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ADAM B. SCHIFF

MEMBER OF CONGRESS • 28TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

July 15, 2019

Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Google LLC
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai:

In written testimony submitted to the Senate Intelligence Committee last fall, a Google representative described how state-sponsored entities used Google products to disseminate information to interfere with America's 2016 elections.¹ I appreciate the ongoing dialogue we have had with Google in the time since on the topic of disinformation and coordinated inauthentic behavior on your platforms by foreign and domestic actors. As we look ahead to the 2020 election, though, I am gravely concerned the experience of 2016 may have just been the prologue.

In June, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence held an open hearing on the national security challenges of "deepfake" images and videos generated using machine learning to depict events, actions, or speech that never occurred. As you are aware, manipulated or misleading media is already a constant feature online, but deepfake technology has the potential to make the problem far worse.

The tools to create deepfakes are widely accessible and quickly improving, which means developing sophisticated disinformation will no longer be the sole purview of well-resourced foreign adversaries, but of anyone with a computer. Furthermore, global platforms like Google and YouTube can catapult a compelling lie into the conversations of millions of users around the world before the truth has a chance to catch up. The consequences for our democracy could be devastating: a timely, convincing deepfake video of a candidate going viral on a platform like YouTube could hijack a race—and even alter the course of history.

The nation saw a small preview of the havoc a well-timed deepfake could wreak in our current political environment when a crudely modified video of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi was posted on several online platforms, including YouTube, in May. This manually edited video was not a deepfake and was easily debunked, but for millions of people who viewed it before platforms removed it or flagged it as misleading, the damage was already done.

Google, YouTube, and other companies and platforms have taken a variety of actions since 2016 to address disinformation campaigns, but I am concerned they remain unprepared and vulnerable

¹ Kent Walker, "Written Congressional Testimony." Submitted to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, September 5, 2018.

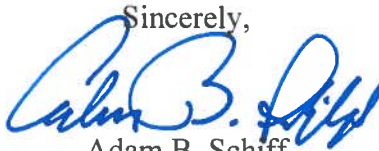
to sophisticated and determined adversaries. With voting in the first 2020 primaries less than eight months away, I encourage you to use this time to prepare for what may come so we are not in the position in the weeks and months after the election of wishing we would have done things differently or acted more quickly.

Developing an effective response to the pernicious potential of deepfakes on platforms in which virality is a central feature is a particularly pressing concern. Accordingly, I ask that you address the following questions regarding deepfake and related content on Google platforms, including YouTube:

1. How many YouTube users viewed the manually altered video of Speaker Pelosi before YouTube removed it? What triggered the review process before the video was taken down, and how long did the review take to complete?
2. Does Google have a written policy on deepfake content on YouTube or its other platforms, including use in advertising? If so, will you provide it in response to this letter? If not, are you developing such a policy and when will it be finalized?
3. Are fake images or videos that realistically portray individuals saying or doing something they never did allowed on YouTube, including use in advertising? Under what circumstances, if any, would Google remove such content and block its upload?
4. Is Google conducting research into techniques for automatically detecting deepfakes and other forms of machine-manipulated media on its platforms? To the extent machine-manipulated media is detected upon upload to a Google platform, will Google take specific steps to dampen the virality of such content, take it down completely, or require a human review for politically relevant content?

Thank you for your attention to these issues. Given the importance of these challenges and the short time we have remaining to harden our democracy against further foreign interference, I request that you respond no later than July 31, 2019.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Adam B. Schiff".

Adam B. Schiff
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

CC Susan Wojcicki, CEO of YouTube