



# NEWS RELEASE

Attorney General Mike Hilgers

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## Nebraska Joins FTC and Coalition of States in Promoting Competition in the Digital Advertising Ecosystem

Today, the Nebraska Attorney General's Office, the Federal Trade Commission, and a coalition of states filed a lawsuit to stop Havas Media Group, one of the nation's largest advertising agencies, from distorting America's modern public square.

Starting in 2018, major U.S. advertising agencies Havas, WPP, Publicis, and Dentsu unlawfully colluded to impose common "brand safety" standards across the digital advertising industry, according to the FTC's complaint. The ad agencies, together with their primary competitors Omnicom and IPG, operated through trade associations to establish a common "Brand Safety Floor" to target "misinformation."

The complaint alleges firms like NewsGuard and the Global Disinformation Index used this misinformation designation as a means to promote the demonetization of disfavored political viewpoints. In a competitive market, ad agencies compete for advertisers' business by offering brand-safety tools that provide the best quality at the lowest cost. The brand safety agreement displaced competition by insulating the ad agencies from these competitive conditions, according to the complaint.

In April, a federal district court approved a settlement between WPP, Publicis, and Dentsu, the FTC, and the coalition of states that put an end to their alleged coordinated conduct. Today's lawsuit is accompanied by a similar proposed order that will prevent Havas from engaging in similar conduct in the future.

"Today's lawsuit and proposed settlement put an end to ad agencies deciding which political views should be promoted and which should be suppressed. The free-flowing sharing of ideas is what makes our country great, and today's action furthers that ideal. We are proud to work with our partners at the FTC and in other states to stop big businesses from colluding to restrict disfavored political views from public view," said Attorney General Hilgers.

If approved by a federal judge, the order will ensure that Havas, like the other advertising agencies that already settled, is prevented from engaging in agreements that would set common brand safety standards or restrict advertising based on biased and politically motivated criteria.

The FTC's complaint and final order were filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas. Joining the complaint are Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, Texas, Utah, and West Virginia.

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