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BCAP offices will be closed Friday, July 1 and Monday, July 4

Google, Apple and Amazon aren't just giant tech companies. They're giant tech companies that use their size to "snuff out competition."

That's the charge levied by Elizabeth Warren in a [speech](#) the Massachusetts senator delivered today in Washington. Warren singled

out three of tech's biggest players in a speech about the perils of "consolidation and concentration" throughout the economy. It comes the day after Hillary Clinton, Warren's recent stage-mate, laid out a "technology agenda" that seemed designed [to please Silicon Valley](#).

Warren had different beefs with Google, Apple and Amazon, but the common thread was that she accused each one of using its powerful

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platform to "lock out smaller guys and newer guys," including some that compete with Google, Apple and Amazon. Google, she said, uses "its dominant search engine to harm rivals of its Google Plus user review feature;" Apple "has placed conditions on its rivals that make it difficult for them to offer competitive streaming services" that compete with Apple Music; and Amazon "uses its position as the dominant bookseller to steer consumers to books published by Amazon to the detriment of other publishers."

"Google, Apple and Amazon have created disruptive technologies that changed the world, and ... they deserve to be highly profitable and

successful,” Warren said. “But the opportunity to compete must remain open for new entrants and smaller competitors that want their chance to change the world again.” Not included in Warren’s list: Facebook, which certainly has platform power that freaks out everyone in the media business.

Then again, Facebook doesn’t have a home-grown product that competes with the product the media business creates — unless you want to argue that **Facebook’s main product is the user-generated content it is now favoring over the stuff publishers make.** Reps for Google, Apple and Amazon all declined to comment.

But Spotify, which has complained about the fee Apple charges music services — and other services — that sign up subscribers using its iOS platform, was happy to comment. Here’s Jonathan Prince, who runs communications and public policy for the streaming music company: “Apple has long used its control of iOS to squash competition in music, driving up the prices of its competitors, inappropriately forbidding us from telling our customers about lower prices, and giving itself unfair advantages across its platform through everything from the lock screen to Siri. You know there’s something wrong when Apple makes more off a Spotify subscription than it does off an Apple Music subscription and doesn’t share any of that with the music industry. They want to have their cake and eat everyone else’s too.”

Warren’s speech didn’t only go after the tech sector. Other targets included Walmart and Comcast, which owns a minority stake in Vox Media, which owns this site. Her main critique was directed at politicians and regulators she thinks have abandoned their responsibility to “restore and defend competition.” Warren doesn’t expect those same politicians to pass new legislation to fix any of this, but she does want them to “enforce our laws in the way Congress originally intended them to be enforced.”

This isn’t the first time Warren has gone after some of Silicon Valley’s standard-bearers. **Earlier this spring she laid into Uber and other “gig economy” companies; Clinton made her own critique of that sector** last year. I can’t imagine that Warren’s newest words will reverberate in techland. It would be nice if they did. The predominant mindset when it comes to competition in Silicon Valley is that the best tech company wins until it doesn’t, and is replaced by a competitor that does it better. When we do talk about competition, it tends to be about fights between giants, usually about little stuff. **Hey! Why won’t Amazon sell Apple TVs?**

And when it comes to platforms, we usually hear that companies that have built enormously powerful platforms get to operate them any way they see fit — and that the people who built them are going to make the best decisions about this stuff, anyway. But these things *are* enormously powerful platforms, built on the same internet that Silicon Valley says should be treated as a public utility. If the platform owners don’t want to end up with Washington regulating, say, the size of their app store fees, they ought to work hard to keep themselves in check. — ***recode.net***

Facebook Inc. shed new light on how it determines what its 1.65 billion users see each time they sign on, in its latest effort to demystify its inner workings.

The social network also said it would prioritize posts from friends and family in users’ news feeds over content from publishers and public

figures, in hopes of persuading users to spend more time on the site. The newsfeed changes could mean some publishers will see readership on Facebook decline “a small amount but a noticeable amount,” said Adam Mosseri, the product manager who runs Facebook’s news feed. “Some publishers may go up, some publishers may go down, some publishers may go down more.”

