, sure, but we don't really have capacity." And then as the time went on, we realized we really didn't have capacity to help.

Q Okay.

A I forgot to add, beyond the three students that continued the sort of student projects. The capstone project or something else.

[Starbird Exhibit No. 14
Was marked for identification.]

[redacted]. All right. This will be exhibit 14.

Mr. Burton. Is this just one and I got a whole bunch of copies? It's just one document?

[redacted]. Yeah, it's just one.

Ms. Starbird. All right.

BY [redacted]:

Q If I could call your attention -- this is on the second page. The Bates number is 832.

A Yeah.

Q There's a paragraph at the top that starts to discuss the work done by the Election Integrity Partnership.

A Uh-huh.

Q And the last sentence in that paragraph reads: "Our industry relationships led to content tagging and takedowns that helped shape nascent platform policies around 'civic integrity.'"

A Yep.

Q Do you agree with that summary of EIP's work?

A Do I agree that's a total summary of everything? No. But do I agree that we led to the tagging of content and some account suspensions and that we helped shape the nascent policies? Yes. But I would clarify, "helped shape" was by actually putting out public communication about what the policies were.

Q Can you say more?

A Around the policy analysis paper that we read -- that we -- sorry -- that we wrote -- may have informed some of their policies and the platforms.

Q Just as a point of clarification.

A Yeah.

Q EIP produced a post about --

A About the policies.

Q -- platforms' existing policies?

A About the existing policies with a list of recommendations for what they should do, and that those recommendations may have shaped those policies. I think that's what that statement is meant to convey.

Q Gotcha. Do you know if any of the social media platforms contacted anyone at EIP to say that they incorporated some of the recommendations?

A No. We never had any direct feedback that says, "Oh, you all said this, and this is what we put in for our policy around the EIP stuff," that I remember. Other times, they have told me things about their policies, but I don't remember any about election -- actually, that's not true. There may have been one time that they said, "We put something in place." But I don't think that's because we told them to. I think that's because I was yelling at them at Twitter for not doing it, like, publicly. And they said, "Hey, look, we've done this." If that makes sense.

Q If you could say a bit more.

A Yeah. So in August of 2020, I do think one of the social media companies contacted me -- it would have been Twitter, possibly Nick Pickles, possibly someone else -- contacted me to say that they had put some kind of policy in place around civic media integrity. And I replied something around the lines of, "Yep. Okay. That's great, but it's not working fast enough."

Because we had just done an analysis to show how fast misinformation was spreading, and we could see specifically false claims from Donald Trump about the process being rigged and something about people being able to get COVID from turning in their ballots into a ballot dropbox.

And so we had tracked that, and we had shown that their policies were going -- and they had gone into place. They were trying to enforce things, but they enforced it after the content was already fading anyway. So I think I made a snarky comment about the fact that it was working too slowly.

But I did sometimes -- we did, like, public communication and visualizations and blogs, and I think sometime in, like, August I had done a blog or a visualization showing how fast that kind of content spread from his account. And I was making -- and I made some comments. And they sent me the email to say, "Hey, we have this policy now." And I said, "It's not going fast enough."

But it wasn't, like, I hadn't told them to do that policy change. They just gave me an update. It was more like I did a public communication that their policies could be improved, if that makes sense. Yeah.

Q Yeah. So just to clarify, the back-and-forth that you had with Twitter, and it sounds like potentially Mr. Pickles, is that private communications? Or is this over, like, a --

A In this one case -- I haven't had a lot of communications with Nick Pickles.

Q Yeah.

A In this one case -- there's maybe two or three cases that you probably have the communications with since you have all my communications.

But in this case we did a public communication. I did a tweet thread showing a graph of the spread of a particular piece of content and how -- and where their actions went into place.

And they had sent, "Hey, we have this" -- they had responded, I think in an email, to say, "Hey, look, we put this policy in place." They often did send, like, "Hey, we have a new policy." And I went back and said something snarky about how it's not going fast enough to make a difference on this kind of information.

Q Okay. Were there any communications preceding the public statement that was issued about showing that the policy was not having any effect?

