

U.S. Sens. Johnson, Cruz, Lee: Ask Google CEO to explain apparent election-related disparities

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WASHINGTON — U.S. Senators Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), Ted Cruz (R-Texas), and Mike Lee (R-Utah) today sent a letter to Google CEO Sundar Pichai after a nonpartisan study raised questions about whether Google targeted get-out-the-vote messages specifically to liberal users in the run-up to the election. In testimony before the Senate last month, Mr. Pichai said that Google does not alter any product to promote a specific political viewpoint.

A study of 773 politically diverse computer users in the lead-up to the election by Dr. Richard Epstein found that only liberal users received get-out-the-vote notifications from Monday, Oct. 26 through Thursday, Oct. 29.

“Dr. Epstein’s response to my phone call regarding his monitoring of Google’s election activities contains a number of astonishing revelations. First is the fact that in order to maintain their viewership numbers on Google’s search platform, newspapers and other media outlets share their Gmail communications with Google. Second is that in order to tilt voter participation in favor of Democrat candidates, Google was sending a voting reminder only to individuals it profiled as liberal. And third is that, according to Dr. Epstein, by monitoring the New York Post’s Gmail account, Google became aware that Dr. Epstein had documented their biased vote reminder. Only then did they end the liberal only vote reminder and begin sending the vote reminder to all voters. Google and other social media giants have amassed far too much power, and this

example of Orwellian Big Brother manipulation demonstrates that Congress must address this significant threat to our democracy and freedoms,” said Sen. Johnson.

“Big Tech presents a grave threat to free speech in America and to the integrity of our elections,” said Sen. Cruz. **“Google has more power than any company on the face of the planet, and Dr. Epstein’s findings raise serious concerns about Google’s abuse of that power and its willingness to manipulate its platform to help Joe Biden win the presidency. Google must provide answers as to why and how it manipulated users to influence this election.”**

“Dr. Epstein’s allegations appear credible and are very concerning. If it is true that Google is targeting messages to help Democrats win elections, then Google has not been truthful to Congress and has deceived countless Americans. These allegations must be taken seriously. Congress must have all the facts and evidence from Dr. Epstein with responses from Google as we consider changes to address these serious issues,” said Sen. Lee.

Text of the Senators’ letter can be found below and [here](#).

November 5, 2020

Sundar Pichai

Chief Executive Officer

Google LLC

1600 Amphitheater Parkway

Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai,

On August 6, 2020, Senators Ron Johnson and Mike Lee wrote you regarding your testimony to the House Committee on the Judiciary in which you stated, *"We won't do any work, you know, to politically tilt anything one way or the other. It's against our core values."***[1]** In your response to the letter, you reiterated this assertion and further stated, *"Google does not modify any products, including Search, to promote a particular political viewpoint...[we] will not do so for the upcoming 2020 presidential election."***[2]**

On November 4, 2020, Senator Johnson spoke with Dr. Robert Epstein to determine if his 2020 Election monitoring of Google's activities had uncovered anything that could be viewed as promoting a particular political viewpoint. Dr. Epstein provided Senator Johnson the following response.

In our election monitoring project this year, we recruited a politically-diverse group of 733 field agents in Arizona, Florida, and North Carolina. Through their computers, we were able to preserve more than 400,000 ephemeral experiences that tech companies use to shift opinions and votes and that normally are lost forever.

One of our most disturbing findings so far is that between Monday, October 26th (the day our system became fully operational) and Thursday, October 29th, only our liberal field agents received vote reminders on Google's home page. Conservatives did not receive even a single vote reminder. This kind of targeting, if present nationwide, could shift millions of votes, in part because Google's home page is seen 500 million times a day in the U.S.

The good news is that it appears that we got Google to stop this manipulation four days before Election Day. On Thursday, October 29th, I sent materials about the monitoring project to Ebony Bowden, a reporter at the New York Post, who was writing a story about the project. I did so knowing that all [nypost.com](https://www.nypost.com) emails are shared with algorithms and employees at Google.**[[3]]**

Late night on the 29th, two notable things happened: First, Ms. Bowden's article, which was about possible large-scale election rigging by Big Tech, was pulled by the Post. Second, Google's targeted messaging stopped completely. From midnight

on the 29th to the end of Election Day, all of our field agents have received the vote reminder. Because of the demographics of the people who use Google, this is still a vote manipulation, but it is far more benign than the extreme targeting we detected last week. [[4]]

Based on Dr. Epstein's response, it would appear your assertion that *"We won't do any work, you know, to politically tilt anything one way or the other"* is not true.

We will be asking Dr. Epstein to provide Congress with the evidence of Google's politically biased activities his monitoring collected during this election cycle. We are writing to provide you another opportunity to conduct a thorough review with your management team to determine the veracity of your previous responses to congressional inquiry regarding this issue, and correct your answers if necessary.

Please provide your response as soon as possible, but no later than 5 p.m. on Thursday, November 12, 2020.

Sincerely,

Ron Johnson

United States Senator
Senator

Mike Lee

United States Senator

Ted Cruz

United States