

Support for the *Banning Surveillance Advertising Act*

“Surveillance advertising has eroded our consensus reality and pushed democracy to the brink. The global information ecosystem has been hijacked by tech giants that manipulate each user and warp public discourse in service of this toxic business model, amplifying extreme content to maximize engagement and profits. Big Tech will continue stoking discrimination, division, and delusion until we upend this perverse incentive structure – which is exactly what Rep. Eshoo and Sen. Booker’s *Banning Surveillance Advertising Act* would do. Accountable Tech is grateful for their bold leadership, and proud to support this landmark legislation,” said **Jesse Lehigh, Co-founder of Accountable Tech**.

“Behaviorally targeted ads aren't just creepy or annoying, they're also incredibly dangerous to society. Companies say they're building profiles on people and monitoring their behavior to give them better services, but in reality, these profiles are used to manipulate and discriminate against them for profit. DuckDuckGo is proof you can run a successful and profitable ad-based business without building profiles on people. We support this bill and urge the House Energy and Commerce Committee to consider the *Banning Surveillance Advertising Act* in their next consumer protection hearing,” said **Gabriel Weinberg, CEO and Founder of DuckDuckGo**.

“We’ve stumbled into a future that we did not and would not choose, as our democracy confronts a tragedy of the ‘un-commons.’ Information and communication spaces that we had always assumed to be public are now ruled by the hidden laws of surveillance capitalism for maximum profit. This tragedy leaves a trail of social wreckage in its wake: the wholesale destruction of privacy, vast corporate concentrations of knowledge and power, the corruption of social discourse, the demolition of social norms, and weakened democratic institutions. The financial incentives that drive these harms originate in surveillance advertising.

“None of this is or ever was inevitable. Today’s tragedy began with the invention and diffusion of surveillance advertising as a solution to the financial emergency of the dotcom bust two decades ago. The shift to targeted advertising depended upon key innovations: the secret massive-scale extraction of human-generated data, the analyses required to use these illicit data for behavioral prediction, the development of targeting tools able to shape attitudes and behavior secretly and at scale, and new advertising markets that trade exclusively in human futures, just like other futures markets in a range of commodities. It is widely understood that these surveillance-based operations produced spectacular financial success for the few and profound social harms for the many because of one overriding condition: the absence of law to stop them.

“Two decades later, surveillance capitalism travels far beyond these ad markets, owning and operating nearly all information spaces and challenging the very foundations of the democratic order. The time for law has come. A ban on surveillance advertising will begin to reverse the unbridled growth of this unaccountable power, finally asserting the rule of law and democratic governance over the critical infrastructures of our information society. The *Banning Surveillance Advertising Act* undertakes this crucial work. Thank you, Representative Eshoo and Senator Booker for your vision and the courage. Your leadership can pave the road to an alternative

future – away from dystopia and toward a healthy democracy. If we do not act now, a democratic and digital future will only become even more difficult to achieve. It is not too late, but there is no time to waste,” said **Shoshana Zuboff, Ph.D., Professor Emerita at Harvard Business School and author of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism***.

“Surveillance advertising's main economic function is to enrich ad tech companies at the expense of publishers, consumers and advertisers themselves, and it is high time for Congress to step in. Banning surveillance advertising will protect individual privacy, reduce corporate incentives to maximize invasive data collection, and spur innovation by unleashing the potential of the digital contextual advertising sector that has been held back by the dominant surveillance advertising platforms,” said **Nathalie Maréchal, Ph.D., Senior Policy & Partnerships Manager at Ranking Digital Rights**.

“There are high costs if we do nothing about disinformation, including the decline of our democracy and public health as misinformation-at-scale reaches millions. Targeted advertising has been a significant weapon in the arsenal of media manipulators and disinformers. It has not only allowed disinformers to hide their identity and intentions, but also gave them the ability to impersonate social movements, business, and individuals, where they targeted vulnerable populations with outrageous lies, scams, hoaxes, and grift. This bill would simplify and broaden how paid messaging arrives in people’s newsfeeds and timelines, which would dampen the ability for disinformers to remain undercover and reach new audiences,” said **Joan Donovan, Ph.D., Research Director at Harvard Kennedy’s Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy**.

