![mozilla](moz://a)

Statement of Alan Davidson
VP of Global Policy, Trust and Security
Mozilla Corporation

Meeting of the International Grand Committee
Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics
House of Commons, Canada
May 29, 2019

Members of the International Grand Committee and the Standing Committee,

I'm here today because all is not well with the internet. The open, global internet is the most powerful communication medium we have ever seen. At its best it creates new chances to learn, to solve big problems, to build a sense of shared humanity. And yet we have also seen the power of the internet used to undermine trust, magnify divisiveness, incite violence, and violate privacy. We can do better - and I'm here to share a few ideas with you about how.

My name is Alan Davidson, and I'm the Vice President for Global Policy, Trust and Security at the Mozilla Corporation. Mozilla is a fairly unusual entity in the internet ecosystem. We're owned by a nonprofit, the Mozilla Foundation. We're a mission-driven open source software company, maker of the Firefox web browser, Pocket, and other services.

At Mozilla, we're dedicated to making the internet healthier. For years, we have been champions of privacy and openness online, not just as a slogan but as a central ethos. We try to show by example how to create products that protect privacy. We build those products not just with our employees, but with thousands of community contributors around the world.

We publish an annual report to examine the internet's evolving challenges - we call it the Internet Health Report. Our 2019 edition came out last month. It's of course worth a careful read, but I'll give you the two-word summary shared by our Foundation's director Mark Surman: "It's complicated."

More people are connected to the internet than ever before, and the pace of innovation and economic growth is still strong. Yet trust online is at an all time low, and we're seeing more and more disparity in who benefits from the internet - among both companies and internet users.

At Mozilla, we believe the internet can be better. To build an internet that is both innovative and worthy of people's trust, we will need better technology and better policy. In my time today I'd like to cover three things: 1. Privacy starts with better product design; 2. Privacy regulation; and 3. Content policy issues.

Privacy Starts With Products That Protect People by Default

First off, our industry can do a much better job protecting privacy in our products. At Mozilla, we are trying to do just that. Let me give one example from our work on web tracking.

When people visit a news website, they expect to see ads from the site owner. But visitors to the top news sites in the US routinely encounter a dozen or more third party trackers - sometimes as many as 30 or 40. Some of these are from household names. Others are obscure companies that profile users. Regardless, most people don't expect their browsing behavior to be tracked and sold this way.

The data collected by these trackers creates real harm. It can enable divisive political ads, shape health insurance decisions, or drive discrimination in housing and jobs. Next time you see a piece of misinformation online, ask yourself where the data came from that suggested you would be such an inviting target.

At Mozilla, we set out to do something about tracking. We created the "Facebook container," which greatly limits what Facebook can collect about you as you browse the web. Now we're building Enhanced Tracking Protections, a major new feature in the Firefox browser that blocks most 3rd party trackers. This will greatly limit the ability of companies to secretly track people as they browse. We're rolling it out to more and more people, with the goal of turning it on by default for all of our users.

This is just one example of how product choices can create 'privacy by default' and help users. We've called on others to do the same. We've urged Facebook to end cross-site tracking by default and asked Apple to make it harder for third parties to track people by device. Along with efforts like our Lean Data Practices to limit the data we collect from our own products, it's an approach we hope others will adopt.

We have learned at Mozilla that it is unrealistic to expect users to sort through privacy policies to protect themselves. To make privacy real, the burden needs to shift from consumers to companies.

Unfortunately, that approach is at odds with many in our industry. To make systematic change, we will also need smart public policies that shift business incentives and force industry to put users first.

Policy Will Play A Central Role in Protecting Consumer Privacy

Which leads to my second main point: Today it is clear that regulation will be an essential part of protecting privacy. The European Union has been a leader in this space with the GDPR, and now countries around the world are updating their own privacy laws.

Updating the law is such an important tool because current practices and public policies have failed. Data has helped spur remarkable innovation and new products, but the long-standing 'notice-and-consent' approach to privacy now serves people poorly.

To be effective, we believe privacy law requires three core components. First, privacy law must include **clear rules for companies** that limit data collection and use. Second, privacy law must establish **strong rights for individuals,** including **granular and revocable consent** over **specific** data collection and use practices. Finally, privacy law must be implemented through **effective and empowered enforcement** through agencies that have clear authority and sufficient resources.

We believe these core components can be put in place while also preserving innovation and the beneficial uses of data. That is why we have supported new federal privacy law in the US, and are working with regulators in India, Kenya, and other countries to craft good privacy law.

Concerns About Content Online Will Require A Range of Approaches

Finally: We've focused so far on privacy, but given the conversation I want to at least touch on one of the central issues that's been raised over the last two days: content regulation.

Of the issues being examined by the Committee, this may be the most difficult. We have seen industry incentives that encourage the spread of misinformation and abuse, leading even to tragedy. Frankly, we've reached this point because the Internet community failed. Industry has failed, government has failed, and now we're trying to figure out what we can do. Yet we want to be sure that our reactions do not themselves undermine the freedom of expression and innovation that have been a positive force in people's lives.

If the current regulatory approach for content is not working, then it's appropriate to explore what more company responsibility might look like. At Mozilla, we have been working on an approach that would build accountability processes, rather than the current focus on individual pieces of content. We also believe the right approach would be principles-based, to ensure that companies take measures tailored and proportionate to their size and role.

Mozilla has also been engaged on disinformation, particularly in the lead up to the EU Parliament elections. We are signatories to the EC Code of Practice on Disinformation, a self-regulatory initiative with principles and commitments to thwart the spread of disinformation. For our part, we built tools in Firefox and other solutions to help people resist online manipulation and make informed choices.

We've also made efforts to push our fellow Code signatories to bring more transparency to political advertising, to ensure that journalists, researchers, and individuals can see who may be trying to influence the vote. We have candidly met with mixed results. There is much room to improve the tools that Facebook and Google are currently offering -- a signal that stronger action may be needed.

Conclusion

In conclusion: None of the issues being examined by the Committee are simple. And the continued evolution of technology - in areas like artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality, or the rising Internet of Things - won't make these issues any easier.

We will need to build up our societal capacity to grapple with these problems. At Mozilla we've been part of the Responsible Computer Science Challenge, to train a next generation of technologists on the social implications of their work. We support an effort to bring back the US Office of Technology Assessment, to build government's capacity to craft good technology policy. We're working to improve diversity in our company and

in our field, a huge capacity gap today. And our Internet Health Report is one contribution to the massive project we all face to educate the public and empower people to make good choices online.

These are just some examples of the ways we need to work across many different levels -- shaping better products; improving our public policies and regulations; and investing in society's capacity to handle future technology challenges.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today, and we look forward to working with you and your colleagues around the world to build a better Internet.