



MEDIA RELEASE

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WITSA Calls for a Sensible Approach to Regaining Trust on the Internet

Fairfax, VA: The World Information Technology and Services (WITSA), today published a statement of policy entitled “*Tech Industry and the Avoidance of ‘Techlash’*: A Sensible Approach to Regaining Trust on the Internet.” The paper addresses the growing animus toward “Big Tech” companies and generalized opposition to technological innovation that is threatening industry development and economic growth, calling it deeply problematic for future progress, prosperity, and competitiveness. The paper debunks the main misconceptions that are associated with this “techlash” and identifies several recommended actions and policy principles which WITSA believes can rekindle faith and trust in the technology industry for the betterment and delivery of the promise of the digital Age where everyone on earth benefits from the use of information and communications technology (ICT).

The paper addresses several important subjects, including anti-trust and competition concerns, privacy concerns, disinformation and election integrity. The paper argues that while politicians around the world are increasingly calling on regulators to break up the largest Internet companies, break-up cases are by far the most difficult type of antitrust action and should be avoided whenever possible. Before governments initiate a time-consuming and costly trust-busting crusade, they should begin with a competition policy agenda that delivers immediate, tangible results. Broader antitrust questions, if they are to be addressed, require a collaborative international effort.

The paper also takes issue with critics that equate big tech with “surveillance capitalism,” the idea that pervasive data collection such as tracking on websites, is eroding all privacy online. However, building and maintaining trust and confidence between all users of the Internet is one of the fundamental building blocks of the *Digital Age* and all stakeholders have a role to play in building this trust ecosystem. To that end, WITSA advocates a principled approach, which recognizes information privacy as a fundamental human right, and seeks to balance this in context with equally important policy objectives of national security and data protection while maintaining the economic and social capability of digital information.

The paper acknowledges that, in the digital era, false content has been amplified through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok and YouTube by fearmongers, Internet trolls and election-meddlers to widen social fissures, undermine democracy and strengthen authoritarian regimes by spreading content that intends to deceive, mislead or

manipulate. However, rather than rushing to create a new framework for regulating speech online, and risk inadvertently harming legitimate speech or reducing the effectiveness of industry's takedown mechanisms, the paper calls on policymakers to work with the private sector to improve such mechanisms, while ensuring platforms have moderation policies that protect free speech.

“Over the past few decades, innovation in ICT has brought about untold benefits and transformed millions of lives in amazing ways,” stated WITSA’s Secretary General Dr. Jim Poisant. “Going forward, policymakers should understand that most people see technology as an essential and valuable part of their lives, and that they seek and desire new innovations and improvements—but that where there are challenges and issues, government acts in a limited and responsible manner to deal with the problems at hand in a manner which cause the least possible harm to competitiveness, innovation, or consumer welfare. Industry stands ready to work with governments everywhere,” continued Dr. Poisant.

The full statement can be found on the WITSA web site at the following link:
https://witsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/WITSA_BigTech_final.pdf

About WITSA:

The World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA) is the leading recognized international voice of the global ICT industry, whose members from over 80 countries and economies represent more than 90 percent of the world ICT market. WITSA is dedicated to advocating policies that advance industry growth and development; facilitating international trade and investment in ICT products and services; strengthening WITSA’s national industry associations; and providing members with a broad network of professional contacts.

WITSA members are leaders in a globally interconnected marketplace. Because the challenges facing the ICT industry are undisputedly global in nature, WITSA members work together to achieve a shared vision on important issues of common interest. WITSA makes it possible for its members — ranging from Mongolia and Argentina to Kenya and the United States — to identify common issues and priorities, exchange valuable information, and present a united position on industry issues. For more information on WITSA, please visit www.witsa.org