“The ‘free’ model helped create much of the internet we see today, including some amazing innovations. But, as the last five or so years have taught us, ‘free’ comes at a price. We pay for it with our attention, and our privacy. Big tech has exploited consumer data, abused market share, taxed small businesses, and stifled competition to remain the most powerful gatekeepers. By removing a critical element of the ad-supported ecosystem – unseemly data collection and tracking to enable advertising – the *Banning Surveillance Advertising Act* represents an important step forward to protect consumers and foster greater competition,” said **Sridhar Ramswamy, CEO of Neeva**.

“We cannot meaningfully fight online hate without changing the way Big Tech does business, and banning surveillance advertising will help disrupt the toxic incentive system that now exists. Social media companies make money by surveilling our behavior, collecting our data, and tuning their algorithms to recommend content that will keep us scrolling—so they can specifically target us with as many advertisements as possible. Under this business model, hate, violence and misinformation flourish because it gets engagement. Big Tech profits from amplifying content that normalizes extremism, incites violence, and harms vulnerable communities. ADL applauds Rep. Eshoo for tackling this issue and introducing the *Banning Surveillance Advertising Act*,” said **Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO and National Director, ADL (Anti-Defamation League)**.

“The time to disrupt corporate surveillance has come. Targeted advertising isn't just creepy, it can have significant impacts on marginalized communities. Individuals in these communities can be targeted with scams and disinformation, or prevented from seeing information about housing and job openings, depriving them of important life opportunities. The *Banning Surveillance Advertising Act* will stop these discriminatory practices and will block advertisers and data brokers from commodifying every tiny bit of our personal data. EPIC is proud to support this bill,” said **Caitriona Fitzgerald, Deputy Director at Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC)**.

“Beeper supports the legislation sponsored by Rep. Anna Eshoo that would ban surveillance advertising because the business model of the major tech platforms have evolved into intrusive and non-transparent dangers for internet users. Essentially, today's surveillance advertising practices have proven harmful to the online ecosystem and unnecessarily manipulative to the consumer experience,” said **Eric Migicovsky, CEO and Co-Founder of Beeper**.

“Currently, consumers are trapped into agreeing to having their data collected and utilized for surveillance advertising. This practice is so widely used consumers cannot avoid it without avoiding the internet completely. Yet, surveillance advertising is invasive, enables advertisers to perpetuate racial and gender discrimination, and harms vulnerable children who, because their brains are still developing, often cannot tell what is an ad and what isn't. The *Banning Surveillance Advertising Act* acknowledges that prohibiting certain surveillance ads, or requiring additional consent for them, is insufficient, and this important bill takes the necessary next step to ban the practice altogether. On behalf of kids and families across the country, Common Sense strongly supports Rep. Eshoo and Sen. Booker's approach,” said **James P. Steyer, Founder and CEO at Common Sense Media**.

“The internet has done a lot to help mankind, but it remains built on a business model that is fundamentally at odds with privacy. Targeted advertising not only encourages online surveillance, but also exploits consumers while perpetuating issues like misinformation and discrimination. Proton applauds Congresswoman Eshoo for tackling these issues head-on, and introducing legislation that would finally put people over advertisers. The *Banning Surveillance Advertising Act* goes a long way to protect consumers from invasive ad practices, and would help reorient the internet toward an emphasis on privacy,” said **Andy Yen, Ph.D., CEO of Proton**.