A No. I mean, what we did as researchers -- we were actually pretty critical of the platforms in my research group. And so we would publicly put out things sort of criticizing and showing how they were facilitating the widespread, the vast spread of rumors and misinformation about the election. And in defending themselves, sometimes the platforms would send me back messages of how they were taking action.

So we were just doing public advocacy for the platforms to be more responsible media platforms in today's environment.

Q Do you recall -- sorry. I was just going to say, it was August 2020, you recall?

A That one, I think, was -- if it's around the blog I think it was around, it would have been in July or August. Yeah.

BY [redacted]:

Q What do you mean by --

A But it wasn't within the Election Integrity Partnership. It was actually before the Election Integrity Partnership was going on.

As I said before, we were already doing that kind of real-time work before the Election Integrity Partnership kind of brought us together under a common umbrella.

Q When you say you were critical and you wanted them to be more responsible, more or less -- I realize I'm paraphrasing -- can you be more specific?

A Yeah. We would be critical of saying, "Hey, you know, these are clear cases of something that's false or unsubstantiated, and it's causing widespread exposure to misinformation."

This is the same kind of stuff that built into that Meta narrative we talked about earlier. And we were saying, "You know, you've facilitated this in happening, and is there" -- just to say, "Hey, this is a problem, and you're part of that problem."

Q Facilitated it by --

A The way the platform is designed that's allowed certain people to get outsized voices and quickly conduct information in ways that can expose people to false information long before any kind of correction can get out into the space.

And, unfortunately, what we know about misinformation is, once exposed and the repetition, the correction doesn't really correct the false impression. So it's very effective if that kind of information can be -- expose a million users in a matter of 20 to 30 minutes.

The policies that they were putting in place and the enforcement actions that were taking place 2 hours later wasn't going to be able to contain that kind of damage.

BY [redacted]:

Q Was the purpose of the public communication to have Twitter change its policy?

A It was, for me -- again, this is not, like, within the EIP brand. This is sort of something that we were just kind of doing that eventually we start working together. But this is just something that I do a lot, which is to put out analysis and have recommendations for the platforms at the end of that analysis.

Sometimes that's in formal papers. In this case, I would sometimes put the analyses out on Twitter to say this is happening and that it's a problem, to draw attention to it, and for them to think about what they should do to change. Yeah.

And I don't always recommend -- I rarely recommend a specific action. I wish -- I didn't get to say this -- I wish I had something better to say. But most of the time, I just point out problems and don't tell them how to fix them. And I understand that the fixes for the problems are very tricky and very hard, so I give them credit for that. But I did a lot of, like, pointing out: This is a problem.

Q Do you recall if there was media coverage related to this example?

A I don't think so, no.

Q Okay. Do you know if other universities -- we'll start with Stanford. Did Stanford University issue similar public communications?

A On this case I don't think so, but I don't know.

Q What about analyses?

A They might have. They might -- you know, it's online, right? People might retweet other things.

I don't -- they work a little bit differently. They tend to do more sort of reports that are based on a month or 6 weeks of intense work. A lot of their work is focused

traditionally on sort of foreign disinformation campaigns, often in other contexts, that aren't even affecting the United States.

They also usually have recommendations for platforms. But, again, those are recommendations, but they're not -- that's just what we're supposed to do as researchers, is to hopefully propose solutions that could help society address things.

Q Do you recall what this one example, what the threshold was that led you and your team to decide to issue a public communication?

A I think it was just the size of it. And I think -- if I remember it correctly, because they had started to put -- so when you think about 2020, these companies didn't have policies around misinformation prior to 2020. And so as a researcher all of a sudden you see these platforms are trying to take action. They're trying to add these labels. It becomes an interesting research question.

So one of the things that we were doing -- again, quite independently from the Election Integrity Partnership -- was to try to look at, like, what are the platforms doing, and how is that having an impact?

And so we could graph, like, here's the spread of it, here's when they added the label, and here's, I think, where it looks like they changed whether or not this could be retweeted or whatever it was.

So we were trying to track what those interventions were and what kind of impact they were having. So we had a communication about that.

