

Here Are The Conservative Groups Google Is Paying To Brush Back Sen. Hawley

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Google is plowing money into the coffers of several conservative groups who are criticizing Sen. Josh Hawley as the Missouri Republican continues crusading against the Silicon Valley giant.

The big tech company provides “substantial contributions” to groups like R-Street, the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), TechFreedom, the Cato Institute and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), to name a few. All four groups characterize Hawley’s legislation targeting tech companies as ploys designed to blow up the internet.

“Not only would this legislation drastically hurt free speech and competition in the online ecosystem, it would mean more conservative content, not less, will be removed from these websites,” R- Street analyst Jeff Westling wrote in June 19 post, responding to Hawley’s move to amend legal protections tech companies enjoy.

EFF analyst Elliot Harmon made similar remarks.

Throttling big tech would effectively “let the government decide who speaks,” he wrote on June 20. Funding for the groups comes after big tech companies dramatically escalated their lobbying efforts. (RELATED: Here’s The Eye-Popping Amount Of Cash Google, Amazon And Facebook Dumped On DC Lobbyists In 2018)

Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO) listens as acting Homeland Security Secretary Kevin McAleenan testifies before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on May 23, 2019. (REUTERS/James Lawler Duggan)

Amazon, Google and Facebook gave Washington, D.C., lobbyists a record amount of money in 2018, almost exactly a year before Democratic lawmakers announced an antitrust investigation into the Silicon Valley giants. They dumped a combined \$48 million into lobbying in 2018, up 13% from 2017, government disclosures from January show.

Google was the biggest spender in 2018 by far, increasing its lobbying contributions 18% to \$21.2 million. Facebook’s spending amount grew nearly 10% to \$12.6 million. All three companies spent the bulk of their lobbying on in-house lobbying crews. The efforts largely went toward market and data regulation issues, according to the data.

There has been a push back against Hawley’s efforts, which include proposing legislation in June amending Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, a law passed in 1996 when the Internet was young and growing. The section protects websites from being sued for the content that users publish on the sites’ platforms.

“I’ve never seen pushback in such a fashion before,” Terry Schilling, executive director of the American Principles Project, a conservative think tank, told reporters Wednesday. “It’s safe to say that it’s largely due to pressure from the social media giants that hasn’t been seen before.”

Conservatives and liberals have meanwhile joined Hawley, Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas and others as they throttle big tech.

Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts released a plan in March to break up the big three companies. Her proposal would impose new rules on tech companies with \$25 billion or more in annual ad revenue, forcing Amazon and Google to dramatically reduce their hold on online commerce.

Hawley, for his part, told his Twitter followers Wednesday that Google’s financial efforts weren’t surprising. “Well, well – who is fine with Big Tech censoring conservatives? People paid by Big Tech. DC is awash in money from @Google and @facebook,” he noted.

Google has not responded to the Daily Caller News Foundation’s request for comment nor did R-Street. AEI refused to comment on donors. An EEF representative explained that the group is dead-set against Hawley’s Section 230 amendment.

Cato’s Center for Representative Government John Samples said the anti-big tech warriors are trying to create distractions. “Instead of responding to my substantive points, Sen. Hawley and his allies have sought to stigmatize political spending by the companies,” he said. TechFreedom was even more pointed in its critique.

“We’ve applied the same principles in critiquing Senator Hawley’s legislation — and he has responded not on substance but by making exactly the same kind of cheap attacks we’ve come to expect from those on the extreme left,” TechFreedom spokesman Ashkhen Kazaryan told the DCNF, referring to the group’s free market positions.