

Facebook ‘Friends’ Conservatives, to Employees’ Dismay

By: Kelsey Miller, J.D. Candidate 2021 | October 8, 2018

Amid tweets from President Trump [alleging bias](#) against him and against conservatives more generally, the Department of Justice began looking into Facebook, Google, and other tech giants that may be “intentionally stifling the free exchange of ideas.” The [assertion](#) came at the end of a Senate hearing on September 5, where Facebook’s COO Sheryl Sandberg and Twitter’s CEO Jack Dorsey testified.

The DOJ’s latest probe is the culmination of a vigorous online campaign by conservative publications including Fox News, the Daily Wire, and Breitbart, and hits at an area where Facebook in particular has long felt insecure. Hyperaware of conservative regulators motivated to scrutinize Facebook’s business practices for what they perceive as liberal bias, the company has made a [concerted effort](#) in recent years to build relationships with prominent Republicans, and particularly so during the unpredictable Trump Administration.

The problem is that Facebook is now embroiled in significant pushback from its own employees, who are primarily based in the [notoriously liberal](#) Silicon Valley.

The tension between Facebook’s regulatory concerns and its employees’ ethos [came to a head](#) last week when Joel Kaplan, Facebook’s Vice President of Global Public Policy and former Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy in the Bush White House, attended Justice Brett Kavanaugh’s hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee. With Kavanaugh there to answer senators’ questions about his alleged high school sexual assault of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, Kaplan was there as Kavanaugh’s longtime friend.

But many perceived Kaplan’s appearance as inextricable from his capacity as a top executive at Facebook. Employees of the company are demanding that Facebook answer for one of its top executives publicly supporting a man credibly accused of sexual assault.

While Facebook’s regulatory strategy has been to round out its policy leadership and lobbying offices with prominent conservatives like Kaplan, Facebook faces an equally pressing business need to keep its employees happy. Given the ongoing competition with companies like Google and Apple for engineers, data scientists, and AI experts, Facebook needs to maintain its reputation as a good place to work for its predominantly progressive employees or risk an overcorrection that alienates the most valuable commodity in Silicon Valley: talent.

