

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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October 31, 2017

Mr. Lawrence E. Page
Co-Founder, Chief Executive Officer
Alphabet Inc.
1600 Amphitheatre Pkwy
Mountain View, CA 94043-1351

Dear Mr. Page,

The Committee on Science, Space, and Technology is continuing its oversight of what appears to be a concerted effort by the Russian government to influence the U.S. energy market. On September 26, 2017, the Committee asked Alphabet to produce documents and information related to Russian attempts to exploit Alphabet's social media platform to influence the U.S. energy market. In response to that request, Alphabet has been actively engaged with Committee staff in planning to provide the information necessary for the Committee's ongoing oversight of this important matter. Today, I am writing to provide additional information showing Russian antagonists posed as Native Americans in an effort to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline. Congress has a responsibility to bring transparency to social media when their content affects important matters of American public policy.

Russian meddling in the U.S. energy market is well documented in the public domain. Subsequent to the Committee's initial request, it was revealed by the media that Russian antagonists had in fact sought to influence the U.S. energy market by exploiting American social media platforms. On October 23, 2017, *BuzzFeed News* reported that Instagram—a social media platform owned by Facebook—was utilized by Russian antagonists to influence the U.S. energy market.¹ Specifically, the article focuses on an Instagram account, which was identified by the Russian media outlet RBC “as one of 180 connected to a Russian troll farm intent on exploiting existing divisions and social movements in the United States.”² This account was exploited by “shar[ing] images related to Native American social and political issues—including the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline.”³ According to *BuzzFeed*, “the accounts uncovered

¹ Ryan C. Brooks, *How Russians Attempted to Use Instagram to Influence Native Americans*, BUZZFEED NEWS (Oct. 23, 2017), <https://www.buzzfeed.com/amphtml/ryancbrooks/russian-troll-efforts-extended-to-standing-rock>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

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by RBC center around highly visible tension points in American politics,” including “protests against pipelines that have become a flashpoint between conservatives and progressives.”⁴

This recent revelation confirms the Committee’s suspicion: Russia has exploited American social media platforms in an effort to influence the U.S. energy market. The Committee remains interested in any and all information that Alphabet has regarding Russian entities purchasing anti-fracking and anti-fossil fuel advertisements or promotions on Alphabet. I am hopeful that this information will assist Alphabet in its efforts to collect documents and information responsive to my September 26, 2017, letter. The Committee looks forward to receiving responsive information or a briefing on the status of production from Alphabet by November 14, 2017. The Committee appreciates your continued efforts to address this critically important issue.

If you have any questions, please contact Tom Connally or Travis Voyles of the Committee staff at 202-225-6371. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Lamar Smith
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Ranking Member, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

⁴ *Id.*