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Weekly Lobbying Articles

April 12, 2018

Albuquerque Journal

April 12, 2018

Poll shows NM voters want campaign finance reform

<https://www.abqjournal.com/1157738/poll-shows-nm-voters-want-campaign-finance-reform.html>

With thousands of young people on the march, women activated by the “#Me Too” movement, and a new crop of candidates for state elections, this year’s elections could be an indication of our state’s appetite for reforming a system that my organization, Common Cause New Mexico, has often found wanting.

Common Cause is a non-partisan organization that does not endorse candidates, but like all ordinary citizens, we have a vested interest in a functioning democratic system which represents the voices of everyday people. We’ve been focused on controlling the influence of big money and special interests on elections and the decision-making process, guaranteeing access for qualified voters, and holding our representatives to high ethical standards. We think it’s what democracy looks like.

This year we asked some different questions in our annual poll and found a few reasons to be optimistic.

First, the poll, taken by Research and Polling Inc. in January, found that only 24 percent of the 452 voters sampled felt New Mexico was on the right track, a much higher level of discontent than in the 2014 elections. It also showed an appetite for reforms never before taken seriously – things like paying legislators, which 54 percent support, and lengthening the legislative sessions, which 65 percent want to do. And along with the usual high level of support for things like transparency for PAC, lobbyist and campaign activities, there was something new – 60 percent of respondents said that they would be more likely to support candidates who push for campaign reforms like these.

That gives us reason to hope. Campaign finance has never been a flashy issue. It’s rarely mentioned in debates. But we think it’s foundational to a functioning democracy. Everyone deserves to have their own voice heard in decisions affecting their families, and to also know who is behind the curtain affecting the outcome.

With these poll results, we now think the public is listening, too.

This month we’re shouting our priorities from the rooftops, and circulating our pro-democracy agenda to candidates and political organizations of all stripes. According to polling data – our own and others’ – many of these issues have had the overwhelming support of voters for years, but they always have great difficulty crossing the finishing line.

Here's a sampling of what we think a pro-democracy agenda looks like:

- Online and automatic voter registration to allow people to vote easily.
- Open primaries to allow decline-to-state and independent voters to participate in primaries.
- An independent, non-partisan ethics commission to make sure elected officials, lobbyists and contractors play by the rules.
- Maintenance of state campaign contribution limits to stem the tide of big money in state elections.
- Disclosure of all political contributions and expenditures from lobbyists, PACs and candidates, in accordance with the constitution.
- Citizen-funded elections using small-donor public financing, which matches small citizen contributions with public funds to enable ordinary people to participate meaningfully and curb special interests and wealthy donors.
- Complete disclosure of activities, contributions and expenditures of lobbyists aimed at influencing the policy-making process.
- A two-year waiting period before lawmakers can become lobbyists.
- An independent, non-partisan redistricting commission to ensure competitive, fair elections where every vote counts equally and the outcome is not rigged by maps drawn to maximize partisan or incumbent advantage.

Voters need to know whether candidates running for office in New Mexico support these common-sense measures. At Common Cause New Mexico, we consider them buttresses to strengthen the pillars of our democracy – fair and equal representation of qualified voters, honest and accountable public officials, and a transparent government. The only way to find out is to ask them at the next candidate forum, fundraiser or community event.

KVRR

April 11, 2018

Represent Fargo Fighting Political Corruption In North Dakota

<http://www.kvrr.com/2018/04/11/represent-fargo-working-fight-political-corruption-north-dakota/>

In all the years Phil Davenport has been on this earth, he says there's one thing that never continues to change in North Dakota politics: corruption.

"People are using large amounts of money and incentives to influence our elections and influence what the electors are doing," said Davenport, an organizer of Represent Fargo.

North Dakota received a "D-" grade for political corruption from the Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit investigative journalism organization.

Now an anti-corruption group called Represent Fargo is working to change that.

“In this one amendment that we’re working on, it will prohibit lobbyists from giving any money or any gifts or bundling any donations to any official,” Davenport said.

Represent Fargo collected signatures to get the anti–corruption amendment added to November’s ballot at their first meeting.

Members say part of the reason they believe it’s already looking like a bright future is because political corruption is a bipartisan issue.

“We all know it’s there and here’s a way we can possibly deal with it,” Davenport said.

