

Twitter employees charged with abusing their positions

by Jackie King

People Editor

On Oct. 6 in San Francisco, two former Twitter employees, Ali Alzabarah and Ahmad Abouammo, were charged with abusing their positions to help Saudi Arabia. The two hacked into thousands of private Twitter accounts in order to gain personal information about people who have criticized Saudi Arabia's capital, Riyadh. This court case is the first time that federal prosecutors have charged agents of a foreign power inside the United States, and it is also the first of these charges involving Saudi Arabians.

Alzabarah was an engineer at Twitter whose job gave him access to the personal information and account data of Twitter's 321 million users. His partner, Abouammo, was a media partnerships manager who could look at the email addresses and phone numbers of all Twitter accounts. The two joined forces to access private information and Abouammo received a payment of almost 300,000 dollars from a source named "Foreign Official-1." However, in 2018, when interviewed by the FBI, Abouammo claimed the money totaled no more than 100,000 dollars, creating a false invoice to justify the payments he received. In addition to the bribe, Abouammo also received a Hublot watch, worth a total of 20 thousand dollars. Due to his corrupted motives, as well as his disregard for his duties as a Twitter employee, Abouammo is being



PUBLIC COMPANY: Twitter went public in 2013 at the New York Stock Exchange.

charged with falsifying records to obstruct a federal investigation and acting as a foreign agent.

Alzabarah, another Saudi Arabian citizen, began working at Twitter six years ago in 2013 as a "site reliability engineer," according to The New York Times. His crime continued for months, starting on May 2 in 2015, and didn't end until Nov. 18 that same year. According to the legal complaint, Alzabarah accessed "the Twitter data of over 6,000 Twitter users, including at least 33 usernames for which Saudi Arabian law enforcement had submitted emergency disclosure requests to Twitter." Most of the accessed accounts were connected to established critics of the Saudi Arabian government. Alzabarah originally said that he merely looked at all of the data out of curiosity, but after leaving his office on Dec. 2, 2015, he booked a flight back to Saudi Arabia, on which he sent his letter of resignation through email.

Twitter made a statement about the incident saying that the company is fully aware that who they call "bad actors" will try to abuse their authority within the company, but Twitter says they "limit access to sensitive account information to a limited group of trained and vetted employees." They stated that they "understand the incredible risks faced by many who use Twitter to share their perspectives with the world and to hold those in power accountable."

(Source: The New York Times, NPR, KTLA5)

Dorsey bans political ads on Twitter prior to '20 election

by Esther Sun

Opinion Editor

Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey announced on Wednesday, Oct. 30, that Twitter would no longer run political ads – a move that many see as a direct jab at Facebook's hands-off policy toward political ads.

Twitter's ban on political ads includes campaign ads for political candidates, as well as ads targeting specific political issues like abortion or climate change.

This move came on the heels of an announcement by Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who declared that Facebook would not block any political advertising on its site – even ads making false claims – on the grounds of protecting free speech. Zuckerberg spent the past few weeks under fire for his decision, with more than 250 Facebook employees signing a letter petitioning him to reconsider the company's stance.

"While internet advertising is incredibly powerful and very effective for commercial advertisers, that power brings significant risks to politics, where it can be used to influence votes to affect the lives of millions," Dorsey tweeted on Wednesday. "Political message reach should be earned, not bought."

Republicans and Democrats almost immediately split on their responses to Twitter's announcement. Brad Parscale, Donald Trump's 2020 campaign manager, called Twitter's political ad ban "another attempt by the left to silence Trump and conservatives."

In contrast, Democrat Representative Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez tweeted, "This is a good call. Technology – and social media especially – has a powerful responsibility in preserving the integrity of our elections. Not allowing for paid disinformation is one of the most basic, ethical decisions a company can make."

Twitter has yet to explicitly define in its policy what counts as a "political issue" – one that would merit an ad's removal from the platform. In contrast, Facebook continues to evidently struggle with this nuance. In a visit to Congress last week, Zuckerberg told Ocasio-Cortez that Facebook would not allow paid advertisement of

an incorrect election date. However, when asked whether he would bar an advertisement falsely claiming that Republicans supported the Green New Deal, he responded, "I don't know the answer to that off the top of my head. Probably?"

Revenue loss from banning political ads won't hurt Twitter significantly: from the 2018 midterm elections, Twitter earned only 3 million dollars in profit from running political ads, which was approximately one percent of its total 2018 revenue.

Now, according to TechCrunch writer Josh Constantie, "all eyes will be on Facebook and Google/YouTube." If Twitter's announcement drives Google CEO Sundar Pichai and YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki to follow suit in banning political ads, Zuckerberg could face even harsher criticism for his opposing decision.

(Sources: Twitter, CNBC, New York Times, Wired, TechCrunch)



PUBLIC FIGURE: Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, shown above, meets military personnel.



PAY TO WIN: Candidates will spend lots of money on political ads like this one.

