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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6325

October 9, 2019

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chair
Senate Committee on Rules and Administration
305 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt:

In light of the Senate Intelligence Committee's Report titled "Russia's Use of Social Media", I write to respectfully request that you schedule an immediate markup of the *Honest Ads Act*.

Yesterday, the Intelligence Committee published a second report (volume II) on its bipartisan investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election. As a member of the Intelligence Committee, you know better than most that the Committee's investigation and the associated reports have been conducted in a bipartisan fashion with the goal of getting to the bottom of how Russia attacked our democracy so that we can prevent future attacks. The report specifically addresses how the Russian government attacked our democracy by working to exploit social media platforms to spread misinformation, sow division, and undermine our political system.

In addition to providing information on how Russia carried out its attack, the Report makes a series of recommendations for how Congress can work to combat the spread of disinformation. Specifically, the Report urges Congress to "examine legislative approaches to ensuring Americans know the sources of online political advertisements." Page 80 of the report contains the following recommendation:

The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 requires political advertisements on television, radio and satellite to disclose the sponsor of the advertisement. The same requirements should apply online. This will also help to ensure that the IRA or any similarly situated actors cannot use paid advertisements for purposes of foreign interference.

I agree with the Committee's recommendation and have introduced bipartisan legislation, the *Honest Ads Act*, with Vice-Chairman Warner and Chairman Graham. Our legislation would ensure political and issue ads sold online have the same transparency and disclosure requirements as ads sold on tv, radio, and satellite. The *Honest Ads Act* has broad support from non-partisan experts on disinformation campaigns and transparency in political advertising. Companion legislation in the House of Representatives is led by Representatives Derek Kilmer (D-WA) and Elise Stefanik (R-NY) and is supported by a large bipartisan group of cosponsors.

There is strong bipartisan support for the *Honest Ads Act* because people have a right to know who is behind the political ads that target them and it defies logic to argue that there should be no rules for ads sold online, especially when so much money is being spent on digital ads.

As the 2020 elections approach, experts estimate that billions will be spent on online political ads and the reach of online platforms far surpasses that of broadcast, satellite, and tv. The largest internet platform has over 210 million American users. The largest cable provider only has 22 million subscribers – nearly an order of magnitude smaller. By requiring the same rules across all advertising platforms, we can limit foreign attempts to influence our elections, increase transparency in political advertising, and promote greater accountability.

Many online platforms recognize that they have a duty to address the problem and have begun to voluntarily comply with portions of the *Honest Ads Act*. While this is a positive step, it is not a substitute for passing legislation and has created a patchwork of solutions whereby there are no standards for transparency and no accountability for advertisers and platforms. This is an unacceptable status quo for our democracy.

Our top intelligence and law enforcement officials continue to sound the alarm that foreign adversaries are *currently* using social media platforms to interfere in our political system and today's report reinforces that fact. Time is of the essence for us to take action. I strongly urge you to schedule a markup of the *Honest Ads Act* as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Rules and Administration