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Opening Statement to Congress on Facebook and Foreign Influence

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[AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio]

Chairman Burr, Vice Chairman Warner, and Members of the Select Committee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. My written testimony goes into more detail about the actions we're taking to prevent election interference on Facebook, but I wanted to start by explaining how seriously we take these issues, and talk about some of the steps we're taking.

Free and fair elections are the foundation of any democracy. As Americans, they are part of our national identity. And that's why it's incumbent upon all of us to do all we can to protect our democratic process. That includes Facebook. At its best, Facebook plays a positive role in our democracy, enabling representatives to connect with their constituents, reminding people to register and to vote, and giving people a place to freely express their opinions about the issues that matter to them.



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However, we've also seen what can happen when our service is abused. As a bipartisan report from this committee said: Russia used social media as part of -- and I quote -- "a comprehensive and multifaceted campaign," "to sow discord, undermine democratic institutions, and interfere in U.S. elections and those of our allies."¹ We were too slow to spot this and too slow to act.

That is on us.

This interference was completely unacceptable. It violated the values of our company and of the country we love. Actions taken show how determined we are to do everything we can do to stop this from happening.

The threat we face is not new. America has always confronted attacks from determined, well-funded opponents who want to undermine our democracy. What is new is the tactics they are using. To stay ahead, we all need to work together, as Chairman Burr said -- government, law enforcement, industry, and experts from civil society. And that is why I'm grateful for the work this committee is doing.

At Facebook, we're investing in security for the long-term. As our defenses improve, bad actors learn and improve too, and that's why security is never a finished job:

We have more than doubled the number of people we have working in safety and security. And we now have over 20,000 people, and we are able to view reports in 50 languages, 24 hours a day.

Better machine learning and artificial intelligence have enabled us to be more proactive in finding abuse. In the first three months of 2018 alone over 85 percent of the violent content we took down, or added warning labels to, was identified by our technology before it was reported. These are expensive investments but that will not stop us. Because we know they're critical,



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Our first line of defense is finding and shutting down fake accounts, the source of much of the inauthentic activity we see on Facebook. Authenticity matters because people need to trust that the content they're seeing is valid; and they need to trust the connections they make. We are now blocking millions of attempts to register false accounts each and every day.

We're making progress on *fake news*. We're getting rid of the economic incentives to create it, and we're limiting the distribution it gets on Facebook. We demote articles rated by third [party fact] checkers as "false." We warn people who have shared them or who are about to share them. And we show them related articles to give them more facts.

We've also taken strong steps to prevent abuse and increase transparency in advertising. Today on Facebook, you can go to any page and see all the ads that page is running, even if they wouldn't be shown to you. For political and issue ads, you can also s[ee] who paid for the ads, how much was spent, and the demographics of the people who saw them. We're also going to require people running large pages with large audiences in the United States to go through an authorization process and confirm their identity.

These steps won't stop everyone who's trying to game the system, but they will make it *lot* harder. As these past few weeks and months have shown, this work is starting to pay off. In July, we removed 32 pages and accounts involved in coordinated, inauthentic behavior. In August, we removed 650 pages and accounts that originated in Iran, as well as additional pages and account -- accounts from Russia. And just last week, we took down 58 pages and accounts from Myanmar, many of which were posing as news organizations.

We are focused -- as I know you are -- on the upcoming U.S. midterms and on elections around the world. Our efforts in recent elections, from Germany to Italy to Mexico to the Alabama special Senate election, show us that the investments we are making are yielding results.



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We also know, as Chairman Burr said, that we cannot stop interference by ourselves. We're working with outside experts, industry partners, and governments, including law enforcement, to share information about threats and prevent abuse. We're getting better at finding and stopping our opponents, from financially motivated troll farms to sophisticated military intelligence operations. We don't have access to the intelligence government[s] have access to, so we don't always know exactly who is behind these attacks, or their motives. And that's why we will continue working closely with law enforcement.

Chairman Burr, I want to thank you for your leadership.

Vice Chairman Warner, I want to thank you for your white paper which has so many ideas on how we can work together to strengthen our defense.

Senators, let me be clear: We are more determined than our opponents, and we will keep fighting. When bad actors try to use our site, we will block them. When content violates our policies, we will take it down. And when our opponents use new techniques, we will share them so we can strengthen our collective efforts.

Everyone here today knows that this is an arms race, and that means we need to be ever more vigilant. As Chairman Burr has noted, nothing less than the integrity of our democratic institutions, processes, and ideals is at stake. We agree. And we will work with all of you to meet this challenge.

Thank you.

¹ 3 July 2018. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Bipartisan Report on Russian Activities Relating to the 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections.