

After sending out a bunch of statements from various executives in a series of failed attempts to make the issue go away, Facebook was forced to send out [Mark Zuckerberg himself](#) to smooth the ruffled feathers of the conservative movement. Did Zuckerberg acknowledge that Facebook had repeatedly punished conservative outlets for being conservative? Of course not. He did, however, simultaneously claim that Facebook would conduct a thorough investigation of the allegations, and also that the allegations are totally false and without merit.

Zuckerberg then announced he would host a conversation with leading conservatives to discuss the issue. This is where the real con job begins. Facebook gave the game away with [this post from Joel Kaplan](#), a former official in the George W. Bush White House who now heads up Facebook's lobbying operation:

A lot of people at Facebook are working to figure out if there are parts of the Trending Topics process that are broken – and if so how they should be fixed. Though we've found no evidence the report is true, it is deeply troubling, and if there is a problem, we want to uncover it and correct it. We've written more on this topic here: <http://newsroom.fb.com/.../05/information-about-trending-top.../>

This matters to us because Facebook has always been a place where anyone can share their opinions and engage in discussion. And it especially matters to me. I'm Facebook's VP of Global Public Policy, and I'm also a Republican and a conservative. We have a team that works to help ensure that everyone, including Republicans, can optimize their use of Facebook in communicating with constituents and fans. The leader of that team is Katie Harbath, a longtime Republican adviser and digital strategist.

I have heard the claims of bias from friends and colleagues. But that is not the truth of Facebook — and I want to share how we ensure we're a home for all voices, including conservatives.

Look, I'm glad that Kaplan, whom I know and like and occasionally worked with on the Hill, was able to parlay a GOP White House gig into an extremely lucrative Facebook lobbying gig. But this just doesn't pass the smell test. Kaplan runs the lobbying shop, not the news curation shop. Are we to believe that he has specific, personal knowledge that the confessions from Facebook's own workers (as well as Facebook's own documents that give step-by-step instructions on how to blacklist topics) were all just a pack of lies? Are we supposed to take his word over [Facebook's very own internal documents](#)?

In the words of Jimmy Valmer: [I mean, come on.](#)

Facebook trotted out Kaplan not because he has any clue what's actually going on in the bowels of the company's news aggregation operation, but because he has a Republican pedigree.

The first three comments to his post give away the whole game:



Facebook VP Joel Kaplan on trending topic discussion <https://t.co/dTVlh3RJXL>

Katie Harbath (@katieharbath) [May 14, 2016](#)

Facebook CEO attaboy? Check.

Facebook COO attaboy? Check.

Facebook PR director attaboy? Check.

Facebook GOP soothsayer tweet? Check.

As every single statement from Facebook makes clear, the company refuses to admit it did anything wrong. So what is the point of this silly meeting in California? It can't be to fix the problem of conservatives being blacklisted, because Facebook won't even acknowledge that the problem even exists. No, the purpose of the meeting of leading conservatives whom Katie Harbath has heard of or is friends with is to scratch some egos in the hope that it'll make the complaining itch go away (full disclosure: one of *The Federalist's* senior writers was invited to the Cali confab).

Here's what Facebook likely wants the conservatives whom Katie Harbath saw on television to tell their audiences after they leave the Wednesday meeting:

Look, you guys. As you know, I'm a Very Important Conservative. And as a Very Important Conservative, I was super concerned about allegations that Facebook was routinely suppressing conservative outlets and conservative topics. But then Facebook invited me, as a Very Important Conservative, to convey my Very Important Conservative Thoughts to them. And you know what? They nodded their heads as they listened to my Very Important Conservative Opinions. And if they're smart enough to understand that I'm a Very Important Conservative with Very Important Opinions, that means I can trust them. And if I can trust them, then you should trust them.

That's the entire game. Facebook doesn't care that a bunch of conservatives are pissed about their outlets being blacklisted. Facebook cares about making a PR headache go away. Facebook cares about

GOP senators halting their investigation into the company. And since Facebook has repeatedly failed on its own to make the whole thing go away, it's now going to enlist Republicans to make it go away for them.

I'm tired of conservatives allowing themselves to be played like fools by people who don't give two craps about them or the conservative movement.

This is, coincidentally, the exact same game that the Bush White House regularly played with conservatives on Capitol Hill when it desperately wanted them to keep quiet about some new big spending program favored by the White House. It's a classic surrogate operation: when you know your primary messenger doesn't have the credibility to make a message stick with a particular audience, you trot out your token member of that audience and tell them to preach to the choir.

As the senior budget staffer for one of the most budget-conscious senators in Washington during the Bush years, I watched this little charade play out week after week, month after month, year after year. Now I'm seeing the exact same play from the exact same playbook being run by the exact same playmakers. And you know what? I'm tired of it.

I'm tired of conservatives being cheap dates. I'm tired of conservatives allowing themselves to be played like fools by people who don't give two craps about them or the conservative movement. So, to my conservative friends who've been invited to tomorrow's little confab, I humbly offer this tiny plea: Don't get played. You are smart and accomplished and impressive, but that's not why you were invited. You were invited not because Mark Zuckerberg cares what you think (he doesn't, at all), but because Facebook has a very specific role it wants you to play. But you don't have to play it.

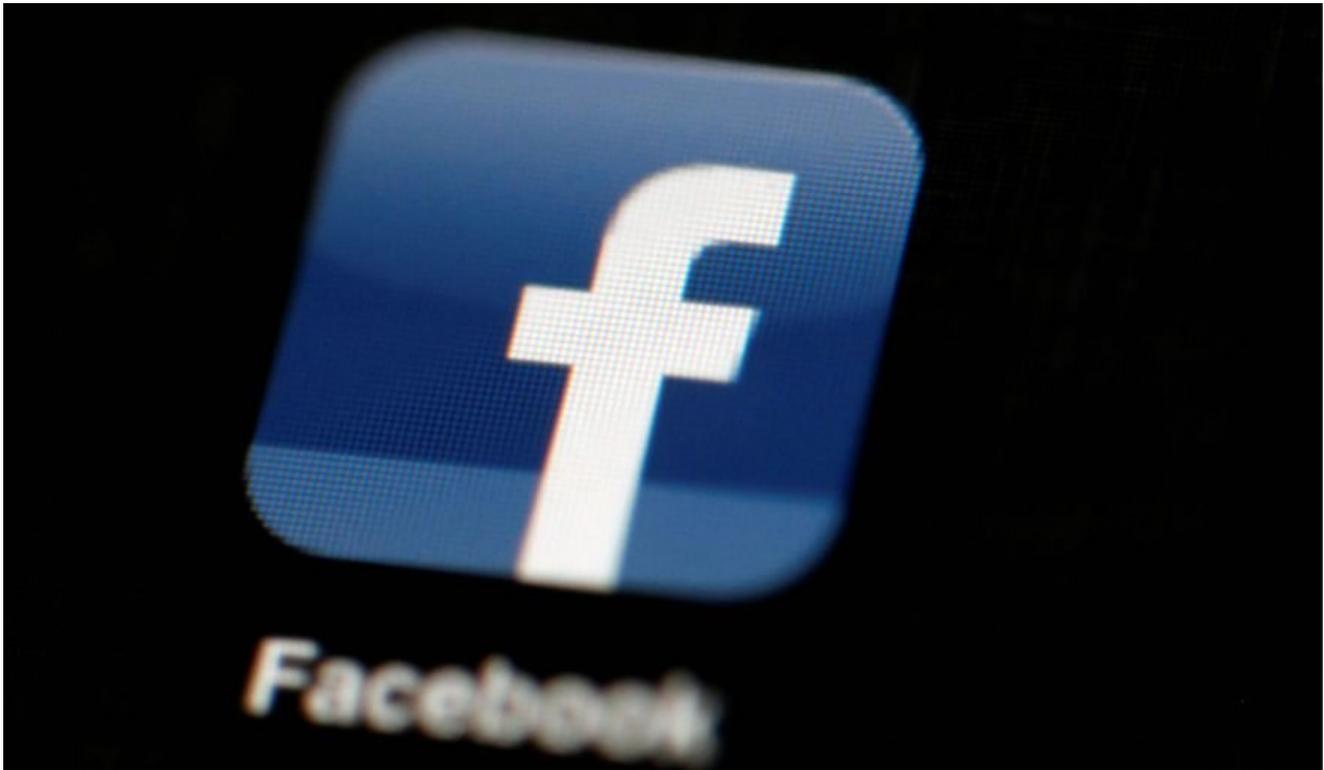
Facebook wants to make this go away. It wants the headlines to cease. It wants the investigative letters from Congress to disappear. And Facebook wants *you* to help them get away with it. Just remember: you don't have to play along.

Photo [Newsweek](#)

Sean Davis is the co-founder of The Federalist.

Facebook's algorithm only as unbiased as its creators

Social media scandal shows curators' slant



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By [Valerie Richardson](#) - The Washington Times -

It turns out the algorithms that govern the internet can be as biased as the people who create and update them.

That may be the most surprising takeaway from the political bias scandal that has enveloped [Facebook](#) after former employees told the tech blog Gizmodo that they would sometimes suppress conservative-friendly items and promote liberal reports on the newsfeed's "trending topics" box.

Even if no humans were involved, however, the algorithm would not have been completely neutral because it was written by humans, digital media analysts say.

[SEE ALSO: Top conservative group rejects Facebook summit, says bias runs too deep](#)

"I think there's probably no such thing as a neutral algorithm, just like there's probably never really such a thing as a truly neutral journalist," said [Philip Napoli](#), journalism and media studies professor at Rutgers University.

