

It's an insult to the public that Google isn't sending its CEO to the Senate

- Google declined an invitation from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence to have CEO Sundar Pichai testify on Russia's meddling in the 2016 election.
- Google has largely avoided the recent controversies surrounding other tech platforms by letting Facebook and Twitter absorb all the public scrutiny.
- The Senate and the public deserve to hear from Google's top leadership, not its lawyers, about what went wrong and how the company plans to make things better.

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 Google CEO Sundar Pichai takes the stage during the presentation of new Google hardware in San Francisco on Oct. 4, 2016.

Beck Diefenbach | Reuters

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When the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence holds its next hearing on Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, it will hear from two of the top executives in the tech industry: [Twitter](#) CEO Jack Dorsey and [Facebook](#) COO Sheryl Sandberg.

Beside them on Wednesday could be an empty seat that's reserved for another high-profile leader. [Google](#) CEO [Sundar Pichai](#) has so far refused to accept the Senate committee's invitation to show up.

Instead of Pichai, [Google](#) offered its top lawyer, Kent Walker, to testify. Walker, the senior vice president of global affairs, is the same guy who previously testified [along with Facebook and Twitter's lawyers last year](#), which was a meek effort from all three companies at a time when Congress and the public deserved to hear from top leadership about how their platforms were so badly abused ahead of the elections.

"Chances are there's going to be an empty chair there," Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va, [told CNBC Wednesday](#), regarding Google's snub of the hearings. "And I think there will be a lot more questions raised that could have been actually dealt with if they sent a senior decision-maker and not simply their counsel."

Warner is the vice chair of the Senate committee.

Google has not said why Pichai or his boss, Alphabet CEO [Larry Page](#), won't accept the committee's invitation. The company declined to comment Friday.

It's a tumultuous time for the world's biggest tech companies, with Facebook taking most of the heat following the reveal of the Cambridge Analytica data scandal in March.

Since then, we've seen Facebook CEO [Mark Zuckerberg](#) go through two marathon sessions of weak congressional testimony. We've seen him fumble through a [self-inflicted scandal about posting Holocaust denial content](#) to the platform. We've seen him squirm when asked why Alex Jones was still allowed to post bogus conspiracy theories, only to boot Jones off Facebook [after a nod from Apple](#) a few days later. We've seen a handful of top Facebook executives, including security chief Alex Stamos, leave the company. And on and on and on.

 [Mark Zuckerberg, chief executive officer and founder of Facebook, speaks during a House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing in Washington, D.C., U.S., on Wednesday, April 11, 2018.](#)

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It's a similar story with Dorsey, who went on a [press tour during](#) the Jones controversy a few weeks ago and has faced a relentless barrage of scrutiny in the media, on [Twitter](#) and within his own company over how he's handled moderating all the vile content and abuse that infects the site every day.

But Google has largely been able to skirt the controversies plaguing its rival platforms, letting Facebook and Twitter take all the heat while its executives shy away from anything that could put them in danger of public scrutiny.

I'm not talking about [manufactured and false controversies from the president](#) about anti-conservative political bias in Google's search results, by the way. (But that's sure to be a good topic for conservative senators on the committee to distract from the hearing's stated purpose of looking into election meddling.) I'm talking about how Google has let its own platforms, ranging from Google search and Google News to YouTube, become abused and perverted over

the years. I'm talking about how if you think Facebook plays it fast and loose with your personal data, take a look at how Google uses the data you provide to target ads based on your location, videos you watch, your search queries and [even stuff you buy with your credit card](#).

Google also allows third parties to access your Google services, including Gmail. Cambridge Analytica and other third-party apps were able to scoop up Facebook user data with little oversight or accountability. [The Wall Street Journal reported](#) earlier this summer that Google also does little to police third parties that have access to users' Gmail accounts and their data. Plus, a few weeks ago [Google admitted](#) that some of its services can track your location, even if you selected to turn off location tracking.

Free pass

And yet, Google is getting a pass. Facebook and Twitter have been wildly inconsistent and confusing in their responses to various scandals, but at least they're taking their shots in full public view. Google would rather send Walker to spew a bunch of legalese than hold its own leaders accountable, just like it did last year.

Even more frustrating is the fact that Google's business appears to be immune to any controversy, giving leadership and investors zero economic incentive to own up to its issues. Google has a series of impenetrable moats around its business — it's the dominant search engine, has the top streaming video site, the most popular web browser, the most popular email service and makes the operating system that powers practically every non-Apple phone on the planet.

Because of all that, Alphabet is healthier than ever, reporting close to \$33 billion in revenue last quarter. Even the [European Union's record \\$5 billion Android antitrust fine](#) against Google was nothing more than a financial blip for the company, and will do little to stop its dominance in mobile. Google's stock, meanwhile, keeps climbing.

But those are also the very reasons Google should send Pichai to testify on Wednesday.

It's because Google is so big. It's because it has built so many moats around its businesses. It's because it needs personal data from users to make its billions. It's

because it built a suite of powerful platforms ripe for abuse from Russia [and Iran](#). That's what makes it so offensive that Google won't take its responsibility seriously enough to put its leader in front of the Senate and explain how it's going to do better.

Google should be examined in exactly the same way Facebook and Twitter will be on Wednesday.

But instead the company will keep its CEO in Mountain View while his peers are in Washington. And that's an insult to the rest of us.

 [Sen. Warner says Google is making a mistake after CEO declines DC hearing](#)

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