

October 20, 2017

Dear Senator:

Our reform organizations and experts urge you to support and cosponsor the Honest Ads Act, bipartisan legislation introduced by Senators Amy Klobuchar, Mark Warner and John McCain to address the need for new rules to expose efforts undertaken by foreign interests to intervene in U.S. elections.

The goals of the Honest Ads Act include preventing foreign interference in future elections and improving transparency of online political ads. The Act provides a framework for addressing the essential need to inform the American people about political advertisements being run on the Internet by foreign interests.

It is widely agreed that Russia conducted numerous cyber-attacks on our democracy in order to intervene in and manipulate the 2016 presidential election. This included the use of false, misleading and fake information distributed on platforms such as Facebook, Google and Twitter, among others.

The integrity of our elections and the protection of our democracy are at stake in effectively addressing the kinds of attacks on our political system carried out by Russia. Preventing a foreign adversary from sabotaging our constitutional system of representative government is a matter of the highest urgency.

In order to address the problems involved here, two avenues need to be pursued.

First, legislation is necessary to ensure that the American people are informed about online election-intervention activities taking place on the Internet, whether undertaken by Russia or by any other foreign interest seeking to interfere in our elections. The Honest Ads Act addresses this pressing need and, where possible, the need to prevent these activities.

Second, in addition to legislation, Facebook, Google, Twitter and other platforms that were used by the Russians have a critical role to play in solving this problem. These platforms were used to distribute fake and misleading political information to the American people. They need to recognize their corporate responsibility to play a lead role in exposing and, where possible, preventing these activities in the future.

The Act requires digital platforms to maintain a public file of “qualified political advertisements,” including ads that contain a message relating to any political matter of national importance. The file would contain a digital copy of the advertisement, a description of the audience the advertisement targets, the number of views generated, the dates and times of publication, the rates charged, and the contract information of the purchaser.

The Act also requires broadcasters, cable and satellite television providers and online platforms to make reasonable efforts to ensure that the qualified political advertisements they disseminate

are not purchased by a foreign national, directly or indirectly.

The Act also amends the definition of “electioneering communications” to include paid Internet and digital advertisements. Currently only broadcast television, radio, cable and satellite communications are included. This will ensure that digital ads that refer to federal candidates in the immediate pre-election period are subject to existing campaign finance disclosure requirements.

Our reform organizations and experts urge you to support and cosponsor the Honest Ads Act, and thereby to publicly commit to taking action to prevent Russia or any other foreign interest from intervening in or manipulating future U.S elections.

Signers include:

American Oversight  
Brennan Center for Justice  
Campaign Legal Center  
Center for Popular Democracy  
Center for Responsive Politics  
Coalition for Integrity  
Common Cause  
CREW  
Democracy 21  
Demos  
End Citizens United  
Every Voice  
Florida Consumer Action Network  
Free Speech for People  
Issue One  
League of Women Voters  
Kathleen Clark  
Norm Eisen, chief White House ethics lawyer for President Obama, 2009-2011  
People For the American Way  
Public Citizen  
Represent.Us  
Revolving Door Project  
Richard Painter, chief White House ethics lawyer for President Bush, 2005-2007  
Small Planet Institute  
Stand Up America  
Sunlight Foundation  
U.S. PIRG