Even a small change in the news-feed algorithm will have significant implications for news outlets. Facebook drives more than 40% of traffic to digital publishers, more than any other site, according to [social-media-analytics company Parse.ly](#). Given Facebook’s sway, many publishers are expanding their presence on the network, despite concerns about ceding even more power to Facebook. “At Facebook’s urging, publishers have invested heavily in producing various content formats for its platform, and this appears to limit the reach of those investments. It’s a perfect example of why publishers need to be judicious in continuing to make bets that put them in control of their own destiny,” said Mike Dyer, president and publisher of the Daily Beast.

The broader explanation about how the news feed works was outlined in a [two-page document the company posted on its website](#). Its release comes amid growing scrutiny of Facebook following a report last month that contractors suppressed conservative viewpoints from the site’s trending topics feature. Facebook denied bias, but revealed that humans were involved in the selection of headlines to a greater extent than it previously disclosed.

The controversy also exposed broader confusion among users about what appears in their news feeds. Facebook relies largely on an algorithm, or computer program, that combs through roughly 100,000 signals and creates a “relevancy score” for each post for a specific user. No two users have the same news feed.

On Wednesday, Facebook made clearer than it has in the past that people also are involved in selecting and prioritizing items in the news feed. “It’s important for people to understand that there’s a group of people who work on news feed, not just sort of like a third-party agent that acts autonomously,” Mr. Mosseri said. He said Facebook wants to show users posts that those users want to see. “That is an opinion. That isn’t neutral. That’s not a political bias, but that is a bias and that is reflected in our decisions and therefore it is reflected in our ranking order,” Mr. Mosseri said.

Facebook tweaks the algorithm often—roughly once a month over the last 2 ½ years. Many of the changes are aimed at making the feed less promotional and repetitive. Facebook generally discloses in broad terms when and how it has altered the formula. Each change is tested in a small group of Facebook users. There are 200 people on Facebook’s newsfeed team, led by Mr. Mosseri.

The latest tweak came after Facebook found that users felt posts from friends were being “drowned out” by publishers, Mr. Mosseri said. Facebook has become an important source of news for many users, who spend an average of 50 minutes a day on the social network, according to the company. As a result, publishers often post hundreds of items a day. Friends, by contrast, post just a few times a week, Mr. Mosseri said. “The thing that we’re worried about is people connecting to their friends less than they want because” publishers post so often, he said.

Posts from personal connections now trump those from public figures and publishers, Facebook said. It also said it would favor what it described as “authentic” posts, rather than spam or misleading articles, colloquially known as clickbait. “People don’t like seeing clickbait, they complain about it, they report it. We get bug reports,” Mr. Mosseri said. Posts widely shared by Facebook users will be less affected. Once a user shares an article, video or other content, Facebook considers it “friend content,” Mr. Mosseri said. That means it will appear higher in a user’s news feed.

One publisher said the change, which has been introduced over the past month, has worked to its advantage. Joe Speiser, co-founder of LittleThings.com, which publishes “feel-good” stories and gets about 75% of its traffic from Facebook, said his publication started to see a bump in traffic earlier this month. The site is on track to exceed the 52 million unique visitors it saw in May, which Mr. Speiser attributed to the fact that Facebook users are more likely to share the kind of “inspirational content” produced by the site. – ***Wall Street Journal; and in the New York Times, “Facebook is a news giant that would rather show us baby pictures”***

Pennsylvania U.S. Sens. Bob Casey and Pat Toomey have gotten the ball rolling on planning America’s “semiquincentennial” birthday. That’s the fancy way to refer to the 250th birthday that takes place in 2026. A bill they co-sponsored will establish a commission to design the big bash. We can’t wait for the Thomas Jefferson bobbleheads, how about you? – ***Pittsburgh Tribune-Review***



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