Some say they also believe the support comes from people looking to get more involved in politics at both the state and national level.

“Right now, politics has gotten divisive. It’s important to have issues that people can get behind and get excited about,” said Whitney Oxendahl, Represent Fargo chapter leader.

Represent Fargo is the local chapter of Represent.Us, the United States’ largest grassroots anti–corruption campaign.

Organizers of Fargo’s chapter say now that the group has come to North Dakota’s biggest city, it’s the start of a long journey ahead.

“We’re talking ten or 20 years that we’re going to completely be tightening the screws on every election every time that we can do this,” Davenport said.

If the anti–corruption amendment does end up getting passed, an ethics commission will be formed to monitor legislators and lobbyists.

NY Daily News

April 10, 2018

Mayor de Blasio claims he can’t remember secret 2015 meeting with major lobbyist that led to \$100G in donations

<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/de-blasio-claims-remember-secret-meeting-lobbyist-article-1.3926774>

The mayor suffered another bout of memory loss regarding ethical lapses Tuesday, insisting he couldn’t remember a secret 2015 meeting he had with the city’s biggest lobbyist and nine of his clients.

The meeting — first revealed Monday in a report by the state Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE) — occurred in a basement dining room at the now-defunct City Hall restaurant in lower Manhattan on Sept. 28, sources told the Daily News.

That was after de Blasio had solicited donations from the lobbyist, James Capalino.

Capalino and his clients then donated \$10,000 each for a total of \$100,000 to the mayor's now-defunct non-profit Campaign for One New York.

After the money was raised, Capalino provided de Blasio's aide, Ross Offinger, with a list of the donors and got Offinger to set up the in-person breakfast meeting with the mayor.

The meeting was not disclosed on the mayor's public lists that de Blasio claims shows all his meetings with lobbyists.

On Tuesday at an unrelated press conference, the mayor was able to remember that "everything was handled appropriately" but couldn't recall anything else.

"I don't remember what we discussed at that meeting. That was years ago," he said.

On Monday night his aides had said there was no lobbying at the meeting, implying that at least someone remembers what happened.

Front page of the New York Daily News on Tuesday regarding de Blasio's secret meeting with a lobbyist and clients.

Asked Tuesday how his meeting with a lobbyist and nine lobbyist clients who'd donated \$100,000 to his cause at his request had nothing to do with lobbying, the mayor got testy.

"You can ask in whatever dramatic tone you want, but when I am lobbied by a lobbyist I disclose it; a city lobbyist lobbying me on any matter I disclose it," he responded. "As I've made very clear, in recent times I don't talk to city lobbyists about their clients any more. But I voluntarily disclose everything has been put out there previously and everything has been handled appropriately."

Several of the donor participants in the breakfast meeting with the Capalino and the mayor were developers seeking help from City Hall on various projects.

Last month the lobbyist, Capalino, agreed to pay \$40,000 to JCOPE to settle an investigation into allegations that he had provided the mayor with illegal gifts, the commission revealed Monday. The JCOPE investigation is continuing.

Last year the Manhattan U.S. Attorney and Manhattan District Attorney closed investigations into de Blasio's fund-raising practices without bringing charges.

The federal prosecutors, however, said they found the mayor and his subordinates had intervened on behalf of donors seeking help from City Hall. The DA found de Blasio's tactics were in violation of the "spirit" of campaign finance laws.

In the last few months two donors have testified under oath that they raised donations and wrote checks for de Blasio and got favorable treatment in return.

De Blasio has consistently stated his fund-raising protocols were approved by his lawyers and he's labeled as liars the donors who accused him of pay to play.

Cincinnati.com
April 10, 2018

FBI investigating Ohio House speaker's lavish lifestyle including trip with lobbyists

<https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/politics/2018/04/10/fbi-investigation-cliff-rosenberger-ohio-speaker-travel-condo/502388002/>

The FBI is investigating the lavish lifestyle of Ohio House Speaker Cliff Rosenberger, from his worldwide travel to his use of a luxury condo in downtown Columbus owned by a GOP donor, several people briefed on the investigation told The Enquirer.

The people requested anonymity because the FBI investigation continues. An FBI spokesman declined to confirm or deny the ex Dayton Daily News he had hired a criminal attorney because of questions the FBI was asking about him.