Eventually, some of my colleagues have a paper about just describing what that is. And as we would describe it, in this case we were describing it to say, "Hey, look, you're doing these things, but it's way too late in the process. If you're trying to stop the exposure to misinformation, you've only stopped about 10 percent of it because 90 percent happened before you took any action."

Q You've mentioned a couple contexts. Labeling is one.

A Yeah.

Q Action a tech company could take. In Twitter's context, prohibiting people from retweeting.

A Yeah.

Q Was there any distinction made with respect to the EIP's work when transmitting a communication to a social media platform?

A Can you ask me that again?

Q Sure. As you've represented -- and I understand that you weren't the one directly engaging with the social media platforms.

A Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q When it's being communicated, whatever the message is --

A Through the EIP?

Q Yes.

A Yeah.

Q Are there -- is there any discussion regarding labeling versus removal of content?

A My understanding is they just sent over -- they just sent, "Hey, this violates your policy" that we did not send recommendations.

Q Do you know if any of the social media companies at the time had a set of policies saying, if you violate this policy, removal is warranted. If you violate this policy --

A I don't know what they had at the time. And they were evolving. So the only thing I remember is something about a strikes policy. But I don't remember anything about, like, if you do this versus that, like a scale of severity. I don't remember

that.

Mr. Burton. Did you say it violated a policy -- do you know if they said it violated a policy or may violate the policy? Was it more direct?

Ms. Starbird. With the EIP, my understanding is we -- actually, I don't know. I don't know how we communicated that. But when I was talking there, I was talking about the platforms themselves and their policies, not about the EIP.

BY [redacted]:

Q You mentioned just in context -- totally outside of EIP -- but that platforms from time to time will say, "Hey, here's our policy."

A Yeah.

Q And you're obviously an expert in the field.

A Yeah.

Q Do you have a sense of the timeline of when these different requests came in? Is it a broad timeline?

A I started to get invitations to talk to platforms around 2017 or '18. And I probably have had 12 to 15 conversations between then and now.

In terms of, like, actual conversations, whether it's I might go in and give a talk, and then they'll ask me questions, or they may reach out to me and say, "Hey" -- maybe three or four times someone has reached out to me and say, "Hey, we've got some ideas for what might work. Can you give me your feedback on those ideas?"

For instance, they gave me feedback on, like, the Birdwatch thing and community-based crowdsourcing, which is now community -- they changed the name of it. Elon Musk changed the name of it when he took over.

So they would present what they were working on and say, "Oh, this might work." "Okay. You might want to work on that. Or I'm not sure how that would work."

So both about the policies as well as how the, like, interventions with -- other kinds of interventions within the platforms, they might ask my opinion as an expert in the field.

Q And what do you mean by other interventions?

A Birdwatch isn't -- well, it is -- they do add labels, but it's community-based labeling.

Q Gotcha.

A Yeah.

Q In your interactions -- and you said there's maybe a dozen conversations or so.

A Yeah.

Q Did you get the sense of whether companies change their policies proactively or as more of a reactionary step?

A I don't know if there's a simple answer to that. I mean, I think the companies were asking a lot of different people for input, and they didn't always take my advice. And I think they were just looking to get input on ideas.

I think when a person comes to give a talk, they're more likely to just ask us questions about what our recommendations might be. But there were other times where they already had a policy and they were looking for a policy, or they're saying they're moving in this direction and they're looking for feedback on it.

Q The August 2020 Twitter example that you gave, do you recall if Twitter had received criticism from anyone else on that issue?

A I wouldn't know if they did or not, but I assume they were receiving criticism from many people around misinformation coming out of that particular account at that particular time.

Q When onboarding the companies for EIP, were there any meetings where all the external stakeholders were brought together? Or you mentioned that you were not directly --

A I never -- we're in online environments. And in online environments we all look flat, even though the names are there.

So I can't 100 percent say that I never encountered these folks, but I don't remember being in conversations where we gathered together these external stakeholders. In many of them, I don't remember meeting anyone from those groups in the course of my work with the EIP.

