



## Google executives summoned by Canada MPs after blocking news content over 'link tax'

### Description

**Canadian lawmakers have demanded [Google](#) executives appear before a parliamentary committee to testify after the search engine began removing links to news articles for some Canadians in response to a proposed law to make the platform pay for republishing news content.**

Last week, Google started blocking links to news stories, both through its search results and its “discover” feature for nearly 4% of the population, a test the company said would last for five weeks. The company framed the blocking as a series of “tests” meant to better understand the implications of the controversial bill.

“It really surprises me that Google has decided that they would rather prevent Canadians from accessing news than actually paying journalists for the work they do,” prime minister Justin Trudeau said in response. “I think that’s a terrible mistake and I know that Canadians expect journalists to be well paid for the work they do.”

The federal government’s Online News Act, or [bill C-18](#), would compel Google and Facebook parent company Meta to sign deals with a wide range of Canadian news publishers to compensate them both for republishing their content and for indexing it. Google has called C-18 a “link tax” and senior management have said the bill pushes the debate over compensation in the “wrong direction”.

Some experts warned the government’s strategy could backfire and force the companies to retreat from the Canadian market.

The Canadian parliament’s heritage committee has now summoned Sundar Pichai, head of both Google and parent company Alphabet, as well as chief legal officer Kent Walker, vice-president of news Richard Gingras and [Canada](#) country manager Sabrina Geremia to appear on Monday in Ottawa. Lawmakers have also ordered the company to disclose any relevant internal documents surrounding its strategy.

The summons issued by parliament is enforceable only for individuals in Canada, meaning it would apply only to Toronto-based Geremia.

“It’s troubling that Google was doing this in secret, but was caught by the press,” parliamentary secretary Chris Bittle told the heritage committee earlier this week, when it voted unanimously to summon Google’s top executives. “It’s important for parliament to take a look and see what Google is doing. I don’t particularly like their track record on this.”

Other lawmakers called Google’s actions “irresponsible” in a criticism of the tech giant. “Google’s actions amount to censorship and Google’s actions are disrespectful of Canadians,” New Democratic party member Peter Julian told the committee yesterday.

It is unclear which, if any, Google representatives might appear before parliament on Monday. In 2019, Facebook executives Mark Zuckerberg and Sheryl Sandberg ignored a parliamentary summons in wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, angering lawmakers.

The current row mirrors a previous fight over compensation and access that unfolded in Australia after officials passed legislation that required Google and Facebook to pay media outlets for using their work. Facebook briefly halted news sharing in the country, as did Google, but both later relented and signed a compensation agreement.

Michael Geist, the Canada research chair in internet law at University of Ottawa said the federal government had created an overly broad interpretation of content use that in effect dared Google to call its bluff – which the Palo Alto-based company did earlier this week.

Geist has previously criticised the federal government’s decision to include linking and indexing in its bill, which could cost Google hundreds of millions

“I think, quite frankly, forcing companies to pay for links would strike many Canadians as pretty bizarre,” he said. “Especially because Google already has compensation agreements with a number of publishers.”

But he understood how the company’s decision to quietly roll out its news filter – admitting to it only after media outlets reported on it – has left Canadians “unsettled” about how the search giant operates.

“If they announced the change ahead of time, it would be characterized as bullying the government. If they don’t announce it, they’re characterized as being secretive and bullying the government.”

Google is in a “tougher position” than Facebook on the legislation because the bill targets indexing and link sharing – the nature of its business model, Geist said. In recent weeks, the search engines field has become an increasingly competitive space with the growing role of artificial intelligence.

“Google either takes a potential hit by having users look for other options, or they open a ‘Pandora’s box’ by paying for links, which if they agree, could prompt more groups to come forward saying they too are owed compensation,” Geist said. “You can frame it as a threat, but it’s just a rational response to legislation that comes with a really big price tag – and goes to the heart of how Google has functioned for two decades.”

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