As the Republican leader of the Ohio House, Rosenberger is one of the most powerful figures in state government. The Clinton County native has made the most of the perks of the office, traveling from Europe to Israel to Los Angeles to Boston on other people's money, instead of out of his \$100,798 salary.

Rosenberger is allowed to pay for work-related travel through his campaign fund, the House GOP's political operation or with a scholarship from an outside group. He must disclose who paid for the travel, and he cannot accept gifts worth more than \$75 from an individual donor or lobbyist. He also must not accept the gift of a trip in exchange for a legislative favor.

Rosenberger's penchant for travel is unmatched by other top Republican lawmakers. Rep. Kirk Schuring, Rosenberger's No. 2, said he follows a simple guideline when considering whether to accept free travel: "How does it read on the front page of the paper?"

FBI agents are also looking into Rosenberger's cozy relationship with longtime GOP donor Ginni Ragan. Rosenberger rented a luxury condo from her in downtown Columbus. The speaker did not say how much he paid in rent, and state law doesn't require he disclose it.

Rosenberger, 36, of Clarksville, could not be reached for comment Tuesday. His lawyer, David Axelrod of Columbus, said the Ohio speaker has not been subpoenaed or told he is under investigation. Questions from the FBI may not turn into criminal charges.

In England with Churchill's granddaughter – and lobbyists

One trip that is of interest to the FBI: In August, Rosenberger joined five GOP leaders from other states on a four-day trip to London, paid for by the conservative GOPAC Education Fund's Institute for Leadership Development. Also on the trip: Rep. Nathan Manning, R-North Ridgeville, who attended as a guest of Rosenberger, GOPAC Executive Director Jessica Curtis said.

The trip, documented in Facebook photos, included a chance to meet Celia Sandys, the granddaughter of the late British prime minister Winston Churchill.

It also included an opportunity for lobbyists to rub shoulders with lawmakers. Two lobbyists for title lender LoanMax, Ohio's Steve Dimon and South Carolina's Leslie Gaines, are pictured in Facebook photos from the trip.

Title and payday lenders have been trying to stall legislation that would restrict that industry. Dimon declined to comment on whether he discussed the legislation with Rosenberger on the trip.

Did the FBI ask him about the trip? "You should ask the FBI," Dimon told The Enquirer Saturday.

Did they lobby Rosenberger?

Dimon and Gaines, linked as business partners and as a couple, have spent time with Rosenberger and other members of the Ohio House all over the country.

Gaines' Facebook page includes photos of Rosenberger in Vermont, in Florida, on a pheasant hunt and at Ohio Stadium.

But Gaines is not registered as a lobbyist in Ohio.

Both Dimon and Gaines lobby for Select Management Resources, which owns LoanMax. Dimon is registered as a lobbyist for that company in Ohio. Gaines is registered to lobby for the same company in South Carolina.

Dimon did not mention the trip to England on any state forms, which is not required so long as he did not pay for any of Rosenberger's or Manning's expenses. He also did not report lobbying for Select Management Resources on any bills in the second half of 2017.

The company has three other lobbyists in Ohio – Bob Klaffky, Doug Preisse and Ben Kaiser, all of Van Meter, Ashbrook & Associates. All three said they lobbied on two bills for Select Management Resources in the fourth quarter of 2017.

Lobbyists registered in Ohio don't have to report their own travel expenses, said Tony Bledsoe, the inspector general for the Ohio Legislature. But they do have to report all bills they discussed with lawmakers. They also must report all food they bought for a lawmaker and any gifts, entertainment or travel worth more than \$25 they purchased for legislators.

How did Dimon and Gaines get on the trip with Rosenberger and the other lawmakers? When asked who went on the trip besides the lawmakers, Curtis said GOPAC did not disclose its donors.

GOPAC is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit. Such nonprofits dedicated to “social welfare” are not required to disclose the names of their donors and are allowed to wade into politics.

Neither Dimon nor Gaines responded to requests for comment Tuesday.

Rosenberger's ties to manufacturing heiress

Also of interest to the FBI: Rosenberger's living arrangements in Columbus. Ragan, the donor who owns the downtown Columbus condo he rented, has given \$1.7 million to GOP politicians' campaigns – most of them members of the Ohio House – since 2012. Nearly \$47,000 has gone to Rosenberger's campaign.