Q Do you recall if there was ever any discussion within EIP about publicizing an incident that was being analyzed by the team?

A That's a hard question. I mean, early on in the process of EIP my team started this thing where if we saw something that was valuable for the public to know so people could react to it, that we would create tweet threads or blog posts around that.

And I believe that that became a thing that we would do. We would actually take something that we were analyzing. And it would probably take 2 or 3 days to get a blog post out. It could take about 2 to 6 hours to get a tweet thread out. But to, like, publicly intervene.

The Sonoma ballots case was one where we put out tweets while that was spreading to try to draw attention to the spread and to make people aware that this was a false -- that it was a false narrative.

So there were -- so in terms of, like, responding during -- as we're analyzing during the moment, that's actually the model that I was kind of pushing us to move towards, like a public response to these things.

Q And what about publicly revealing whatever messages were communicated

directly to the social media companies?

A I don't remember any conversations about that. Yeah.

Q Was there any discussion, after the conclusion of the 2020 election and EIP's work through the first iteration, about publicizing what was communicated to the social media companies directly?

A I don't remember having any conversations about that.

Q You mentioned in the previous answer and then also earlier that there are benefits to -- transparency, I think, is one word you used -- as far as showing what you're seeing.

A Yeah.

Q Can you say a little more about what those benefits are?

A To transparency -- can you explain that again? There's too many ways I could interpret that. So can you be a little bit more specific into what aspect?

Q Sure. So you and your team -- and earlier it sounded like EIP -- are looking at incidents of misinformation?

A Yeah.

Q You're able to organize it by a particular issue. We've gone over a few examples here.

If I was understanding your previous answers correctly, it's that you would view that there would be benefits in more publicly revealing your research, your analysis, your conclusions of what's going on?

A Yeah.

Q So I guess just at a high level, what -- I think I could probably guess the answer -- but what are the benefits of publicly revealing --

A We worked throughout to try to draw attention to the work that we were

doing to try to let people know. I mean, at the end of the day, it's a communication problem. We're trying to make people aware that they are being exposed to false and misleading claims, that they may be misinterpreting things, and to, at the end of the day, help them find information they can trust so that their vote counts and that they have trust in the process.

And so I think in that kind of case, like, being transparent is -- that transparency is going to be a value of a project like that. And my understanding of how we approach this and through our work at the University of Washington is we were trying to make as much as we could public.

Q Okay. Going back to EIP. There are these tickets, some form of communication that's being sent directly to the social media companies.

A Yeah.

Q Is the intent there that they will take some sort of appropriate action?

A Is our intent that they will take appropriate action?

Our intent was to make them aware that there were things that violated their policy. And I think our -- again, this is not the part of the project that was front and center in my mind because I think it's a Whac-A-Mole kind of endeavor.

But I think that the idea was that we could help them with what they thought was their policy, we could help -- what they established as their policy -- is that we could help them identify where things violated their policies.

Again, it's not something -- I just don't think that that was a good use of our time, but it's something that the EIP was doing.

Q Okay. So understanding, again, what your position on this is and that you weren't the one directly sending whatever it was to the social media platforms. But if I understood your testimony earlier, it sounded like there was a large number of tickets,

and only a subset of them are being communicated to the social media platforms. Is that right?

A I don't know what percentage was communicated to the social media platforms. I think they had to meet a certain threshold and be in scope for us and meet a certain criteria.

Q But your research that you were conducting post election involved more than just that subset of tickets, right?

A The research we did postelection, we didn't cross-reference to whether things were -- the research my team did, did not cross-reference for whether things were sent to the platforms or not. So I don't know where they overlap.

Q So I guess it appears clear that you have these tickets. There's a value in conducting the research, doing the analysis. Your team is, post election, able to do that.

But why were some of the tickets sent to the social media companies?

A We sent tickets to the social media companies when we saw that they -- when our analysts thought that they violated their policies. I think the idea was that our analysis could contribute to their understanding of what was flowing on their platform.

Q I guess if I could just push a little bit farther.

