

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 17, 2020

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

Adam Mosseri
Executive, Instagram
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Office, Alphabet Inc.
1600 Amphitheater Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Susan Wojcicki
Chief Executive Officer, YouTube
901 Cherry Ave
San Bruno, CA 94066

Jack Dorsey
Chief Executive Officer, Twitter
1355 Market Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg, Mr. Mosseri, Mr. Pichai, Ms. Wojcicki, and Mr. Dorsey:

As our country grapples with the spread of information designed to sow division and reduce Americans' confidence in the integrity of our elections, weak policies and poor enforcement of platform rules are damaging our democracy. Therefore, we write to express serious concern regarding election related disinformation and misinformation on your platforms.

Since 2016, your companies have taken important steps to stop the spread of false information related to elections and voting. While we appreciate the public airing of this information, foreign adversaries continue to target our elections and influence voters through social media. Accordingly, we strongly urge you to take additional action to ensure that the ads you sell and content you publish do not harm our democracy.

The Intelligence Community has confirmed — and according to the New York Times, some of your platforms have also confirmed — that our elections are being targeted by Russia and other foreign adversaries. At the same time, we are facing a global pandemic that is changing the way Americans vote.¹ Unprecedented steps are underway to make it safe and easy to vote, including increasing our country's capacity to allow Americans to cast a ballot by mail.

¹ *Statement by NCSN Director William Evanina: Election Threat Update for the American Public*, Office of the Director of National Intelligence (August 7, 2020) <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/press-releases/item/2139-statement-by-ncsc-director-william-evanina-election-threat-update-for-the-american-public>

Intelligence Bulletin, *Russia Likely to Continue Seeking to Undermine Faith in US Electoral Process*, Department of Homeland Security (September 3, 2020) https://www.scribd.com/document/474711820/DHS-Russia-Intel-Sept-3-2020-Voting-w-Redactions#from_embed

Sheera Frenkel and Julian E. Barnes, *Russians Again Targeting Americans With Disinformation, Facebook and Twitter Say*, New York Times (September 1, 2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/01/technology/facebook-russia-disinformation-election.html>

As some are working around the clock to ensure every voter can cast their ballot safely and securely, there is an epidemic of misinformation online about the voting process, including harmful lies about voting by mail. In July, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) warned that while the "disinformation risk to mail-in voting infrastructure and processes is similar to that of in-person voting...threat actors may leverage limited understanding regarding mail-in voting processes to mislead and confuse the public."² And the September intelligence bulletin noted that "Russia is likely to continue amplifying criticisms of vote-by-mail and shifting voting processes amidst the COVID-19 pandemic to undermine public trust in the electoral process."³

As you know, your platforms are a major source of information for many Americans. While your ability to identify and remove coordinated campaigns has improved since the 2016 election, disinformation is still thriving online and millions of users continue to see content created by foreign adversaries before it is removed. One report found that in 2019 alone, politically relevant disinformation reached over 158 million American users.⁴ Another recent report showed that nearly half of all top-performing posts on Facebook that mentioned voting by mail were false or misleading.⁵ Some researchers have concluded that despite efforts from online platforms to curb the spread of disinformation, more disinformation is reaching users ahead of the 2020 election than before the 2016 election.⁶

It is particularly concerning that there are platforms accepting payment for publishing political ads that contain misinformation about the voting process.⁷ Companies should not profit from efforts to disenfranchise voters.

In order to protect the right to vote and to help ensure our elections are free and fair, we urge all of your platforms to immediately implement the following measures ahead of the 2020 general election:

- Reject any political or issue ad that contains false or misleading claims about the voting process, including the voting by mail process.
- Broaden platform policies for content removal about misinformation on voting and elections.

² *Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience Note*, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, (July 28, 2020) https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/cisa-mail-in-voting-infrastructure-risk-assessment_508.pdf.

³ Josh Margolin and Lucien Bruggeman, *Russia is 'Amplifying' Claims of Mail-In Voter Fraud, Intel Bulletin Warns*, ABC News (Sept. 3, 2020), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/russia-amplifying-claims-mail-voter-fraud-intel-bulletin/story?id=72799959>.

⁴ *US 2020: Another Facebook Disinformation Election?* AVAAZ (November 5, 2019) https://avaazimages.avaaz.org/US_2020_report_1105_v04.pdf.

⁵ Ryan McCarthy, *"Outright Lies": Voting Misinformation Flourishes on Facebook*, (July 16, 2020) <https://www.propublica.org/article/outright-lies-voting-misinformation-flourishes-on-facebook>.

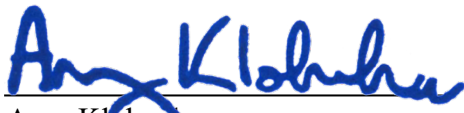
⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Isaac Stanley-Becker, *Google Greenlights Ads with 'Blatant Disinformation' About Voting By Mail*, Washington Post, (August 28, 2020) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/08/28/google-ads-mail-voting/>.

- Immediately remove the posts of any elected official, government official, or political party which contains falsehoods, conspiracy theories, or misrepresentations about the voting process, including voting by mail.
- Immediately remove posts that contain intimidating or threatening messages about voting, or intimidating or threatening posts that are targeted at voters.
- Increase cross-platform coordination for tracking, monitoring, and taking down disinformation campaigns, which often work across platforms simultaneously to amplify their message.
- Increase collaboration and communication efforts with public and private sector stakeholders, independent researchers, and civil society organizations to identify and eliminate threat actors.

We appreciate the steps you've taken since the 2016 elections to make your platforms more resilient against foreign interference, including working more closely with federal agencies and election officials. In the 47 days before the general election, we urge you to take additional actions to stop the exploitation of your platforms and protect the integrity of our democracy.

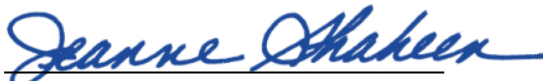
Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



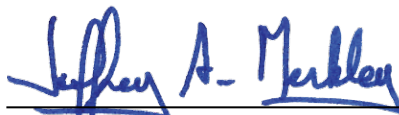
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



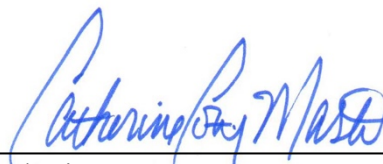
Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



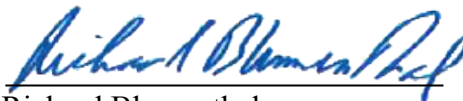
Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



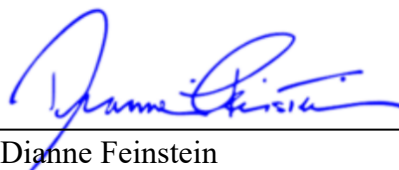
Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator