

Google, Meta can't just eat up competitors, California AG says

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California Attorney General Rob Bonta has a message for big tech companies, including those in the state: he's going to take action when they violate laws.

"This is priority space for me: To hold big corporations, Big Tech specifically, accountable," Bonta, 50, said in an interview Thursday. "You should expect to see more."

When he took on the job in April, replacing Xavier Becerra who was named U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary, Bonta inherited and joined several investigations and lawsuits in the tech space. Among them is a recently launched multistate investigation of Meta Platforms Inc.'s Instagram and its effect on the mental health of young people. California is also part of a multistate suit against Alphabet Inc.'s Google over anticompetitive concerns with its Play app store policies, as well as an appeal challenging a court's dismissal of lawsuits regarding Meta's power.

"In Big Tech, we are seeing companies that are doing things and are at the size that we've never seen before, and we certainly are concerned about impacts on young people, as an example, on consumers generally when it comes to privacy, when it comes to consumer choice," Bonta said. "We want competition. We want innovation."

Bonta, a former state legislator appointed to his post by Governor Gavin Newsom, foresees more legal fights. The ongoing investigation into Instagram's impact on young users "could lead to a [legal action](#) down the road depending on how the investigation goes," he said without specifying a time frame on how soon the states may decide to sue.

The investigation is in its early stages, according to Bonta, who added that he expects "full cooperation" from Meta.

Bonta questions whether Meta should be able to do acquisitions similar to its purchases of Instagram in 2012 and WhatsApp in 2014—takeovers that came under sharp scrutiny in the monopoly suit he and other states are fighting to revive after a Washington judge ruled that the states

waited too long to file their complaint.

"It can't be part of the model that when there's competition, you eat it up, you gobble it up," Bonta said. "Competition is good for consumers, so we're concerned about that." Legislative action is also needed to revamp U.S. [antitrust laws](#) to "capture today's modern business models," he said.

Californians also want consumer choice, Bonta said, referring to the multistate suit challenging Google's lucrative Google Play app store business model. His office is also preparing to add its voice to the antitrust fight between Apple Inc. and Epic Games Inc. over whether the iPhone maker's App Store policies hurt consumers and developers. His office will present similar arguments made in the Google Play fight in the App Store dispute, according to Bonta.

"Single-entity dominance creates a lack of choice, perhaps a lack of quality, perhaps less privacy protections, certainly potential less innovation, when there's no one competing with them to provide another option or to provide incentive to innovate and do best by consumers," Bonta said. "So the theory is similar, just applied to a different case."

Bonta also explained that his office won't necessarily participate in every regulatory action aimed at tech, such as the lawsuits by other states alleging that Google's location tracking function violates user privacy.

"I wouldn't read too much into the states that are involved and are not involved right now," he said. "There are many issues and we try to put our resources where we can make the most impact."

Asked whether aggressive enforcement by his office might encourage businesses to leave the state, Bonta said successful companies should also be able to play fair. "We're proud of our companies. We want them

to stay here and follow the law."

Bonta, a Democrat, is up for election later this year.

A recent breakout in crime, particularly smash-and-grab robberies, is also a concern, Bonta said in a separate interview Thursday on Bloomberg Television's "Balance of Power."

"We are working with the governor and his new budget proposal, the safety plan, to make sure we are addressing those spikes, taking them head-on."

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