

James Hoft
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The State of Intellectual Freedom in America
Subcommittee on The Constitution
and Civil Justice

September 27, 2018

Jim Hoft Statement for the Subcommittee on the Constitution and Civil Justice

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Good morning.

Thank you, Chairman King and subcommittee members for organizing this important hearing today.

Your colleagues in Congress have provided a lot of airtime recently to prominent CEOs of tech companies who are trying to put me, and others with my politics, out of business. I thank you for allowing me to speak, instead of the perpetrators.

My testimony today is how the purification of thought has been accomplished by one company with a monopoly-like hold on the public commons in our internet era.

My name is **Jim Hoft** and I am the owner and editor of The Gateway Pundit (TGP) website based in St. Louis, Missouri.

I'm somewhat known in my business for my headlines. Here is the headline I bring to you: In the run-up to the 2016 election Americans got to choose what they read on Facebook. Today, Facebook chooses for them.

It is *your* constituents, left and right, rich and poor, who are impacted by this thought-filter imposed on what most believe is an unfiltered forum. It is they who are unknowingly cut off from content they seek.

I grew up in Iowa, and I understand the pulse, the struggles, the hopes and dreams of Middle America. I came to find out Facebook doesn't like my type.

I launched Gateway Pundit in 2004 as a way to report on news that I didn't see the mainstream media covering. At first, I had two or three daily readers, including my friend Chris and my twin brother, Joe. I was humbled and amazed to see our content grow in popularity over the years to nearly one million readers today thanks to promotions by Michelle Malkin, Glenn Reynolds, The Drudge Report and others. We provide news coverage and opinion that Americans could not find elsewhere.

There is no way to account for the demand for our content, on a shoestring budget we offered something the American people desired: **real news**. We were ranked by Harvard and Columbia Journalism Review as the 4th most influential conservative publisher in the 2016 election.¹

¹ <https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/2017/09/another-election-analysis-identifies-the-gateway-pundit-as-the-4th-most-influential-right-leaning-media-outlet-during-2016-election/>

The Gateway Pundit business cultivated its audience on Facebook, spending roughly \$70,000 advertising on Facebook in 2015 resulting in 600,000 Facebook likes and supporters.

Our readers: smart, patriotic, and diverse, have not given up on the promise of America. This is who I represent in speaking with you today.

2016 was a transformative election year.

This was the first election where Americans rejected, *en masse*, their legacy media options and turned to the freedom of choice and lack of filter on social media instead, through which they would share, comment on, and connect with content like mine.

We may not be invited to gala dinners and attend award shows, but our reporting is fulfilling a vital role of providing truthful content that is competition to the sanitized, on-message news of legacy media.

In fact, it was our readers who, on Election Day, were not surprised by the outcome.

Over the past 19 months, Gateway Pundit saw a decline in our Facebook traffic from 24% of total website traffic in January 2017 to 2% of total website traffic in June 2018.

This is an 88% decrease in traffic from Facebook.

Recently we analyzed traffic numbers for some of the top conservative publishers in the U.S. **What we found was simply shocking.** Just as Gateway Pundit had been eliminated by Facebook from being seen by its readers, **Facebook eliminated 93%² of combined referral traffic to these websites from January 2017 to May 2018.**

The site Western Journal and other conservative websites under their umbrella had more than *a billion* page views in 2016. Since then the organization lost 75% of its Facebook traffic. Likewise, Klick Media, host of over 60 conservative websites, lost 400 million page views from Facebook in the last six months when compared to the prior year. **The total number of pageviews lost³ by just these two conservative online publishers is more than 1.5 billion pageviews from Facebook in one year.**

In January 2017, Facebook began making algorithm changes to ensure conservative news was no longer an option for their users. Two studies released in March of 2018 confirm this. A study by The Outline Organization⁴ found conservative publishers were hit the hardest by recent Facebook algorithm changes -- and that The Gateway Pundit was hit the hardest.

² <https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/2018/07/shock-study-facebook-has-eliminated-93-of-traffic-to-top-conservative-websites-since-2016-election/>

³ <https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/2018/08/top-conservative-publishers-speak-out-we-lost-1-5-billion-facebook-pageviews-since-2016-election/>

⁴ <https://theoutline.com/post/3599/conservative-publishers-hit-hardest-by-facebook-news-feedchange?>

A Western Journal study⁵ in March revealed the same startling statistics. Further, this study found that liberal publishers actually saw a 2 percent increase in traffic.

In fact, we found that every prominent conservative website from 2016 has either had their Facebook traffic diminished or entirely eliminated⁶.

If Facebook were seeking to hold a book burning, they wouldn't have been half as successful as they were in eliminating contrary points of view from being accessed by the American people.

In fact, book burning is benign when compared to what Facebook has silently done to restrict and eliminate diversity of thought; in book burnings, you can see the flames and watch the words disappear. In our case, we were silently and effectively “disappeared.” Several top conservative sites have already closed their doors since 2017.

If our Fourth Estate is to remain an effective check as our Founders intended, we must ensure that the political purification of thoughts by one communication corporation, Facebook, is given ample competition. Today that competition is being eliminated. Tomorrow there will only be one sanctioned form of thought the American people will be allowed to hold.

This is not America.

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⁵ <https://www.westernjournal.com/confirmed-facebooks-recent-algorithm-change-is-crushing-conservative-voices-boosting-liberals/>

⁶ <https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/2018/09/finally-one-graphic-shows-how-facebook-has-eliminated-conservative-content-since-the-election-of-donald-trump/>