“Because of how often we use our phones and computers, Americans have become vulnerable to targeted manipulation like never before. The *Banning Surveillance Advertising Act* is a bold and important intervention to protect our public institutions and help reclaim our online spaces as places where people can flourish. Critically, this bill recognizes that certain information practices are significantly more dangerous than others. It draws a strong line by prohibiting the corrosive

practice of delivering microtargeted ads,” said **Woodrow Hartzog, Ph.D., Professor of Law and Computer Science at Northeastern University and author of *Privacy’s Blueprint*.**

“Surveillance advertising uses invisible and invasive techniques to manipulate consumers and rob them of real choice in the marketplace. Since the discrimination and unfair treatment that can result from this practice outweighs any potential benefits to consumers, and contextual advertising is much less privacy-invasive and a better alternative for businesses, Consumer Federation of America strongly supports Representative Eshoo’s bill to ban surveillance advertising,” said **Susan Grant, Senior Fellow at Consumer Federation of America.**

“Targeted advertising is one of the most toxic practices of the surveillance economy. The few advantages it can offer can be attained in non-intrusive ways (e.g., through contextualized advertising), and its disadvantages are numerous and severe: from gender and racial discrimination to the erosion of democracy through polarization and personalized propaganda. Representative Eshoo’s bill strikes the right balance by allowing contextual ads while banning surveillance-based ads. The *Banning Surveillance Advertising Act* is an essential step towards better protecting people’s rights and the integrity of our democracy in the digital age,” said **Carissa Véliz, Ph.D., Associate Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and Institute for Ethics in AI at the University of Oxford and author of *Privacy is Power*.**

“Surveillance advertising is eroding Americans' rights with horrifying speed. It has led to some of the shadiest companies in the world compiling detailed dossiers on countless people that are ripe for exploitation by any parties willing to pay for it, from malicious hackers to foreign intelligence services. Congress must tackle these issues head-on and ban this dangerous practice before it's too late,” said **Sean Vitka, Senior Policy Counsel at Demand Progress.**

“The unchecked collection of personal data by the dominant tech platforms fuels microtargeting, which is core to the business model at the heart of the consumer internet industry. I thank Congresswoman Eshoo and Senator Booker for introducing legislation that puts the interests of our democracy over market incentives,” said **Dipayan Ghosh, Ph.D., Co-Director of the Digital Platforms & Democracy Project at the Harvard Kennedy School and author of *Terms of Disservice*.**

“Identifying, tracking, discriminating, sorting, targeting, and manipulating online users lies at the heart of all that is toxic about today’s digital world. Surveillance advertising drives discrimination and compounds inequities, it destroys democratic institutions and rights, strengthens monopoly power of Big Tech platforms, and is harmful to children, teens, families, and communities. If enacted, the *Banning Surveillance Advertising Act* would put a stop to surveillance advertising and would be an important first step in building a digital world that is less toxic to our democracy, economy, and collective well-being,” said **Katharina Kopp, Ph.D., Director of Policy for the Center for Digital Democracy.**

“In the name of advertising, big technology corporations indiscriminately collected data about us so that we can be micro-targeted in ways over which we are barely aware. But what has occurred is not mere advertising, it is behavioral manipulation where we are no longer merely being sold products, but instead inundated with content designed to influence and arouse us; all without any transparency or accountability. Our data should be ours to direct and control; not the fuel for polarization, disinformation, and conspiracy theories. I applaud Rep. Eshoo and Senator Booker for introducing this bold new piece of legislation that ensures that our Internet moving forward will work for its users,” said **Ramesh Srinivasan, Ph.D., Professor and Director of the University of California’s Digital Cultures Lab, author of *Beyond the Valley*.**

“The Internet’s prevailing business model undermines its potential as a place to connect and learn. Young people, in particular, are harmed by advertising micro-targeted to exploit their vulnerabilities. We applaud Representative Eshoo for introducing this groundbreaking legislation,” said **Josh Golin, Executive Director, Fairplay.**

“Surveillance advertising is a broken business model that incentivizes manipulation, enables discrimination, weakens privacy, and undermines a free and diverse media system. The *Banning Surveillance Advertising Act* is an important step toward resetting the internet economy to work for everyone, rather than the most powerful,” said **Matthew Crain, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Media and Communication at Miami University and author of *Profit Over Privacy: How Surveillance Advertising Conquered the Internet*.**