

US lawmakers probe whether Amazon misled Congress

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Congress is probing the accuracy of Amazon's statements that its algorithm does not advantage its own goods over third-party items.

Pointing to recent news reports on how Amazon advantages its own products over third-party items, a bipartisan group of lawmakers on Monday questioned whether the tech giant had committed perjury.

Amazon has long insisted that its platform is agnostic, not favoring company-made goods over those provided by other sellers.

But lawmakers with the House Judiciary Committee cited recent accounts that Amazon-made products were listed above third-party items with higher consumer ratings; and that Amazon made use of proprietary data from third parties to market copycat goods.

A letter from the group questioned whether officials with the tech giant had perjured themselves in prior statements to the committee.

Amazon defended its past statements, disputing the accuracy of the news reports and saying "we design our search experience to feature the items customers will want to purchase, regardless of whether they are offered by Amazon or one of our selling partners," according to a company spokesperson.

The back-and-forth comes as tech giants face greater attention from Washington in the wake of meteoric growth has accelerated during the coronavirus pandemic.

The letter, signed by New York Democratic Representative Jerrold Nadler, Colorado Republican Representative Ken Buck and three other lawmakers, quoted statements from Amazon officials in congressional testimony and correspondence denying that company's algorithms are designed to prioritize company-made items.

"At best, this reporting confirms that Amazon's representatives misled the Committee," said the letter to Amazon Chief Executive Andy Jassy. "At worst, it demonstrates that they may have lied to Congress in possible violation of federal criminal law."

The lawmakers gave Amazon until November 1 to provide documents

and "sworn" responses to questions, noting that perjury in the course of the congressional investigation is a federal crime.

Amazon defended its conduct.

"Amazon and its executives did not mislead the committee, and we have denied and sought to correct the record on the inaccurate media articles in question," an Amazon spokesperson said.

"As we have previously stated, we have an internal policy, which goes beyond that of any other retailer's policy that we're aware of, that prohibits the use of individual seller data to develop Amazon private label products. We investigate any allegations that this policy may have been violated and take appropriate action."

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