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Trump Antitrust Chief Says 'Big Is Not Bad' for Tech Companies

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A day after Attorney General Jeff Sessions said the Justice Department will examine whether big technology companies are harming competition, his chief antitrust enforcer made clear the obstacles the government faces in bringing a case.

“Just because somebody is big does not mean they have violated the laws. Nor should we condemn them because they have succeeded,” Makan Delrahim, the head of the department’s antitrust division, said at a conference in New York Thursday.

Delrahim was responding to a question from an audience member who asked about targeting Amazon.com Inc. as a monopoly and breaking up the online retailer. The dominance of technology companies like Amazon and Alphabet Inc.’s Google -- and how or whether the companies should be regulated -- is emerging as an issue in Washington.

On Wednesday, the matter was front and center as Facebook Inc.’s Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg and Twitter Inc.’s Chief Executive Officer Jack Dorsey testified about misinformation and election interference. Hours later, the Justice Department announced it would look at the companies with state attorneys general.

“The attorney general has convened a meeting with a number of state attorneys general this month to discuss a growing concern that these companies may be hurting competition and intentionally stifling the free exchange of ideas on their platforms,” the department said.

In his remarks Thursday, Delrahim said the debate was important but cautioned that antitrust enforcers need “credible evidence” that the companies are taking steps to harm competition and need to make sure startups are able to take on the tech giants. He said afterward that he supports the Justice Department meeting.

“Is any of their conduct in any way limiting the ability of that upstart to challenge their market position in that market where they’re dominating?” Delrahim said. “Big is not bad but behaving badly is bad.”

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