

OPEN HEARING ON FOREIGN INFLUENCE
OPERATIONS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS
(THIRD PARTY EXPERT WITNESSES)

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 1, 2018

U.S. Senate,
Select Committee on Intelligence,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:32 a.m. in Room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. Richard Burr (Chairman of the Committee) presiding.

Present: Senators Burr, Warner, Risch, Collins, Blunt, Lankford, Cotton, Cornyn, Feinstein, Wyden, Heinrich, King, Manchin, and Harris.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD BURR, CHAIRMAN, A U.S.

SENATOR FROM NORTH CAROLINA

Chairman Burr. I'd like to call the hearing to order.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses today: Dr. Todd Helmus,

Senior Behavioral Scientist at the RAND Corporation; Renee DiResta, Director of Research at New Knowledge; John Kelly, CEO and founder of Graphika; Laura Rosenberger, Director of the Alliance for Securing Democracy at the German Marshall Fund; and Dr. Phil Howard, Director of the Oxford Internet Institute.

Welcome to all of you. I thank you for being here today and for your willingness to share your expertise and insights with this Committee and, more importantly, with the American people.

We're here to discuss a threat to the Nation that this Committee takes every bit as seriously as terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, espionage and regional instability. Today we're talking about how social media platforms have enabled foreign influence operations against the United States.

Every member of this Committee and the American people understand what an attack on the integrity of our electoral process means. Election interference from abroad represents an intolerable assault on the democratic foundation this republic was built on.

The Committee, in a bipartisan fashion, has addressed this issue head on. In May, we released the initial findings of our investigation into Russia's targeting of election infrastructure during the 2016 election.

Today's hearing is an extension of that effort. But in some ways it highlights something far more sinister, the use of our

own rights and freedoms to weaken our country from within. It's also important that the American people know that these activities neither began nor ended with the 2016 election. As you can see on the one graph on display to my left, your right, the Kremlin began testing this capability on their domestic population several years ago, before using it against their foes in the Near Abroad and on the United States and Western democracies.

Even today, almost two years after the 2016 election, foreign actors continue an aggressive and pervasive influence campaign against the United States of America. Nothing underscores that fact more than yesterday's announcement by Facebook that they've identified over 30 new accounts that are not only causing chaos in the virtual domain, but also creating events on our streets with real Americans unknowingly participating.

These cyber actors are using social media platforms to spread disinformation, provoke societal conflict and undermine public faith in democratic institutions. There does not seem to be much debate about that.

I think it's also the case that social media isn't going anywhere anytime soon. It's part of how we exchange ideas, we stay connected, it binds us as a community, it gives voice to those that are voiceless. Social media is the modern public

forum, and it's being used to divide us.

This was never about elections. It is about the integrity of our society.

So how do you keep the good while getting rid of the bad? That's the fundamental question in front of this Committee and in front of the American people. And it's a complex problem that intertwines First Amendment freedoms with corporate responsibility, government regulation and the right of innovators to prosper from their own work.

Sixty percent of the U.S. population uses Facebook. A foreign power using the platform to influence how Americans see/think about one another is as much a public policy issue as it is a national security concern.

Crafting an elegant policy solution that's effective but not overly burdensome demands good faith and partnership between social media companies and this Committee. We hope to hear from those innovators in September, because you can't solve a problem like this by imposing a solution from 3,000 miles away. This requires a thoughtful and informed public policy debate and this Committee is uniquely positioned to foster that debate.

Last November, when we first welcomed the social media companies in an open hearing, I stressed then what this debate is and is not about. This isn't about relitigating the 2016

U.S. presidential elections. This isn't about who won or who lost. This is about national security. This is about corporate responsibility. And this is about the deliberate and multifaceted manipulation of the American people by agents of a foreign hostile government.

I thank you again for being here, for the work that you've done. Your analytic and technical expertise is indispensable to us getting this right. We cannot possibly formulate the right solution without first knowing the extent of the problem.

I'm hopeful this morning that as you offer your insights and your findings, that you'll also share your recommendations. We can't afford ineffective half-measures, let alone nothing at all.

While it's shocking to think that foreign actors used social networking and communication mediums that are so central to our lives in an effort to interfere with the core of our democracy, what is even more troubling is that it's still happening today. Nothing less than the integrity of our democratic institutions, processes and ideals is at stake.