Her donations have also funded Rosenberger's travel, although records do not show them doing so directly. He spends money from his campaign fund on travel, but Ragan has also sponsored travel paid for an outside group. Rosenberger took a free trip in September to Normandy, France, with the National Conference of State Legislatures. Ragan was listed as a sponsor. Rosenberger sits on the group's board.

Ragan, 73, of Columbus, has advocated for years for the elderly and those with Alzheimer's disease. Gov. John Kasich appointed Ragan to the Ohio Advisory Council for Aging. Her passion for helping those with Alzheimer's arose after her father, the late Greif Inc. chairman John Dempsey, developed the disease.

Ragan is a top shareholder in Greif, a Delaware, Ohio, industrial packaging manufacturer, and her son serves on the company's board.

Roll Call

April 9, 2018

Facebook's Lobbying Team Faces Test With Zuckerberg on Hill

<https://www.rollcall.com/news/politics/facebooks-lobbying-team-faces-test-with-zuckerberg-on-hill>

Mark Zuckerberg, chief executive officer and founder of Facebook, is leaning on an expanding roster of well-connected lobbyists and message-shapers at his company, as well as a team of outside consultants, to prepare for questions from members of Congress this week.

Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg's highly anticipated debut as a congressional witness this week marks an unprecedented step in the company's decade-long effort to wield influence in the nation's capital.

The social media titan is leaning on an expanding roster of well-connected lobbyists and message shapers at his company, as well as a team of outside consultants, to prepare for a host of questions from senators on Tuesday and House members Wednesday. Lawmakers plan to probe everything from a scandal involving Facebook users' data to the secretive sources of campaign ads on the platform.

Zuckerberg intends to approach an appearance Tuesday before the Senate Judiciary and Commerce, Science and Transportation committees, and House Energy and Commerce the following day, in a contrite and humble manner, say people familiar with the company's preparations, who asked for anonymity to speak candidly about preparations.

Though Zuckerberg has embraced, theoretically, some type of new regulation for his industry, lawmakers and tech policy lobbyists say they don't expect federal legislation to move as a result of the high-profile hearings — and some are skeptical of what Facebook might actually support.

"Absent new bombshells stemming from the hearings and investigations, new privacy legislation is very unlikely in the U.S. in 2018," said Bruce Mehlman, a founder of the firm Mehlman Castagnetti Rosen & Thomas and an assistant Commerce secretary for technology policy in the George W. Bush administration.

Europe already is moving on new privacy measures, though, and some state governments may well take them up now, too, Mehlman noted.

Those come in response to the same scandal that prompted Zuckerberg's appearance: revelations that British-based Cambridge Analytica obtained Facebook data on potentially 70 million Americans to profile and then target potential voters. The firm has ties to the GOP megadonor Mercer family, which has funded campaign coffers supporting President Donald Trump.

Zuckerberg was expected to arrive in Washington on Sunday evening, said a source familiar with his plans, to prepare for the congressional hearings.

In addition to Facebook's in-house lineup, a team from the law and lobbying firm WilmerHale, including its congressional investigations practice leader Reginald Brown, is spearheading the congressional testimony effort, said two sources with direct knowledge. Brown, an associate White House counsel in the George W. Bush administration, did not respond to a request for comment.

WilmerHale was not among Facebook's registered lobbying firms as of Friday, according to congressional disclosures. These bipartisan firms include a group from Steptoe & Johnson. James Barnette, the longtime general counsel at the House Energy and Commerce Committee, is among those at Steptoe & Johnson registered to represent Facebook.

Facebook also has on retainer Luke Albee, a former chief of staff to Democratic Sens. Patrick J. Leahy of Vermont, who will take part in Tuesday's questioning, and Virginia's Mark Warner.

A lobbying trail

Facebook isn't a newbie to lobbying, but it has sharply built up its presence inside the Beltway since 2009 when it disclosed spending just \$200,000 on federal influence campaigns. It spent \$11.5 million on lobbying in 2017, the most ever for the company, according to congressional lobbying disclosures. In 2012, the social media company was a founding member in launching the Internet Association, along with Google, Amazon and eBay.

For comparison, Google spent \$18 million on federal lobbying last year, the most of any individual corporation.

Lobbying reports for activity covering the first three months of the year are not due to Congress until April 20.

“Tech isn’t cute anymore — it now drives the modern economy,” said Maura Corbett, founder and CEO of the Glen Echo Group, an issue advocacy shop. “Just as with preceding revolutions across history, there is a point where that power intersects with accountability and that’s where we are right now.”

Facebook’s political action committee, which tilts slightly toward Republicans, is not among the top corporate PACs based on donations. It ranks 204th, according to the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics, which tracks campaign money and lobbying activity. Facebook’s PAC so far has raised about \$410,000 for the 2017-2018 cycle, and contributed about \$384,000 to candidates.

The company has given campaign contributions to senior members of the three committees that will question Zuckerberg, including House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Greg Walden, R-Ore., Senate Commerce Chairman John Thune, R-S.D., and Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California, the top Democrat on the Judiciary panel.

Facebook is seeking to expand its Washington footprint and is advertising for D.C.-based jobs in communications, law and public policy. It also plans to move to bigger offices in the nation’s capital, in the heart of the Chinatown-Gallery Place neighborhood.

Rep. John Sarbanes, a Democratic member of Energy and Commerce, said Facebook has mobilized its lobbyists.

“If you’re going to have lobbyists on your payroll, this is the time to deploy them,” said the Maryland lawmaker. “And that’s fine. Mark Zuckerberg will show up informed by the conversations that his team, the executives and representatives and lobbying folks have been having with members of Congress. I’m hoping that means he’ll arrive with a certain amount of contrition about these revelations.”

Sarbanes said he’s looking for substantive commitments from Zuckerberg, so Facebook users feel their personal data is safe and understand the sources of political persuasion efforts aimed at them on the social media platform.

Influencing legislation

Bipartisan legislation aimed at the disclosure of online ads still may not move after the high-profile hearings, said Meredith McGehee, executive director of Issue One, which supports the measure.

“The real measure here is going to be after the hearings. Are lawmakers willing to take meaningful policy steps like the Honest Ads Act?” she said, using the title of the legislation. “The current law essentially draws a roadmap, including for foreign actors, to influence our elections and our politics.”

Facebook’s chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg, said Thursday in an interview with PBS that the company isn’t “just open to regulation — we’re moving ahead of it.” She said that even if the bill doesn’t pass, “We have already built the tool. It’s live in Canada. It will be live in the U.S. before the election.”

Zuckerberg on Friday announced two new efforts, one requiring advertisers of political or issue ads to be verified and another requiring people who manage pages with large followings to be verified.

When it comes to privacy proposals, such as a bill by Rep. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., that would require companies like Google and Facebook to get a user's consent before sharing some data, Facebook has a record of pushing back.

For the company's position on the measure, a company spokesman who declined to be named on Friday pointed to a statement last May by the Internet Association, saying the bill could "upend the consumer experience online and stifle innovation."

Ernesto Falcon, legislative counsel with the Electronic Frontier Foundation, an advocate for online privacy, says he's skeptical Facebook will support new disclosures or tough privacy rules for the industry, based on his observations of the company's lobbying in Sacramento.

Working through the Internet Association, Facebook and Google launched an "11th hour opposition" to a cable and telephone privacy measure in September 2017, which did not pass, he said. For Facebook, the measure would have affected "nothing they have," Falcon said, adding that the company worked behind the scenes to sow concerns.

"They're the big technology company that had nothing at stake, but it seems like the concern from them was the moment you raise standards for one set of industries, they'll raise standards on them," he said.

Falcon said he'll be watching to see what Facebook does after the Zuckerberg hearings and how the company goes about implementing its pledge to make new European privacy standards global.

"They're making a lot of commitments," he said. "We'll see if it's all just words."

Daily Beast
April 9, 2018

How Every Campaign Will Have a Troll Farm of Its Own

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-every-campaign-will-have-a-troll-farm-of-its-own>

| Mark Zuckerberg heads to the nation's capital this week for some lashings from America's legislators.

On Tuesday, he'll appear in front of joint sessions of the Senate Judiciary and Commerce committees. Then on Wednesday, the Facebook CEO will visit the House Energy and Commerce Committee for another round of bruising. Since the presidential election of 2016, congressmen have pummeled social media giants for Russia's infiltration and exploitation of their systems.

But America's politicians may want to tread lightly as they seek answers from Zuckerberg. Political actors, more than anyone, seek the power and reach of social media to win the hearts and minds of voters. In the future, Russia and other authoritarians will continue their manipulation, but it will be ordinary candidates and their campaigns, lobbyists, and corporate backers that seek to exploit the manipulative advantages available on social media. A combative tech CEO just might flip the script and call out the politicians for their role in this mess.

In 2008, President Obama beat the establishment in part by harnessing social media. The Obama campaign successfully used online networks to create real world votes, and everyone ran to follow and duplicate their methods. Fast forward eight years into the social media era, and we've found out from whistleblower Christopher Wylie, and Channel 4's undercover expose that Cambridge Analytica took e-campaigns to the logical next step. They aggregated more than 80 million Facebook users' data to analyze and then deliver customized messages to the right voters at exactly the right time. Cambridge Analytica's CEO Alexander Nix eerily bragged about mimicking the Kremlin's playbook during a covertly filmed business meeting. Nix explained how his company, working through a series of cutouts and front companies, could create physical provocations in the real world, such as the employment of Ukrainian sex workers, to discredit political opponents in the virtual world.

The company's investors and board members include Republican megadonor Rebekah Mercer and Steve Bannon, founder of Breitbart News, one-time adviser to President Trump, and hero of nationalist audiences from America to Europe. Subsequent revelations say Bannon used Cambridge Analytica to test populist narratives on social media, such as "Drain the Swamp" and "Deep State," as far back as 2014.

Trolling-as-a-service, one stop shops for analyzing, engaging, and mobilizing online audiences, will be a method all political campaigns seek to exploit in the future. Just think about what a political campaign needs: a deep insight into voter demographics and desires, voter preferences and dislikes; key emotional vulnerabilities constituents didn't even know they possess; the ability to efficiently spend advertising on specific voting blocs; the rapid creation of engaged audiences for a newly formed campaign; and the ability to destroy a political foe with information attacks while hiding the hand of the attacker. The world shouldn't be surprised Cambridge Analytica moved to offer the precursor to trolling-as-a-service. We should instead be surprised that it's the only one we know about to date. Political campaigns recognize this need, and it's no wonder that Brad Parscale, President Trump's digital campaign leader in 2016 who smartly brought Facebook directly into his efforts, has been elevated to campaign manager for 2020.

The Kremlin honed the first generation of trolling by advancing several novel concepts. Above all, they seamlessly integrated hacking and influence, two disciplines that largely sat apart or when used in combination pursued only tactical discrediting campaigns. When APT 28, Fancy Bear, and APT 29, Cozy Bear, hackers from Russia's intelligence services, launched their cyberassaults on thousands of targets in 2015, their intended strategic purpose was to influence the presidential election a year later. Russia's trolls also mastered workflow in ways previous propagandists had not. In multiple regions and languages, around the clock, the Internet Research Agency, the Kremlin's social media propaganda cutout indicted this past February by special counsel Robert Mueller, created layered social influence by crafting stripped out blogs, deployed waves of human-operated false accounts, and even fashioned shareable memes and graphics tailored to individual audiences (PDF). The Internet Research Agency advanced the content of Russia's state sponsored news outlets under a veil of plausible deniability. Most importantly, the Kremlin enlisted witting and unwitting virtual allies, securing the cooperation and in some cases allegiance of foreign audiences they persistently nudge after any single election.

The Kremlin ignited the social media trolling tidal wave, and now many other authoritarians have pursued it. In only the first year after the 2016 presidential election, authoritarians in Myanmar, Cambodia, and Philippines aggressively employed social media to suppress their adversaries, distribute

false and manipulated news, and distort reality through virtual trolling. Social media information campaigns employed by leaders of developing nations remain a bit basic in their methods, relying more on art than science. But authoritarians aren't the ones the world should worry about most. Their technical know-how remains limited, and for the most part, they don't have the resources and methods for acquiring the best social media manipulation technology.

Cambridge Analytica's approach appears to have advanced the Kremlin's playbook by applying more science to their art, aggregating voluminous personal data and then employing greater computational power to more rapidly and effectively influence audiences on scale. Cambridge Analytica's second generation trolling and claimed offerings are as much aspirational as reality, a touch of digital snake oil perhaps, but their vision is on target. Cambridge Analytica is really just the beta version of trolling-as-a-service.

If left unchecked, politicians and their political parties, Super PAC's, lobbyists, and corporate public relations firms will seek out "trolling-as-a-service" to dominate the information space toward their advantage but to the detriment of society. Western political campaigns can garner far more resources and apply them for the best available information warfare services. Even further, they can and will sustain their campaigns over an enduring period, persistently engaging and sustaining their audiences, campaigning relentlessly regardless of the candidate, who may be substituted between elections.

Great reward will come to the entrepreneur with enough startup capital to harvest and correlate large amounts of personal data on distinguishable voting blocs and then mine those details rapidly and incisively by employing machine learning. From there, rented troll farms will deploy sophisticated computational propaganda to alter the information environment and employ humans to act as for-hire propagandists advancing their client's message and tackling their client's adversaries.

Trolling-as-a-service providers will create two forms of cutouts: hacker teams to compromise their paying candidate's adversaries and on-the-ground operatives to stage events, propel provocations, and instigate rallies creating a false, physical rendering of support for their candidate's objectives. Trolling-as-a-service providers will create their own proprietary technology for social media reconnaissance and deployments, will work through third parties to garner massive amounts of user information, will provide their client's plausible deniability of contracted influence efforts, and will advance trolling techniques designed to stay inside the terms of services (ToS) of social media companies.

Social media companies have endured waves of illicit actors, dating back to al Qaeda in Iraq's forays on YouTube. But time and time again, the firms seem agonizingly slow to respond. No wonder some users are fed up.

The companies have logically fought regulation, but unlike cybersecurity professionals who joined together in the face of relentless hacking waves, social media companies have hardly come together collectively to protect their industry against threats to customer trust. When combating the so-called Islamic State's social media advances, tech companies created working groups but beyond the biggest platforms, they hardly had counterparts to interface with as extremists ran to smaller apps with more encryption.

Social media's giants missed Russia's meddling before the U.S. election, and since this failure some have done better than others to spot the Internet Research Agency's bad behavior. Thus far though, they've only shared small batches of data allowing for them to catch bad activity on their platforms.

Data sharing, collaborative intelligence production and rapid response, along with self-regulation, would be logical ways to protect their industry and restore user confidence. If they don't band together, social media giants will rot from the trolling cancer spreading across their systems. Social media, as an industry, should look to information security associations, particularly in the financial services sector, who routinely share malware signatures and threat techniques in cybersecurity despite competing as businesses. They've learned what the social media companies have not, loss of trust is a collective problem harming the entire industry, when one company fails, they all suffer.

The larger puzzle piece remains the U.S. government response. The country's leaders have been bizarrely slow to respond to Russian interference. And while social media companies have some explaining to do, so does Congress. In October 2017, the Honest Ads Act was put forth by Sens. Mark Warner and John McCain. Passage of the bill would require social media companies to attribute political and social advertising to the same degree as seen in print, radio, and television. Yet, six months later, this bill remains unpassed. In the absence of government movement, Facebook pre-emptively announced new procedures for ad verification ahead of its testimony next week.

More damning from the Cambridge Analytica revelations is American political party acquisition of their services beyond President Trump. The most ironic of these customers has been Sen. Ted Cruz who not only received significant campaign support from Cambridge Analytica investor Robert Mercer and associated super PACs but also utilized Cambridge's social media services. On Jan. 17, 2018, Sen. Cruz aggressively questioned Twitter during a Senate Commerce committee noting, "if you are a neutral public forum, that does not allow for political editorializing and censorship."

Sen. Cruz's jabs at Twitter now strike an odd tone, and Facebook and Zuckerberg, when they go to testify, might turn the tables on the politicians that have used private American data from social media companies to target Americans. In their campaigning on social media, some congressmen have made it difficult for social media companies to be neutral public forums, as they exploited these platforms for personal political gain. Given that incentive, the question remains: Will Congress rise to stop the emergence of trolling-as-a-service, or will they instead accept the future, a dark world of predatory social media campaigning?