



Russia Investigative Task Force Hearing with Social Media Companies

Opening Statement of Rep. K. Michael Conaway

November 1, 2017

Before we begin, I would like to take a brief moment of silence to remember the victims of yesterday's terrorist attack in New York City.

Appearing before the Committee today are Mr. Colin Stretch, the General Counsel of Facebook; Mr. Sean Edgett, the Acting General Counsel of Twitter and Mr. Kent Walker, the Senior Vice President and General Counsel of Google.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today to discuss a very important topic – Russia's use of social media platforms during the 2016 election.

As you know, this Committee has been investigating Russia's involvement in the 2016 election since the beginning of this year. As part of that investigation, we are examining the role that social media companies played in disseminating malign content produced and paid for by Russian actors, including the Russian government's propaganda arm, the Internet Research Agency. It is no secret that Russian actors used your social media platforms during and after the election cycle to communicate messages to the American public, many of which sought to sow discord, racial animus and division among our citizens. Such tactics by foreign adversaries are not new or novel, but the manner in which they can be employed using social media are unique.

For example, let's take a look at some of the Facebook advertisements identified as being created by Russian actors. These images were provided to the Committee in advance of today's hearing and represent a small sample of some of the images that appeared on computers and mobile devices between 2015 and 2017. These exhibits were not selected for political gain or shock value, but to provide those viewing this hearing a clear example of what we seek to discuss this afternoon. These exhibits represent some the most viewed Russian created Facebook advertisements from 2015-2017:



Exhibit #1 is an ad titled “Being Patriotic”. It was created on June 23, 2015 and received approximately 530 thousand ad impressions and 72 thousand ad clicks. It cost approximately 330 thousand Rubles or approximately \$5,700 US Dollars at today’s exchange rate.

Exhibit #2 is an ad titled “Blacktivist”. It was created on December 10, 2015 and received approximately 531 thousand ad impressions and 32 thousand ad clicks. It cost 121 thousand Rubles or approximately \$2,100 US Dollars at today’s exchange rate.

Exhibit #3 is an ad titled “South United”. It was created on October 14, 2016 and received approximately 511 thousand ad impressions and 40 thousand ad clicks. This ad cost approximately 78 thousand Rubles or approximately \$1,300 US Dollars at today’s exchange rate.

Exhibit #4 is an ad titled “Back the Badge”. It was created on October 19, 2016 and received approximately 1.3 million ad impressions and 73 thousand ad clicks. This ad cost approximately 111 thousand Rubles or approximately \$1,900 US Dollars at today’s exchange rate.

Exhibit #5 is an ad titled “Woke Blacks”. It was created on December 1, 2016 and received approximately 752 thousand ad impressions and 34 thousand ad clicks and cost approximately 58 thousand Rubles or approximately \$1,000 US Dollars at today’s exchange rate.

All three companies have a public responsibility to ensure that the content carried on your platforms is not produced by foreign adversaries seeking to harm our society and our democratic process. I submit this task is not easy in a democracy where free speech is safeguarded by the Constitution. Americans must always be free to pick and choose which stories and ads they seek to read, click or re-tweet. However, we must not let technology provide foreign enemies with a free pass to spread disinformation with the intent to divide us.

I thank you for the efforts your companies have recently made to address the harmful Russian influence on your platforms and the transparency with which you have made those changes.



I hope today's hearing will help our Committee and the public fully understand the extent to which Russian actors used your platforms during the 2016 election. We also hope your testimony will shed light on the relative impact of this hostile influence campaign as compared to other legitimate messaging campaigns during the same period, and how your companies distinguish between malign activities and free speech, to include whether there are differences on how Google, Facebook, and Twitter filter content in Western Democracies as opposed to China and Russia. We also expect that each of you will address your company's specific plans moving forward to help ensure that such activities do not occur again on your platforms.

With that, I look forward to a productive hearing. I now recognize the Ranking Member, Mr. Schiff, for five minutes, for any opening comments he would like to make.

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