

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 15, 2018

The Honorable Trey Gowdy  
Chairman  
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Gowdy:

According to recent reports in the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, corporations have been selling "followers" to consumers made up largely of fake social media accounts. Often these accounts are spoofed off of real users, without their knowledge. We request that you hold a hearing to investigate the possible influence of these "bots" on the 2016 Presidential election, and invite representatives of companies who sell these accounts to testify before the committee.

According to reports, wholesale companies like Devumi make millions of dollars selling fake accounts to "social media influencers" looking to spread their reach. These influencers often pay thousands of dollars to amass hundreds of thousands of "followers," the majority of which are now known to be bots.<sup>i</sup> Recent estimates by the University of Southern California (USC) and Indiana University indicate that as high as 15 percent of users on Twitter may be bots.

While companies profit handsomely off of these fake accounts, there are very real consequences. Bot accounts can spread false information at staggering rates, altering public opinion that could even sway our elections. It is vital that we understand how companies like Devumi operate in order to prevent these bot accounts from destabilizing the public's trust in our nation's elections and undermining our national security.

States have recognized the seriousness of this matter and have begun to act. In California, legislation has been introduced to require automated accounts to come with disclaimers. The bill would also require "advertising purchased on social media be made by accounts verified to be controlled by an actual person."<sup>ii</sup> As members of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, we must address this problem as the national threat it is.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We are available to discuss the need for this hearing at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,




Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress



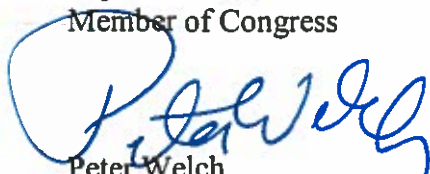
Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



Stephen Lynch  
Member of Congress



Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Member of Congress




Peter Welch  
Member of Congress




Carolyn B. Maloney  
Member of Congress



Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress



Jimmy Gomez  
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress

CC: Rep. Elijah Cummings, Ranking Member, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/01/27/technology/social-media-bots.html>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/politics/essential/la-pol-ca-essential-politics-updates-california-would-require-rules-on-social-1517265261-htmlstory.html>