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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,  
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEBSITE: <https://commerce.senate.gov>

LILA HARPER HELMS, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR  
BRAD GRANTZ, REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

December 23, 2024

Mr. Satya Nadella  
Chief Executive Officer  
Microsoft Corporation  
One Microsoft Way  
Redmond, WA 98052

Dear Mr. Nadella,

It has come to my attention that Microsoft is actively promoting and funding NewsGuard's so-called "Media Literacy" tool, which is being rolled out to schoolchildren across the country.<sup>1</sup> Given growing concerns about NewsGuard's ideological bias and its efforts to manipulate young minds, I ask for transparency regarding Microsoft's involvement in and financing of this Orwellian censorship project. Your company's financial support for NewsGuard is especially troubling given Microsoft's purported commitment to protecting free expression online.<sup>2</sup>

NewsGuard, which touts itself as an "apolitical" "news rating" organization,<sup>3</sup> has been under increasing scrutiny for its bias against conservative viewpoints.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, NewsGuard has labeled conservative outlets, such as *the Federalist*, *the Daily Wire*, and *Newsmax*, as "unreliable" based on a subjective, opaque, and inconsistent rating system, while flagging their accurate reporting as misinformation.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, NewsGuard rates left-leaning outlets like

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<sup>1</sup> *Media Literacy*, NEWSGUARD, <https://www.newsguardtech.com/industries/media-literacy/> (noting that "NewsGuard's Media Literacy Programs are made possible thanks to generous support from Microsoft") (last visited Dec. 18, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> *Human Rights*, MICROSOFT, <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/corporate-responsibility/human-rights> (last visited Dec. 18, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> *News Reliability Ratings*, NEWSGUARD, <https://www.newsguardtech.com/solutions/news-reliability-ratings/> (last visited Dec. 18, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> MAJORITY STAFF, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY, INTERIM STAFF REPORT: GARM'S HARM: HOW THE WORLD'S BIGGEST BRANDS SEEK TO CONTROL ONLINE SPEECH 3 (2024) (*Judiciary GARM Report*); Jonathan Turley, Opinion, *The Most Chilling Words Today: I'm from NewsGuard and I Am Here to Rate You*, THE HILL (July 27, 2024), <https://thehill.com/opinion/civil-rights/4795501-newsguard-censorship-conservative-speech/>; Letter from Brendan Carr, Comm'r, FCC, to Sundar Pichai, CEO, Alphabet Inc., et al. (Nov. 13, 2024), <https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/DOC-407732A1.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> MAJORITY STAFF, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS, INTERIM STAFF REPORT: INSTRUMENTS AND CASUALTIES OF THE CENSORSHIP-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX 42-50 (2024) (*Small Business Censorship Report*); Brent Scher, *NewsGuard Runs Cover for Terrorists in 'Fact-Check' of Ben Shapiro*, DAILY WIRE (Oct. 27, 2023), <https://www.dailywire.com/news/newsguard-runs-cover-for-terrorists-in-fact-check-of-ben-shapiro>.

*Jacobin*, *the Atlantic*, and *the New Republic* as highly credible even when they have peddled deceptive and sensational headlines and articles that were factually incorrect.<sup>6</sup>

The organization's "Media Literacy" program, which is actively marketed to schools, has faced criticism for pushing a left-wing ideological agenda while censoring conservative perspectives and news outlets.<sup>7</sup> NewsGuard's marketing of its services to schools appears to be less about education and more about ideological conformity. Instead of encouraging critical thinking, NewsGuard's extreme bias limits young minds from questioning authority and forming independent opinions. This *distorts* media literacy by limiting the range of ideas to which students are exposed.

NewsGuard has found a willing partner in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), with whom it has entered into a licensing agreement to provide "the AFT's 1.7 million members, tens of millions of kids they teach, and their families" with "free, real-time 'traffic light' news ratings and detailed 'Nutrition Label' reviews, via a licensed copy of NewsGuard's browser extension, whenever they search the web for news and information."<sup>8</sup>

America is unique amongst democracies for enshrining in its constitution a foundational respect of the right of free men and women to communicate with each other without government censorship. Whether being done by Big Government or Big Tech, the censorship of ideas and speech is antithetical to this tradition and our shared cultural values. Given Microsoft's significant influence in America's tech and education sectors, it is crucial that the company takes responsibility for the tools it promotes, especially when those tools have the potential to influence young minds in ways that limit intellectual diversity and the free flow of ideas.

The Standing Rules of the Senate provide the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation the authority to "review and study, on a continuing basis" matters related to communications and technology.<sup>9</sup> Please provide written answers to the following questions no later than January 10, 2025:

1. Please describe all agreements between Microsoft and NewsGuard, both in relation to NewsGuard's Media Literacy programs and otherwise, including the terms, conditions, funding amounts, and start and end dates of these agreements.
2. Please describe any internal resources, such as staff time, software, and infrastructure, Microsoft has dedicated in support of NewsGuard's services, both in relation to NewsGuard's Media Literacy programs and otherwise.

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<sup>6</sup> *Small Business Censorship Report, Id.*

<sup>7</sup> John Tillman, *NewsGuard Primes Children in Public Schools for Life of Leftist Activism*, WASH. TIMES (May 27, 2024), <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2024/may/27/newsguard-primes-children-in-public-schools-for-li/>.

<sup>8</sup> Press Release, American Federation of Teachers, AFT Partners with NewsGuard to Combat Misinformation Online (Jan. 25, 2022), <https://www.aft.org/press-release/aft-partners-newsguard-combat-misinformation-online>.

<sup>9</sup> S. Rules XXV(1)(f), XXVI(8).

3. Please describe all examples of integration of NewsGuard resources, data, and ratings into Microsoft services.
4. How much total funding has Microsoft provided to NewsGuard for its “Media Literacy” programs?
  - a. How much of that total funding has gone towards elementary (K-5) schools?
  - b. How much of that total funding has gone towards middle and upper (6-12) schools?
  - c. How much of that total funding has gone towards universities?
  - d. How much of that total funding has gone towards public libraries?
  - e. How much of that total funding has gone towards older populations?
5. Is Microsoft aware of the evidence of NewsGuard’s censorship and bias? Please answer with “yes” or “no” before providing a further answer.
  - a. If yes, please explain why Microsoft continues to support NewsGuard despite evidence of its bias and censorship.
6. Does Microsoft recognize the potential dangers of promoting NewsGuard’s “Media Literacy” tool in public schools? Please answer with “yes” or “no” before providing a further answer.
  - a. If yes, please explain why Microsoft nevertheless decided to support NewsGuard’s Media Literacy programs.
7. Will Microsoft ensure that its financial support of NewsGuard aligns with its stated commitment to protecting free expression online?<sup>10</sup> Please answer with “yes” or “no” before providing a further answer.
  - a. If yes, please explain, in detail, how Microsoft will do so.

I look forward to your response and a clearer understanding of how Microsoft plans to address these concerns.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



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Ted Cruz  
Ranking Member

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<sup>10</sup> *Human Rights*, MICROSOFT, <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/corporate-responsibility/human-rights> (last visited Dec. 18, 2024).