

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 913

To conduct a study on the spread of COVID–19-related disinformation and misinformation on the internet and social media platforms, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 23, 2021

Ms. HIRONO (for herself, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. REED, and Ms. WARREN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To conduct a study on the spread of COVID–19-related disinformation and misinformation on the internet and social media platforms, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “COVID–19
5 Disinformation Research and Reporting Act of 2021”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) The National Academies of Sciences, Engi-
2 neering, and Medicine and the National Science
3 Foundation have provided scientific, evidence-based
4 findings and foundational research, across all dis-
5 ciplines, that benefit the people of the United States.

6 (2) Accurate and reliable information is impera-
7 tive for health and safety during a national emer-
8 gency like the COVID–19 pandemic.

9 (3) Disinformation and misinformation have
10 spread alarmingly during the COVID–19 pandemic,
11 hindering the public response efforts of Federal,
12 State, local, and indigenous leaders.

13 (4) The internet and social media have made it
14 easier to spread fake medical information, such as
15 unproven treatments for COVID–19, or inaccurate
16 information that undermines scientific experts.

17 (5) The internet and social media have likewise
18 made it easier to spread disinformation and misin-
19 formation about the safety and efficacy of COVID–
20 19 vaccines, impacting public acceptance of the vac-
21 cines and threatening to prolong the pandemic.

22 (6) COVID–19-related disinformation has been
23 weaponized by foreign adversaries, including Russia,
24 China, and Iran, through the use of fake social
25 media accounts and bot networks to amplify content.

1 (7) Understanding the financial incentives for
2 entities spreading and amplifying disinformation and
3 misinformation can help to combat its distribution.

4 **SEC. 3. SCIENCE STUDY ON COVID-19-RELATED**
5 **DISINFORMATION AND MISINFORMATION.**

6 (a) STUDY.—Not later than 30 days after the date
7 of enactment of this Act, the Director of the National
8 Science Foundation shall enter into an arrangement with
9 the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and
10 Medicine to conduct a study on the current understanding
11 of the spread of COVID–19-related disinformation and
12 misinformation on the internet and social media plat-
13 forms. The study shall address—

14 (1) the roles disinformation and misinformation
15 have played in the public response to COVID–19, in-
16 cluding public acceptance of and demand for
17 COVID–19 vaccines;

18 (2) the sources, both foreign and domestic, of
19 COVID–19-related disinformation and misinforma-
20 tion, and the mechanisms by which that
21 disinformation and misinformation influence the
22 public debate;

23 (3) the role social media plays in the dissemina-
24 tion and promotion of COVID–19-related
25 disinformation and misinformation content and the

1 role social media platforms play in the organization
2 of groups seeking to spread COVID–19-related
3 disinformation and misinformation;

4 (4) the potential financial returns for creators
5 or distributors of COVID–19-related disinformation
6 and misinformation and the role such financial in-
7 centives play in the propagation of COVID–19-re-
8 lated disinformation and misinformation;

9 (5) potential strategies to mitigate the dissemi-
10 nation and negative impacts of COVID–19-related
11 disinformation and misinformation (and specifically
12 the dissemination of disinformation and misinforma-
13 tion on social media), including through improved
14 disclosures and addressing information literacy; and

15 (6) an analysis of—

16 (A) the limitations of the mitigation strate-
17 gies described in paragraph (5); and

18 (B) how the strategies can be implemented
19 without infringing on the constitutional rights
20 and civil liberties of the people of the United
21 States.

22 (b) REPORT.—In entering into an arrangement under
23 this section, the Director of the National Science Founda-
24 tion shall request that the National Academies of Sciences,
25 Engineering, and Medicine transmit to Congress a report

1 on the results of the study not later than 1 year after
2 the date of enactment of this Act.

3 (c) AUTHORIZATION.—There is authorized to be ap-
4 propriated, for the purposes of conducting the study under
5 this section, \$1,000,000.

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