

Twitter whistleblower brings his critiques to Congress

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A screen shows the price of Twitter stock at the New York Stock Exchange, Sept. 18, 2019. Peiter Zatkó, the former Twitter security chief who's accused the company of negligence with privacy and security in a whistleblower complaint, will testify before Congress on Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Lennihan, File

A former security chief at Twitter will appear before Congress Tuesday with alarming allegations that the social platform misled regulators about its cyber defenses and efforts to control millions of fake accounts.

Peiter "Mudge" Zatkó, a respected cybersecurity expert, will appear Tuesday before the Senate Judiciary Committee to lay out his concerns. Zatkó's claims could also affect Tesla billionaire Elon Musk's attempt to back out of his [\\$44 billion deal to acquire the social platform](#). Musk claims that Twitter has long underreported spam bots on its platform and cites that as a reason to nix the deal he struck in April.

Zatkó was the head of security for the influential platform until he was fired early this year. He [filed a whistleblower complaint in July](#) with Congress, the Justice Department, the Federal Trade Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission. Among his most serious accusations is that Twitter violated the terms of a 2011 FTC settlement by falsely claiming that it had put stronger measures in place to protect the security and privacy of its users.

The Judiciary Committee chairman, Illinois Democrat Sen. Dick Durbin, called Zatkó's accusations "serious business."

"If it's anywhere along the lines that (he) suggested, I think it's a matter of grave personal-privacy concern," Durbin told reporters Monday. "The question is whether information gathered by Twitter has been used for purposes which we're not aware of."

Many of Zatkó's claims are uncorroborated and appear to have little documentary support. Twitter has called Zatkó's description of events "a false narrative ... riddled with inconsistencies and inaccuracies" and lacking important context.

Zatkó also accuses the company of deception in its handling of

automated "spam bots," or fake accounts. That allegation is at the core of [billionaire tycoon Elon Musk's attempt to back out of his \\$44 billion deal to buy Twitter](#). Musk and Twitter are locked in a bitter legal battle, with Twitter having sued Musk to force him to complete the deal. The Delaware judge overseeing the case ruled last week that Musk can include new evidence related to Zatkan's [allegations](#) in the high-stakes trial, which is set to start Oct. 17.

Zatkan, 51, first gained prominence in the 1990s as an ethical hacker and later worked in senior positions at an elite Defense Department research unit and at Google. He joined Twitter in late 2020 at the urging of then-CEO Jack Dorsey.

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