

# Warner, Klobuchar, Coons, Blumenthal Press Facebook on Reports That They Retaliated Against Critics

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WASHINGTON- U.S. Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Mark Warner (D-VA), Chris Coons (D-DE), and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) pressed Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg to respond to reports that the company used contractors to retaliate against or spread intentionally inflammatory information about their critics. Since the 2016 election, both the government and Facebook internal investigations have revealed that the company failed to adequately protect the data of its 2.2 billion users. Recent reports—including [one from the New York Times](#)—allege that Facebook has taken significant steps to undermine critics, including hiring partisan political consultants to retaliate and spread intentionally inflammatory information about people who have criticized Facebook, which, if not properly disclosed, may have campaign finance implications.

**“We are gravely concerned by recent reports indicating that your company used contractors to retaliate against or spread intentionally inflammatory information about your critics,”** the senators wrote. **“In addition, the staggering amount of data that Facebook has collected on both its users and people who have not subscribed to or consented to use of the platform, raises concern that the company could improperly or illegally use its vast financial and data resources against government officials and critics seeking to protect the public and our democracy.”**

**“Both elected officials and the general public have rightfully questioned whether Facebook is capable of regulating its own conduct.”**

Russia attempted to influence the 2016 presidential election by buying and placing political ads on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google. The content and purchaser(s) of those online advertisements are a mystery to the public because of outdated laws that have failed to keep up with evolving technology. The *Honest Ads Act*, led by Klobuchar, Warner, and the late

Senator John McCain (R-AZ) and cosponsored by Coons and Blumenthal, would prevent foreign actors from influencing our elections by ensuring that political ads sold online, including social media platforms like Facebook, are covered by the same rules as ads sold on TV, radio, and print.

The full text of the letter can be found below:

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We are gravely concerned by recent reports indicating that your company used contractors to retaliate against or spread intentionally inflammatory information about your critics.

Since the 2016 election, both the government and your own internal investigations have revealed that your company failed to adequately protect the data of its 2.2 billion users. Your company also failed to implement protocols to prevent manipulation by foreign adversaries working to undermine America's political system. Both elected officials and the general public have rightfully questioned whether Facebook is capable of regulating its own conduct.

According to recent reports, your company hired contractors to retaliate and spread intentionally inflammatory information about people who have criticized Facebook, which, if not properly disclosed, may have campaign finance and other potential legal implications. In addition, the staggering amount of data that Facebook has collected on both its users and people who have not subscribed to or consented to use of the platform, raises concern that the company could improperly or illegally use its vast financial and data resources against government officials and critics seeking to protect the public and our democracy.

In light of these concerns, we respectfully request you answer the following questions:

1. To your knowledge, did your company hire any entity – including, but not limited to research firms and contractors – to collect or find information to be

used in retaliation against people who criticized Facebook, including elected officials who were scrutinizing your company?

2. Did your company hire any entity – including, but not limited to research firms and contractors – to spread negative or intentionally inflammatory information in retaliation against people who criticized Facebook, including elected officials who were scrutinizing your company?

3. Did your company – or any entity affiliated with or hired by your company – ever use any of the vast financial and data resources available to Facebook in retaliation against people who criticized Facebook, including elected officials who were scrutinizing your company?

4. Did your company – or any entity affiliated with or hired by your company – ever seek to conceal information related to foreign interference with the 2016 U.S. election from the public or government investigators?

5. Did your company – or any entity affiliated with or hired by your company – ever contact any media outlets with negative or misleading information, or suggest, promote, or amplify negative or misleading social media about your critics, including elected officials scrutinizing your company?

6. How much money have you expended or paid other entities to collect, find, spread or amplify information about people who have criticized Facebook, including elected officials scrutinizing your company? Has any of that spending been publically disclosed?

7. Some of us have requested that the Deputy Attorney General expand the scope of the Department of Justice's existing investigations to include the latest reports that Facebook hired contractors to retaliate and spread negative information about people who criticized the company. If the Department's investigation is expanded to include this recent report, will you commit to cooperating with any investigation into this matter?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,

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