

Facebook CEO visits lawmakers amid push for tech oversight

September 19 2019, by Marcy Gordon



In this April 11, 2018, file photo, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg arrives to testify before a House Energy and Commerce hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington. Facebook said Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2019, that it expects to name the first members of a new quasi-independent oversight board by year-end. The oversight panel, which the social network first discussed publicly last November, will rule on thorny content issues, such as when Facebook or Instagram posts constitute hate speech. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik, File)

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg visited lawmakers Thursday to discuss potential regulation of the tech industry, particularly when it comes to the collection of users' personal data on their platforms.

Zuckerberg is discussing oversight of the industry in private meetings with senators including Mark Warner, D-Va., vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee; Mike Lee, R-Utah, a senior member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Josh Hawley, R-Mo., an outspoken conservative critic of Big Tech.

Congress has been debating a [privacy law](#) that could sharply rein in the ability of companies like Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple to collect and make money off users' personal data. A national law, which would be the first of its kind in the U.S., could allow people to see or prohibit use of their data.

Acting pre-emptively, Zuckerberg last spring called for tighter regulations to protect consumers' data, control harmful online content, and ensure election integrity and data portability. The internet "needs new rules," he said.

Facebook, a social media giant with nearly 2.5 billion users, is under heavy scrutiny from lawmakers and regulators following a series of privacy scandals and amid accusations of abuse of its market power to squash competition.



In this April 11, 2018, file photo, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg testifies before a House Energy and Commerce hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington about the use of Facebook data to target American voters in the 2016 election and data privacy. Zuckerberg will be in Washington Thursday, Sept. 19, 2019, to meet with lawmakers and talk about internet regulation. The company said the meetings are not public and it did not give details on whom Zuckerberg is meeting with and what, exactly, he'll discuss. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik, File)

The Justice Department, the Federal Trade Commission and the House Judiciary antitrust subcommittee are all conducting antitrust investigations of the big tech companies, and a bipartisan group of state attorneys general has opened a competition probe specifically of Facebook.

It is Zuckerberg's first public visit to Washington since he testified before Congress last spring about privacy, election interference and other issues.

At Facebook's request, Warner helped organize a dinner meeting in Washington Wednesday night for Zuckerberg and a group of senators.

"The participants had a discussion touching on multiple issues, including the role and responsibility of social media platforms in protecting our democracy, and what steps Congress should take to defend our elections, protect consumer data, and encourage competition in the social media space," Rachel Cohen, a spokeswoman for Warner, said in a statement.

Warner and Hawley have proposed legislation that would force the tech giants to tell users what data they're collecting from them and how much it's worth. The proposal goes to the heart of Big Tech's hugely profitable business model of commerce in users' [personal data](#). The companies gather vast data on what users read and like, and leverage it to help advertisers target their messages to individuals they want to reach.

The tech companies view with particular alarm a separate legislative proposal from Hawley that would require them to prove to regulators that they're not using political bias to filter content. Failing to secure a bias-free audit from the government would mean a social media platform loses its long-held immunity from legal action.

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Citation: Facebook CEO visits lawmakers amid push for tech oversight (2019, September 19) retrieved 8 December 2023 from

<https://techxplore.com/news/2019-09-facebook-ceo-lawmakers-tech-oversight.html>

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