The Internet changed the world forever, opening access to information and driving economic growth into the new millennium. Most of those changes are positive -- but not all of them.

In recent years, we've seen Big Tech companies -- like Facebook, Google and Twitter -- become an extended version of Big Brother, eroding trust and damaging the public debate. Big Tech platforms have a significant role in our elections, and the public deserves to know the truth about how they operate. They should not be allowed to arbitrarily pick sides and censor speech, and they must be held responsible when they deceive consumers or act egregiously.

We can take action in Virginia to protect the First Amendment and hold Big Tech accountable.

How did we get here?

- Social media platforms have taken actions damaging to our public discourse, eroding trust with the public.

- Three-quarters of Americans believe social media platforms "intentionally censor political viewpoints that they find objectionable," according to a study from Pew Research. [1]

- This is a trend that has emerged over several years, accelerating over the last few months with egregious actions by social media platforms, unfairly targeting conservatives.

    - *In 2016, former Facebook employees blew the whistle on censorship happening inside of Facebook, blocking trending news stories on the platform.* [2]

    - *In 2018, Facebook blocked videos by Prager University - and later backtracked, admitting it was wrong.* [3]

    - *In 2018, Twitter was caught 'shadow banning' some elected conservatives.* [4]

    - *Here in Virginia, groups like Virginia Rising and VCDL have been blocked from the platform. At least one Virginia elected official has also been blocked.*

- Facebook and Twitter have also gotten more aggressive at marking certain types of speech as misinformation or false news.

- While of course steps need to be taken to prevent the proliferation of misinformation, the trust issues created by tech companies have created a perception of bias and censorship.

- All of this is what we know. What we don't know is largely how their algorithms and internal decisions may be affecting access to their platforms.

[1] *Pew Research*
[2] *Gizmodo, 5/19/16*
[3] *BBC News*
[4] *Vice News*

Kirk's Plan

INCREASE TRANSPARENCY

- *Require Big Tech to publish standards used to censor posts, de-platform, or shadow ban users clearly and separately from the terms of service.*

- *Allow users to opt-out of algorithms used to determine which content users see.*

- *Notify users before taking action to censor, ban, or prohibit content, except in cases where users break the law.*

PREVENT UNCALLED-FOR CENSORSHIP

- *Create a 'three-strike' system of warnings prior to adopting permanent bans and suspensions.*

- *Make available to users remedial steps that can be taken to restore their accounts..*

- *Prohibit the de-platforming of qualified candidates for elected office.*

CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY

- *Expand the Attorney General's authority to investigate and act against censorship and de-platforming.*

- *Enact $100,000 daily fine for big tech companies that violate the law.*