



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on April 18, 2019

“Unplanned” Ordeal Again Highlights Big Media & Big Tech’s Leftwing Bias & Censorship

The recent experience of Pure Flix, the producers of the breakout film *Unplanned*, has reignited the debate over what can and should be done about the ideological/political bias and censorship of the social-media giants such as Google, Twitter, and Facebook. *Unplanned*, which tells the true story of Abby Johnson, who rose from being a volunteer at Planned Parenthood to becoming its youngest clinic director ever, faced a concerted attack from Planned Parenthood and the abortion behemoth’s allies in Hollywood, Big Media, and Big Social Media.



Despite the attacks and sabotage, however, the pro-life movie defied all predictions and has become a [box-office hit](#). Nevertheless, these attempts to abort the movie undoubtedly hampered the producers’ efforts to reach much of their intended audience and greatly reduced the film’s ticket sales and revenue. In testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on the Constitution, Chuck Konzelman, the co-writer and co-director of *Unplanned*, briefly detailed some of the extraordinary hurdles thrown in front of their film effort, including especially the impediments imposed by Google and Twitter.

Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas), chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution, chaired the April 10 hearing (shown) entitled [“Stifling Free Speech: Technological Censorship and the Public Discourse.”](#)

“Free speech is foundational to our Constitution,” Senator Cruz stated in his opening comments. “The First Amendment in the Bill of Rights begins by protecting our rights to free speech. Our democratic processes depend upon robust free speech. Speech with which we agree, and speech with which we disagree — the marketplace of ideas.”

Senator Cruz made it clear that he does not want to see government, particularly the federal government, wade into the thorny briar patch of regulating social media. He does not want to see government censorship replace private censorship by Big Tech, he said. Nevertheless, the Texas solon noted that because Big Tech has been granted important privileges by the federal government, it does have an obligation to demonstrate good faith in providing platforms that are nonpartisan and serve all of the public. A substantial body of anecdotal evidence, he noted, indicates that charges of blatant bias, censorship, and “shadowbanning” by Big Tech against conservative thought must be taken seriously. As we have [reported](#), in similar previous hearings, Big Tech executives have testified that they do not engage in any of those practices. A major problem faced by lawmakers in this regard, said Senator Cruz, is that the big social-media companies refuse to divulge the data that would show whether or not they are intentionally suppressing conservative expression and conservative causes while promoting



those that are “progressive.”

“In particular, what makes the threat of political censorship so problematic is the lack of transparency,” Senator Cruz stated. “The invisibility. The ability for a handful of giant tech companies to decide if a particular speaker is disfavored. That he or she may speak, and their words simply fade into the ether. That nobody hears what they say. And that nobody knows that no one hears what they say. Not only does big tech have the power to silence voices — with which they disagree — but big tech likewise has the power to collate a person’s feed, so that they only receive news that comports with their own political agenda.”

“Nobody, or at least nobody in their right mind, wants to see a government speech police,” Cruz said. “No one wants to see the federal government regulating what is allowed to be said.” Yet he observed there are “at least three potential remedies” that could be considered to address the problem without infringing on constitutional rights: 1) reviewing [Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act](#), which grants Internet platforms “special immunity from liability”; 2) invoking antitrust laws to break up the tech giants, and; 3) exploring whether Big Tech practices of biasing content that most users assume to be on neutral and open forums constitutes fraud.

“My argument,” said Cruz, “is that big tech made, effectively, a bargain with Congress, and a bargain with the American people: ‘we’ll be neutral, we’ll be fair, we won’t be biased, and in exchange for that, we’ll receive what is effectively a federal subsidy of immunity from liability.’”

“If Big Tech wants to be partisan political speakers it has that right,” he continued. “But it has no entitlement to a special immunity from liability under Section 230 that the *New York Times* doesn’t enjoy, that the *Washington Post* doesn’t enjoy — that nobody else enjoys other than Big Tech.”

Big Tech & Big Media vs. *Unplanned*

Unplanned’s Chuck Konzelman [testified](#) concerning the Big Media/Big Tech/Big Hollywood lynching that his movie faced. “From the outset, making a pro-life film in a pro-choice town [Los Angeles], we knew we would face a number of challenges,” he stated. “Moving past the challenges of production and post-production, limiting my comments to the marketing campaign, allow me to highlight some of these: The MPAA saddled us with an “R” rating, which strongly discourages much of the Christian audience, and all of the Church of Latter-day Saints from seeing our film, since they have a general prohibition against seeing “R” rated films. It also precluded us from using the single most effective form of motion picture advertising — paid placement of our theatrical trailer before other films in theaters.”