So you have to go through all this hassle to onboard the social media platforms. What is the goal that EIP is trying to accomplish?

A Again, I didn't onboard the social media platforms.

Q Sure. EIP.

A Yeah.

Q To the extent you have an understanding of what --

A Yeah. I think you would have to ask the people who brought those folks

on. You're asking me to defend pieces of the project or talk about pieces of the project that really weren't core to what I was doing.

Q Okay. And your understanding is that Stanford was the one that was --

A I don't know who --

Q -- responsible for this part of the partnership?

A I don't know who brought this on, but my guess would be Stanford. And I don't know when, whether it was early in the process, whether it came later. Certainly, when I was thinking about it, initially when the project was developed, I was thinking that it was more -- and it was going to be more -- certainly it was going to be more for our group about the kinds of things we did about public communication in real time.

[redacted]. Okay.

Can we go off the record, please?

[Discussion off the record.]

[redacted]. Back on the record.

BY [redacted]:

Q Dr. Starbird, there was just a reference made to onboarding the social media companies.

To your knowledge, were the social media companies onboarded onto the EIP?

A I don't know how the social media companies were coordinating with the Election Integrity Partnership, but they were considered sort of external partners.

Q Okay.

A Yeah.

Q There was a fair amount of discussion earlier about your August interaction -- August 2020 interaction with Mr. Pickles.

A Yeah.

Q I just want to have this clear.

You made a public Twitter post?

A Yes.

Q And your Twitter -- your Twitter is publicly available. It's not private now?

A Yes. And at the time, it was getting lots of interactions.

Q Okay. And so that was you exercising your First Amendment rights to put your thoughts out on the internet, correct?

A Indeed, yeah.

Q Okay. And so -- and Twitter saw that and -- like many people did -- and you can't control what people do with your free speech once you put it out there, correct?

A Indeed. Yes. In fact, that's how I met those folks from Twitter, is I would do public posts, and they saw them, and then they contacted me about them. Yeah.

[redacted]. Okay. Thank you.

We can go off the record. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 3:38 p.m., the interview was concluded.]

Certificate of Deponent/Interviewee

I have read the foregoing ____ pages, which contain the correct transcript of the answers made by me to the questions therein recorded.

_____

Witness Name

_____

Date

**Transcribed Interview Transcript Errata Form**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Interviewee** | Kate Starbird |
| **Date of Interview** | 6/6/2023 |
| **Date of Review** | 7/21/2023 |
| **Name of Reviewer** | Tiffany Rowe |
| **Signature of Reviewer** | |

| Page | Line | Suggested Correction |
|---|---|---|
| 13 | 13 | @end add "U.S. actors" |
| 13 | 25 | change "disinformation" to "misinformation" |
| 16 | 24 | confirm "affordances of the platforms" is accurate |
| 20 | mid page | about "workforce issues" |
| 24 | 20 | "so these is seconds" to be "so these are seconds [to committee members]" |
| 27 | second answer | "often only a couple of us made it" means "to the meeting" and NOT to vote |
| 34 | 9 | 'representational' should be 'reputational' |
| 37 | 4 | "come" should be "coming" |
| 37 | 24 | "Susan" = "Suzanne" |
| 44 | mid page + line 21 | "voluntarism" = "volunteerism" |

| Page | Line | Suggested Correction |
|---|---|---|
| 74 | 25 | "them" = "the students" |
| 77 | 15 | clarify that "Alex and the student" are Stanford, not EIP |
| 111 | 4-5 | strike "political communication" Unintentional choice of words |
| 116 | 4 | "using false information COULD cause..." |
| 117 | 1-14 | requires clarification by Starbird re 'scope' |
| 121 | First full answer | requires clarification by Starbird re "work @ UW" v. EIP work |
| 135 | mid page | aberrant = apperent? confirm from video? |
| 152 | mid page | "conduct" = communicate |
| 15 | 2 | Confirm Chris "Coward" is correct spelling |
| 121 | 9 | requires clarification by Starbird re "@ Univ of Wash |
| 154 | mid-page | "One of the things that WE were doing" Clarification by Starbid of "we" |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |