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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

September 13, 2018

TODD ROKITA
4TH DISTRICT, INDIANA

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET
VICE-CHAIRMAN

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND THE WORKFORCE

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

ROKITA.HOUSE.GOV

Chairman Joseph Simons
Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Chairman Simons,

As the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) examines competition and consumer protection in the 21st century, I write to request an update on what actions the Commission is taking to fulfill its mission to protect consumers from false and malicious claims.

As stated on the FTC's website, "when consumers see or hear an advertisement, whether it's on the internet, radio or television, or anywhere else, federal law says that ad must be truthful, not misleading, and, when appropriate, backed by scientific evidence."

The internet is a free marketplace of ideas. To help Americans navigate these ideas, companies like Alphabet, the parent of Google, offer search services. These search services claim to be fair and impartial, presenting the facts that consumers need.

A recent journalistic inquiry by PJ Media has thrown this claim into serious doubt. 96% of the results for "Trump News" were articles from liberal news sources. The word news suggests that Americans browsing for this category of information are looking for facts and not biased pieces, but the distribution of the returned results from Google's search algorithm suggests anything but fairness.

Google has changed its algorithm in response to news coverage and to promote its own products. The overwhelming and statistically questionable bias of results for the term "Trump News" warrants investigative action by the FTC. Consumers searching for news have a right to know if they receive manipulated results instead. Your agency is tasked with protecting consumer confidence and doubts about the fairness of internet search results undermine consumer confidence.

I am encouraged that the FTC is examining new technologies. The American people need to have confidence in the companies they rely on for information and in the systems that are in place to protect consumers from biased information. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Todd Rokita
Member of Congress