

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

October 4, 2018

Mr. Larry Page
Chief Executive Officer
Alphabet, Inc.
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chief Executive Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Mr. Jack Dorsey
Chief Executive Officer
Twitter, Inc.
1355 Market Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Mr. Page, Mr. Zuckerberg, and Mr. Dorsey:

I write to request that your companies answer questions regarding your efforts to safeguard the American political system and society from divisive foreign influence, specifically regarding the debate over Supreme Court Nominee Judge Kavanaugh. As Americans discuss critical issues—including the nomination, allegations of sexual assault, and victim's rights—using your platforms, I urge you to protect our nation from foreign agents sowing discord and promoting tribalism.

Leading up to the 2016 presidential election, the Russian Internet Research Agency exploited divisions among Americans by targeting issues such as immigration, race, and religion.¹ These practices continue today,² and collectively, your companies have taken up the mantle of fighting such foreign influence.³ As I have previously written to you, the growing

¹ Indictment at ¶ 34, *U.S. v. Internet Research Agency, et. al.*, (D.D.C filed Feb. 16, 2018) (No. 1:18-cr-00032-DLF).

² *FBI Director: Russia 'Continues to Engage in Malign Influence Operations' Against U.S.*, Politico (July 7, 2018).

³ See e.g., *Hard Questions: What is Facebook Doing to Protect Election Security?*, Facebook (Mar. 29, 2018) (newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/03/hard-questions-election-security/); See e.g., *An Update on our Elections Integrity Work*, Twitter (Oct. 1, 2018) (blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/topics/company/2018/an-update-on-our-elections-integrity-work.html); See e.g., *Security and Disinformation in the U.S. 2016 Election*, Google (Oct. 30, 2017) (www.blog.google/outreach-initiatives/public-policy/security-and-disinformation-us-2016-election/).

Mr. Larry Page
Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Mr. Jack Dorsey
October 4, 2018
Page 2

influence of the internet and consolidation among social media platforms has allowed a few companies to take on a quasi-governmental role policing content.⁴ In light of this dynamic, an update on your efforts to combat foreign influence, including efforts focusing on Judge Kavanaugh, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, Deborah Ramirez, and Julie Swetnick, is timely and important to our democracy.

Efforts related to these allegations involving Judge Kavanaugh are particularly relevant because they appear to raise political and social tensions in ways similar to issues previously exploited. Troubling reports indicate that tactics like those previously employed by Russian linked accounts or pages are potentially being used to exploit these allegations. For example, one leading Facebook group supporting Judge Kavanaugh entitled “Confirm Judge Kavanaugh (Enough is enough)” had previously focused on boycotting Nike and driving GOP election turnout to the polls. That group has more than 27,000 members, but reports indicate that only approximately 3,500 joined during the pendency of Judge Kavanaugh’s conformation process.⁵ Separately, on October 1, 2018, the German Marshall Fund’s Hamilton 68 project cited Kavanaugh, Trump, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and Dr. Ford as the top four issues discussed by Russia-linked Twitter accounts.⁶

In light of these issues, I request that you provide an update on your efforts to combat such foreign influence and specifically answer the following questions:

- 1) Have your companies discovered any foreign links to any anomalous behavior related to activities focusing on Judge Kavanaugh or Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, Deborah Ramirez, or Julie Swetnick, including the practice of co-opting unrelated social media groups? If so, what are the reaches of these pages, and what corrective action, if any, have your companies taken to address the potential for improper foreign influence?
- 2) Are your companies working with third-party researchers and firms to identify accounts or pages with foreign links focusing on Judge Kavanaugh or Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, Deborah Ramirez, or Julie Swetnick? If so, to what extent are you working with such groups, and how effective has that cooperation been in quickly identifying foreign-linked accounts or pages?

⁴ Letter from Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, to Larry Page, Mark Zuckerberg, and Jack Dorsey (Oct. 23, 2017).

⁵ *That Facebook Group You Joined Years Ago? It Might Now Be Supporting Brett Kavanaugh*, Washington Post (Oct. 4, 2018).

⁶ *Russian Trolls and Bots Are Flooding Twitter with Ford-Kavanaugh Disinformation*, Quartz (Oct. 2, 2018).

Mr. Larry Page
Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Mr. Jack Dorsey
October 4, 2018
Page 3

- 3) Do your efforts to combat foreign influence include reviewing emerging divisive issues in American political and social life, such as the allegations of sexual assault against Judge Kavanaugh? If so, please describe the nature of these reviews, including how they are conducted and their frequency if such reviews are not continuous?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please provide a general update and responses to these questions with October 18, 2018. If you have any questions, please contact Gerald Leverich or Lisa Goldman of the Democratic Committee staff at (202) 225-3641.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member