



## The Masters of the Universe Build a ‘Lobbying Army’ to Fight Potential Investigations

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Although America’s largest tech companies have historically stayed away from lobbying Congress, Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google have transformed into some of the largest influencers in Washington, D.C.

The four technology giants have spent a combined \$55 million on lobbying in 2018, doubling their previous record \$27.4 million spent in 2016, and some of the tech companies are spending at an even higher rate this year, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

The tech companies’ rapid hiring of lobbyists arises as the House Judiciary Committee announced that it will start a “top-to-bottom” investigation of America’s largest tech giants, the Donald Trump Department of Justice (DOJ) said it will investigate Google for potential antitrust violations, and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has reportedly started asking Amazon’s rivals about the e-commerce giant’s business practices.

Big Tech’s rapidly growing influence puts these companies at relative parity with traditional lobbying powerhouses such as the defense, automobile, and banking industries.

The four tech companies have reportedly amassed 238 lobbyists for the first quarter of 2019, both in-house and contracted lobbyists; roughly 75 percent of the lobbyists come from government offices or political campaigns.

Big Tech’s lobbying influence extends to calls with members of Congress, advertising, funding of think-tanks, and efforts to influence President Donald Trump, who has occasionally criticized Big Tech’s censorship of conservatives and even Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos’ ownership of the establishment *Washington Post*.

Breitbart News has reported that Google has donated to conservative think-tanks and publications such as the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI), the *National Review*, the Cato Institute, the American Conservative Union (ACU). Many of these institutions, such as the *National Review* and CEI have been critical of calls to rein-in Big Tech’s dominant status and censorship of conservative and alternative viewpoints.

Sheila Krumholz, the executive director of the Center for Responsive Politics, told the *New York Times* that these companies have ramped up their lobbying efforts.

Krumholz said, “They are no longer upstarts dipping a toe in lobbying. They have both feet in.”

Big Tech also has rapidly picked up former high-level congressional staffers to increase their influence on Capitol Hill.

Facebook hired Catlin O’Neill, who worked as Rep. Nancy Pelosi’s (D-CA) chief of staff, and who now works as the company’s American director of public policy for the social media giant. Pelosi reportedly received nearly \$43,000 in total donations during the 2018 midterm cycle from employees and political action committees (PACs) of the Big Tech companies, each of which ranks among her top sources of campaign cash. Pelosi has typically served as a champion of Big Tech companies.

Google has contracted two lobbyists who worked as lawyers for the House GOP-side of the Judiciary Committee. One of those lawyers, Sean McLaughlin, served as deputy assistant attorney general under former President George W. Bush.

Breitbart News reported that Google and Facebook spent much of their time lobbying on Capitol Hill on various issues relating to antitrust, privacy, and net neutrality.

Facebook and Google’s dominance on the Internet has become increasingly apparent as Google has approximately 90 percent of web search traffic, whereas in digital advertising, Google and Facebook amount to nearly two-thirds of American digital ad spending, with Amazon at a “distant third” at under nine percent.

These social media giants spent much of their time on then Rep. and now Sen. Marsha Blackburn’s (R-TN) Browser Act, which would require that social media companies have to obtain explicit permission from users before they start collecting their data. The legislation would also prevent the tech giants from blocking users from their services if they do not opt-in to the company’s data collection program.

Even though Big Tech has increased its lobbying efforts on the Hill, conservatives such as Sen. Josh Hawley contend that there must be remedies for Silicon Valley’s dominant status in the marketplace.

“There is a burgeoning awareness that there is a big problem with the dominance of Big Tech,” said Sen. Hawley in a recent interview. “Big Tech may be more socially powerful than the trusts of the Roosevelt era, and yet they still operate like a black box.”