"They get created and they evolve over time and they get tweaked. And there's no one author," [Mr. Napoli](#) said. "These algorithms are the result of years and years of modification and refinement and different people coming in and contributing. It's more dispersed."

The question of eliminating bias in the algorithm — or at least mitigating it — is likely to be raised when leading conservative commentators such as Glenn Beck and Dana Perino meet Wednesday with [Facebook](#) founder [Mark Zuckerberg](#).

[Mr. Zuckerberg](#) has insisted that “rigorous guidelines” govern what appears on “trending topics,” the box in the top right corner of the [Facebook](#) feed that users have been led to believe reflects the most popular subjects on the site.

With 1.6 billion users, [Facebook](#) is the most pervasive media outlet in the world. If [Facebook](#) represents its “trending topics” feed as politically neutral but conservatives are excluded — either automatically by the algorithm or proactively by curators — implications for the free exchange of ideas are enormous, critics say.

Sen. John Thune, South Dakota Republican and chairman of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, fired off a letter to [Mr. Zuckerberg](#) last week seeking answers to questions raised by the report of “political manipulation.”

“Any attempt by a neutral and inclusive social media platform to censor or manipulate political discussion is an abuse of trust and inconsistent with the values of an open Internet,” Mr. Thune said in a May 10 statement.

On the left, the commentary has fallen largely in the “get over it” category. A Friday headline on ThinkProgress announced, “Yes, [Facebook](#)’s algorithm is biased. So is literally everything.”

A 28-page “Trending Review Guidelines” document released last week by [Facebook](#) instructed curators to check the importance of a national story against 10 news sources.

Nearly all of those outlets are at least left-leaning: CNN, BBC, Fox News, the Guardian, NBC, The New York Times, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and Yahoo. Only one of those (Fox News) and the op-ed pages of another (The Wall Street Journal) would be considered reliably right of center.

[Facebook](#) later released a list of “1,000 reputable websites,” at least three of which must reference an item before it can be considered trending. They included several state-run media outlets in repressive regimes such as Russia and China, as well as the websites of The Onion, Tiger Woods, Perez Hilton, Muscle & Fitness, and Seventeen, according to The Washington Free Beacon.

“It’s a classic garbage in, garbage out thing,” said Dan Gainor, vice president of business and culture for the conservative Media Research Center. “If you set up an algorithm that is skewed heavily toward traditionally liberal news sources, that’s what you’re going to get. You’re going to get traditionally liberal worldviews. And so it’s not shocking they would do that.”

The Federalist’s Mollie Hemingway pointed Sunday to what she described as a significant delay after the pro-life Center for Medical Progress posted its first undercover video with Planned Parenthood officials in July. The video quickly went viral.

“Perhaps the worst example was when the Planned Parenthood story broke, it went viral almost

within minutes. It took a very long time for [Facebook](#) to acknowledge that this was a trending

topic. And then when they did they didn’t link to the conservative sites that were actually breaking

the news and doing the investigations,” Ms. Hemingway said on CNN’s “Reliable Sources.”

“They linked to a few Planned Parenthood-sponsored items instead,” she said. “And that really

affects the way public opinion can be shaped.”

[Mr. Zuckerberg](#) is slated to meet Wednesday with a group of conservatives at company

headquarters in Menlo Park, California. In addition to Mr. Beck and Ms. Perino, the contingent

includes American Enterprise Institute President Arthur Brooks, senior Donald Trump campaign

aide Barry Bennett and Targeted Victory co-founder Zac Moffatt.

“Trending Topics is designed to surface the most newsworthy and popular conversations on

[Facebook](#). We have rigorous guidelines that do not permit the prioritization of one viewpoint

over another or the suppression of political perspectives,” [Mr. Zuckerberg](#) said last week in a

post.

The episode has raised questions over whether it will lead to more federal regulation of the

Internet, much as television and radio are now regulated by the Federal Communications

Commission.

“I’m not saying that [Facebook](#) did anything anti-competitive, but they are in this incredibly

influential bottleneck position, and historically these kinds of bottleneck industries have led to

government oversight of some form or another,” said [Mr. Napoli](#).

As a private company, [Facebook](#) is entitled to its political biases, but not when it represents a

section as a neutral conglomeration of the day’s most discussed stories, say critics.

What heartens Mr. Gainor is [Mr. Zuckerberg](#)’s willingness to sit down with conservatives to

work on fixing the problem.

“This is a big black eye for [Facebook](#), and I am not trying to sound overly optimistic, but I am

cautiously optimistic that they are indeed trying to address it since they’re meeting with people,”

Mr. Gainor said.

“When’s the last time The New York Times had a huge meeting with conservatives about their

coverage?” he asked rhetorically.

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