



Issued 11/5/18

Senators Tell Facebook to Fix the Bugs in its Political Ad System

Facebook's attempts to stop foreign governments from buying political ads on its platform appear to have major loopholes—and two Democratic senators are not happy. On Friday, Sens. Amy Klobuchar and Mark Warner called on Facebook to fix the problem, which can reportedly let anyone buy political ads under almost any name you like, including ISIS or Vice President Mike Pence. "It is increasingly clear that major gaps exist in Facebook's efforts, potentially allowing adversaries to exploit your platform with continued disinformation efforts," the senators wrote in a letter to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg about the problems. In April, Zuckerberg said Facebook would verify the buyers of political and issue-based ads on the platform. To get verified, you need to supply a residential mailing address and a picture of a US passport or driver's license, along with the last 4 digits of your Social Security number. In addition, Facebook began requiring political ads to list who sponsored the advertisement. The problem is that authorized political ad buyers can place almost whatever text they want in the "paid for by" field for the ad, according to The New York Times. Vice News tested the system using the names of all 100 sitting US senators, including Mitch McConnell and Chuck Schumer, and succeeded. "The fact Facebook's new security tools allow users to intentionally misidentify who placed political ads is unacceptable," Sens. Klobuchar and Warner wrote. The loopholes also suggest Facebook is failing to use human reviewers to vet political ads, the senators added. Simply checking the IDs of political ad buyers also may not enough to stop foreign governments from gaming the system. Earlier this year, the US government indicted 13 Russian nationals for exploiting social media in an attempt

to influence voters during the 2016 US election. Allegedly, the Russians stole the identities of several US citizens to help them buy ads over the social media sites.