Konzelman continued:

We also looked to advertise on cable television. But with the exception of Fox News and CBN, we were systematically denied access to the outlets where we sought to advertise — among which were Lifetime, UP TV, Hallmark, HGTV, USA Network, Food Network, The Travel Channel, DIY and the Cooking Channel. In fact, Lifetime, which is owned by A&E Networks, a joint venture of Walt Disney and Hearst Communications, told our buyers that they were refusing due to the “sensitive nature of the film,” but had previously promoted an interview with Scarlett Johansson in which she promoted Planned Parenthood. We consider these blanket refusals highly unusual and highly discriminatory, and have formally petitioned the FCC to look further into the matter.

Turning to social media, they again found themselves stymied. “Google Ads [formerly known as Google Adwords] blocked the entirety of the *Unplanned* pre-release banner ads,” Konzelman noted. That was a big deal, for, as Google boasts, “When you advertise on the Google Display Network — which has over 2



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million sites and reaches over 90% of the people on the internet – your ads can appear across a large collection of websites, mobile apps, and video content.”

But Google wouldn't accept the movie's ads. “Google cited a policy regarding abortion-related ads. Just one problem: We weren't doing abortion related ads. We were marketing a movie,” Konzelman said. “It's important to note,” Konzelman emphasized, “that this prohibition was solidly in place for the entire leadup to our theatrical release. Why is this important? Because much like the advertising spent in a political campaign, the vast majority of the dollars spent in promoting a film are spent to help build up a white-hot-intensity and awareness around one particular date.... For films, it's the Friday night of opening weekend. Because that all-important opening weekend's results determine the course of the film's theatrical run ... and even how much it will make in ancillary markets and overseas. And after the film's release? Google came up with yet another restriction, concerning event ticket sales ... one which our film's marketers had never come across or even heard of in multiple similar campaigns. In short, we firmly believe they were sharpshooting us; hiding behind highly selective and discriminatory enforcement of their own guidelines. It is impossible for me to quantify the damage done by Google's refusal, but it's absurd to think that there wasn't damage done.”

Then came their Twitter woes, within hours of the film's theatrical debut. “In the early morning hours of Saturday, March 30th,” Konzelman recounts, “the film's Twitter account — technically the account owned by the film's single purpose marketing entity — was suspended. The reason for the suspension has not — to the best of my knowledge — been made clear, beyond being ‘accidental.’ However when such ‘accidents’ occur within twelve hours of the film's theatrical debut — and after nine months of ownership, during which time there were zero suspensions — the ‘glitch’ is of course suspect.”

“Later on the same day,” Konzelman noted, “Twitter apparently deleted the vast majority of those listed as ‘followers’ for our account, reducing the number from something on the order of 200,000 to less than 200. A thousand-to-one reduction in our listed followers. And numerous people — including the subject of our film — Abby Johnson — and the star of our film — Ashley Bratcher — found themselves unable to follow their own movie on Twitter.”

“Again, this was all during the all-important first weekend of our release,” he continued. “Begging the question, Why does this only seem to happen to conservatives? Or as the satirical website The Babylon Bee put it: ‘Meanwhile, Planned Parenthood, an organization that actually kills babies every single day, still had an active Twitter account in good standing.’”

In conclusion, Konzelman stated: “For the record, we allege no collusion between any of the social media or cable media entities. At least not in the formal sense. They require no coordinated communication or agreement between them, because they are universally progressive in their orientation, political beliefs, and worldview, and likewise strongly predisposed toward stifling conservative thought. But as evidence that the discrimination is one-sided, I posit this question: There are a number of pro-choice films currently in development in Hollywood. I will mention two: Let Her Speak, the story of Wendy Davis' pro-choice filibuster on the floor of the Texas senate ... to which Sandra Bullock is attached to star. And This is Jane, being produced by Amazon Prime, which tells the story of an underground abortion network in pre-*Roe v. Wade* Chicago. Is there any member of this committee who would like to go on record as saying they honestly expect either of those films to have trouble in buying advertising — on Google, or otherwise? I think not — because they won't. Unless, perhaps, this committee elects to remember and closely scrutinize whether the standards are applied evenly.”



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Image: screenshot from [YouTube video](#)

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