

Elizabeth Warren issues call for internet censorship

By Patrick Martin
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In a statement issued January 29, Senator Elizabeth Warren, a leading candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, called for a massive effort to impose internet censorship during the 2020 presidential election.

She also pledged that a President Warren would push for “tough civil and criminal penalties” on social media platforms and web sites that publish misleading information about when, where and how to vote, or that engage in any conduct to suppress or discourage voter participation.

While billed as an effort to bar voter suppression and other “dirty tricks” frequently engaged in by right-wing groups—such as sending emails to minority voters giving them the wrong date for an election, so they miss the opportunity to vote—this initiative has far more sweeping implications.

“Disinformation and online foreign interference erode our democracy, and Donald Trump has invited both,” Warren said in a tweet Wednesday, which effectively portrayed her initiative as an extension of the impeachment trial in the Senate. “Anyone who seeks to challenge and defeat Donald Trump in the 2020 election must be fully prepared to take this on—and I’ve got a plan to do it.”

In a further statement, she declared, “Anyone who seeks to challenge and defeat Donald Trump in the 2020 election must be fully prepared to take on the full array of disinformation that foreign actors and people in and around the Trump campaign will use to divide Democrats, suppress Democratic votes and erode the standing of the Democratic nominee.”

This language is so vague that it could easily encompass criticism of the Democratic Party and its nominee, appeals to vote for a third-party candidate, or declarations that the difference between the Democrats

and Republicans is so insignificant that it is not worth casting a ballot.

Warren called on Facebook, Google, Twitter and other social media platforms to step up their efforts against “disinformation” and “fake” or “manipulated” content. Who decides what is false content, however, she did not specify—but obviously, that would be the corporate-controlled media monopolies and the US intelligence agencies.

And she said that if elected president, she would seek sanctions against countries, including Russia, that used online propaganda to undermine US elections. She said nothing about the operations of the US military-intelligence apparatus, which engages in propaganda, subversion, electoral manipulation and outright criminality in countries around the world—as well as at home.

Warren placed her plan to combat online disinformation within the context of the anti-Russia campaign waged by the Democratic Party for the last three years, in part directed against Trump, who was said to be the beneficiary of Russian intervention in the 2016 election, but aimed more generally against opposition to the Democrats from the left, including socialist candidates and the Greens.

Former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton has ascribed her electoral defeat in 2016 to Russian intervention, despite the fact that the alleged Russian electoral operations on Facebook involved a total expenditure of \$70,000, a drop in the bucket in a \$5 billion campaign, in which Clinton substantially outspent Trump because she had much greater support from Wall Street and corporate America.

Clinton also branded the 2016 Green Party presidential candidate, Jill Stein, a “Russian asset,” claiming her campaign took votes from the Democrats

in key states like Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, which were critical for Trump's victory in the Electoral College.

The *Washington Post*, in describing the alleged online propaganda efforts to which Warren was responding, included the activities of Warren's Democratic rivals, noting particularly that "backers for Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT.) and his 2020 bid have been some of the most aggressive online, weaponizing features on Facebook to share viral, hostile memes about his fellow Democratic contenders."

The choice of words is significant—"aggressive," "weaponizing," "hostile"—effectively accusing Sanders supporters of engaging in criminal conduct for voicing their political opposition to Warren, Biden and other candidates.

The *Post* also reported that the Democratic National Committee is sending "top cybersecurity and disinformation experts" to Iowa "to help protect the caucuses against digital attacks from Russia and other US adversaries."

This effort is aimed not merely at protecting the infrastructure of the caucus voting and vote-reporting—which is highly decentralized and unlikely to be hit by any outside intrusion—but against political criticism of the Democratic Party by the supporters of any of the candidates.

The *Post* referred without qualification to the need to protect the Iowa caucuses from the "fate that befell Hillary Clinton in 2016 when her campaign was upended by a Russia-backed hacking and disinformation effort." In reality, Clinton went down to defeat because her own right-wing campaign alienated significant numbers of workers and youth, particularly in the Midwest, many of whom stayed home, while others voted for Trump or for third-party candidates.

The emails from DNC servers and Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta, released by WikiLeaks, were not "disinformation," but gave a true and accurate picture of two significant aspects of the Clinton campaign: her groveling speeches to Wall Street audiences, in which she promised friendly treatment by her administration; and the coordinated effort by the DNC and the Clinton campaign to rig the primaries against Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

The *Post* article cited the concerns of DNC security coordinator Nellwyn Thomas, not only about supposed

foreign disinformation, but about domestic complaints, including "efforts that seek to undermine public confidence in the results, including by suggesting caucus results were tallied wrong or that a candidates' supporters were disenfranchised. Those could come from disgruntled Republicans or even from Democrats who aren't happy about how the night is going for their preferred candidate, she said."

The DNC is working with the federal Department of Homeland Security to monitor online commentary on the vote-counting and react to "any false narrative about the legitimacy of the results," Thomas said. In other words, for all their anti-Trump invective, the Democratic Party establishment is working with the Trump administration to crack down on Democratic dissidents who might object to efforts to once again manipulate the outcome of the nomination contest.

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