Rep. Cummings passes away

by Quincy Marks

Public-Relations Manager

Representative Elijah Cummings passed away from health complications on Oct. 17 at the age of 68. Cummings made a profound impact on his hometown, Baltimore, by serving in the House of Representatives for Maryland's 7th Congressional District. He strongly advocated for stricter gun laws and providing more resources for drug addicts. Most notably, Cummings served as the chairman for the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, which allowed him to investigate the Trump Administration.

Starting at a young age, Cummings knew that he wanted to become an advocate. Growing up in Baltimore during the 1960s, Cummings faced multiple incidents of racial profiling. At age eleven, people threw glass and rocks at Cummings when he helped integrate a once segregated swimming pool. Later, the TV series "Perry Mason" made Cummings want to become a lawyer. Despite his

rocky childhood, Cummings went on to study law at Howard University.

Throughout his political career, Cummings was known for having a "fiery" attitude. Cummings started out serving in the Maryland House of Delegates, where, according to the Committee on Oversight and Reform, "he became the first African American in Maryland history to be named Speaker Pro Temp." Cummings later joined Congress in 1996 and eventually became the chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, which is the "main investigative committee in the U.S. House of Representatives." According to the Baltimore Commons, Cummings used this position to investigate Trump's election and his actions against "threats to democracy." Cummings investigated Trump's financial records and his lawyer, Michael Cohen.

Cummings and President Trump had a heated relationship. Cummings routinely spoke out about his dislike for Trump. In return, Trump hurled insults back at Cummings, calling him racist and labelling Baltimore as a "disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess." However, after his death, Trump changed his tone as he offered his condolences to the Cummings family via Twitter.

Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, and Hilary Clinton spoke at Cummings' funeral. The funeral also featured performances from famous gospel singers, such as Bebe Winans, and was very religious because Cummings was a devout Christian. As written in the New York Times, Cummings "was driven by his faith" to fight for what he believed in. Admirers of Cummings will remember him for his rise from humble beginnings and notable achievements in Congress.

(Sources: NYT, Washington Post, Baltimore Sun)



IMPACT CONGRESSMAN: Cummings attends the DNC.

GA sex offenders win trial

by Morgan Tinsley

Editor-in-Chief

A federal judge ruled that a Georgia sheriff may not place signs at registered sex offenders' homes that warn kids not to trick-or-treat at their houses, as such action violates the offenders' constitutional rights.

After Butts County Sheriff Gary Long posted signs advocating for no trick-or-treating at sex offenders' homes, three registered offenders filed a lawsuit against the Sheriff's Office on Oct. 21, arguing that the signs violated their rights to privacy. The lawsuit, filed by registered offenders Christopher Reed, Reginald Holden, and Corey McClendon, claims that employees of the Sheriff's Office trespassed on their property and wrongfully inflicted anxiety and humiliation upon offenders.

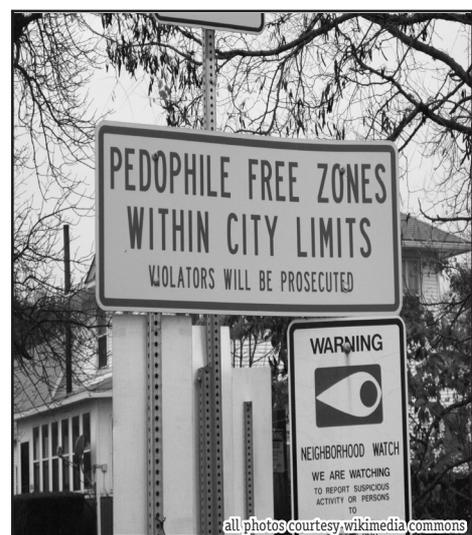
Additionally, McClendon, who was convicted of statutory rape of two 14-year-olds when he was 18, Holden, who was convicted of sexual battery with a minor between the ages of 12 and 15, and Reed, who was convicted of criminal sexual assault of a minor and aggravated sexual battery, all object to being labelled a "sex offender," according to the lawsuit.

Georgia, unlike states such as Ohio and Missouri, does not have "No Candy" laws, which bar offenders from handing out candy to young children on Halloween. U.S. District Court judge Marc T. Treadwell decided that Georgia's law for sex offenders "does not require or authorize sheriffs to post signs in front of sex offenders' homes." Treadwell filed a temporary injunction on Oct. 29, preventing Sheriff Long from placing and requiring the signs on the plaintiffs' lawns; he argued that the men who filed the suit were rehabilitated and living "productive, law-abiding lives."

Following the decision, Mark Yurachek, the plaintiffs' attorney, expressed his hope to pursue

a permanent injunction and win the case, further preventing Long from placing cautionary signs at offenders' homes. Yurachek also shared the court's sentiment that this ruling posed no threat to children on Halloween.

"The lack of signs in front of registrants' homes will not affect either their joy or safety this year or any year," he said in a Twitter statement.



TRICK OR TREAT: Signs like this aren't required for offenders.

In response to Treadwell's ruling in favor of the offenders, Long said he "respectfully and strongly" disagreed with the court's decision.

"Just as I followed Georgia Law, I will follow the Judge's ruling in this case," he said in a Facebook statement. "I will continue to fight for and protect our children by any legal means necessary." (Sources: New York Times, CNN, USA Today, Georgia Sex Offender Registry)