

Musk, Zuckerberg visit US congress to discuss AI

September 13 2023, by Alex PIGMAN



Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta, the parent company of Facebook, attends a US Senate forum on artificial intelligence in Washington, DC, on September 13, 2023.

Big tech bigwigs including Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg traveled to

Capitol Hill on Wednesday to share their plans for artificial intelligence as the US prepares to draw up legislation to better control the technology.

Senator Chuck Schumer, the Democratic majority leader of the US Senate, has planned a series of so-called AI Innovation forums, closed door meetings where lawmakers can quiz tech leaders about the technology that has taken the world by storm since the release of ChatGPT last year.

Europe is well advanced in its own AI Act and the pressure is on US lawmakers to avoid falling behind and seeing AI overwhelm society, with lost jobs, rampant disinformation and other consequences, before it is too late.

"Today, we begin an enormous and complex and vital undertaking: building a foundation for bipartisan AI policy that Congress can pass," Schumer told the meeting, according to remarks shared with the media.

"In past situations when things were this difficult, the natural reaction...was to ignore the problem and let someone else do the job. But with AI we can't be like ostriches sticking our heads in the sand," he said.

OpenAI CEO and ChatGPT creator Sam Altman and Microsoft founder Bill Gates also attended the forum, which was closed to the press.

"I'm very optimistic about (AI), but it doesn't mean that there won't be some rockiness along the way," Altman said as he entered the meeting.

"I have been very impressed with our interactions with lawmakers even though I know our industry loves to dig on them," he added.

The three hour morning session covered a broad range of AI issues including its dangers and potential, with participants agreeing that government had some role in dealing with the fallout from AI.



SpaceX, Twitter and electric car maker Tesla CEO Elon Musk, arrives for a US Senate bipartisan Artificial Intelligence (AI) Insight Forum at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, on September 13, 2023.

'Service to humanity'

Musk praised Schumer for doing "a service to humanity here, along with the support of the rest of the Senate. And I think something good will come of this."

Uncurtailed AI, the tycoon added to reporters after the meeting, "is potentially harmful to all humans everywhere."

Whether the US congress can pass legislation to curb AI innovators with clear rules remains an open question, given the deep political divisions in Washington and the coming elections in 2024.

While both sides agree that tech can have very negative effects on everyday life, the parties often differ on what the solutions might be.

Tech companies also lobby hard to maintain a light touch regulatory regime that is pro-business and preserves innovation.

Some senators complained that the meeting was closed to the public and gave too much leeway to tech giants to influence lawmakers.

"This is not how it should be," said Senator Josh Hawley, a Republican who works closely on AI issues.

"Senator Schumer has talked about tech for two years now and he hasn't put a single significant tech bill on the floor," he complained.

The meeting was also the first known encounter between Musk and Zuckerberg since the Tesla CEO proposed a cage fight with his Meta counterpart.

Musk also shared the room with Gates, with whom he has a testy relationship, according to a best-selling biography of the Tesla and SpaceX chief that was released on Tuesday.

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