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## Facebook announces 20 members of new oversight board

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Facebook revealed the first 20 members of its new oversight board, which will have responsibility for content enforcement and governance on its platforms.

With more than 2.6 billion estimated monthly users — a number that eclipses the population of the world’s largest nations — Facebook now has something resembling its own judicial system.

The new board will make “final and binding decisions” on whether to allow specific content on Facebook and Instagram and will begin hearing cases in the coming months, according to the board’s website.

Members include a former U.S. federal judge, several judges’ former law clerks and a scholar at the libertarian Cato Institute. Facebook said this week the members have lived in more than 27 countries, speak at least 29 languages and have a “wide range of views and experiences.”

“We expect them to make some decisions that we, at Facebook, will not always agree with — but that’s the point: they are truly autonomous in their exercise of independent judgment,” wrote Nick Clegg, Facebook vice president of global affairs and communications, on the company’s blog. “We also expect that the board’s membership itself will face criticism. But its long-term success depends on it having members who bring different perspectives and expertise to bear.”

The board includes Pamela Karlan, a Stanford University law professor and former law clerk to the late Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun, who has been a target for criticism from conservatives.

During House impeachment hearings against President Trump, Ms. Karlan vouched for the legitimacy of the charges against Mr. Trump.

In doing so, she singled out the president’s teenage son, Barron, to joke that Mr. Trump acted as though he were a king. “The president can name his son Barron, he can’t make him a baron,” she quipped.

She later apologized.

Another Stanford University law professor, Michael McConnell, also will serve on the board. He is a former federal judge who was appointed by former President George W. Bush to the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals.

“Facebook has one of the most influential roles to play in deciding what can and can’t be said in our culture today. It’s important those decisions be made in a balanced way,” Mr. McConnell said in a statement. “As a former judge and scholar, I’m trained to see issues from a variety of perspectives and that is what I will try to bring to the Oversight Board.”

The libertarian Cato Institute’s John Samples also got a seat on the panel. He directs Cato’s Center for Representative Government, where he studies the First Amendment, public opinion and governmental failure, according to the Cato Institute’s website.

“Facebook’s growth has created unique and potentially problematic situations with free speech,” Mr. Samples said in a statement. “Much of the important decisions about freedom of speech were being made by large tech companies in Silicon Valley. I see the board as a historic, slowly unfolding institution that will have powerful effects on human liberty.”

The 20-member board soon will double in size, the company said.

Nearly one-quarter of the board’s current composition hails from North America. Other members from the international community have had a distinctive role in American politics, such as Alan Rusbridger, the former editor-in-chief of the Guardian who published former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden’s leaks.

Facebook said the board members contract directly with the oversight board and are therefore not technically Facebook employees.

The company pledged to abide by the board’s decisions except in the most extreme circumstances.

“Facebook will implement the board’s decisions unless doing so could violate the law, and will respond constructively and in good faith to policy guidance put forth by the board,” Mr. Clegg said.