



One Hundred Fifteenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

March 21, 2018

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Ms. Sheryl K. Sandberg
Chief Operating Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg and Ms. Sandberg,

Last week, I learned that Cambridge Analytica (Cambridge) – the data and analytics start up funded by Republican donor Robert Mercer and heralded for helping President Trump win the 2016 Presidential election – gathered the personal data of between 30 and 50 million American Facebook users without their knowledge or permission.¹ As the Ranking Member of the Committee on Homeland Security and the co-chair Congressional Task Force on Election Security, I am disturbed to learn of one more way Facebook’s platform may have been unwittingly manipulated for political purposes, and are concerned that Facebook has been slow to identify, acknowledge, mitigate, and respond to misuse of its platform and its users’ data.

As you are well aware, Christopher Wylie, a Cambridge employee who helped found the firm revealed that the firm failed to delete data obtained in violation of Facebook’s terms of use,² and

¹ Philip Bump, “Everything You Need to Know About the Cambridge Analytica-Facebook Debacle,” *The Washington Post* (March 19, 2018), available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2018/03/19/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-cambridge-analytica-facebook-debacle/?utm_term=.c31b13dc68e0; Matthew Rosenberg, et. al, “How Trump Consultants Exploited the Facebook Data of Millions,” *The New York Times* (March 17, 2018), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-trump-campaign.html>.

² Matt Rosoff, “Facebook Suspends Cambridge Analytica for Misuse of User Data, which Cambridge Denies,” *CNBC* (March 16, 2018), available at <https://www.cbc.com/2018/03/16/facebook-bans-cambridge-analytica.html>.

that he used that data to target U.S. voters with personalized political advertisements.³ More troubling, he has exposed the real Cambridge’s actual motive: “They want to fight a culture war in America. . . . Cambridge Analytica was supposed to be the arsenal of weapons to fight that culture war.”⁴

According to several media reports, Facebook has been aware – on some level – of Cambridge’s data collection activities for several years.⁵ And, according to *The Guardian*, Sandy Parakilas, Facebook’s platform operations manager responsible for investigating data breaches by third-party developers, warned Facebook executives between 2011 and 2012 that its “lax approach to data protection risked a major breach.”⁶ He insists that Facebook could have prevented data breaches of 30 to 50 million American Facebook had it proactively audited developers that used its data to understand how they were using it.⁷ Instead, Facebook appeared to pursue a course blissful ignorance.⁸

While I am encouraged by the remedial actions Facebook has taken since the Cambridge story broke, such as hiring a digital forensics firm to audit Cambridge, Facebook learned that the firm misused its users’ data over two years ago.⁹ Accordingly, I cannot be confident Facebook would have initiated the audit of Cambridge had the firm’s misuse of data not been revealed by the media. That is troubling.

I am concerned that Facebook has not only failed to anticipate the various ways its platform and the data it collects might be misused, but also that it is not taking seriously the potential consequences. I learned that Facebook’s Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) is leaving because of disagreements about how much information to disclose about the misuse of its platform in the months leading up to the 2016 election, with the exiting CISO advocating for more disclosure.¹⁰ Moreover, Facebook has reduced the number staff working for the Chief Information Security Officer from 120 to 3.¹¹ That gives the impression that Facebook would rather turn a blind eye to misuse of its platform than tackle it head on.

The Facebook platform is virtually ubiquitous. People rely on it to share memories, ideas, and news. But even good technology can be exploited by bad actors, and I am concerned that

³ Zameena Mejjia, “Meet Christopher Wylie, the Millennial Whistleblower Behind Facebook’s Data Controversy,” *CNBC* (March 19, 2018), available at <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/19/4-facts-about-facebook-data-whistleblower-christopher-wylie.html>.

⁴ Rosenberg, *supra* n.1.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Paul Lewis, “‘Utterly Horrifying’: Ex-Facebook Insider Says Covert Data Harvesting Was Routine,” *The Guardian* (March 20, 2018), available at <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/20/facebook-data-cambridge-analytica-sandy-parakilas>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.* (Parakilas “said one Facebook executive advised him against looking too deeply at how the data was being used, warning him: “‘Do you really want to see what you’ll find?’”).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Nicole Perlroth, et.al, “Facebook Exit Hints at Dissent on Handling of Russian Trolls,” *The New York Times* (March 19, 2018), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/19/technology/facebook-alex-stamos.html>.

¹¹ *Id.*

Facebook continues to learn this lesson the hard way. From fake Russian accounts spreading fake news to firms harvesting and using users' data without their knowledge or permission, Facebook has appeared caught off guard when it has learned its platform was used for nefarious purposes. The consequences of failing to anticipate and aggressively address misuse of the Facebook platform are serious, and they should be taken seriously.

Accordingly, I request that you provide a briefing outlining not only how Facebook is addressing known efforts to undermine or manipulate our elections, but also how Facebook is proactively identifying ways bad actors might manipulate its platform and implementing solutions to close or mitigate those vulnerabilities.

Thank you for your attention to this request. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Alison Northrop, Chief Director of Oversight, at (202) 226-2616.

Sincerely,



Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security