

The Washington Post

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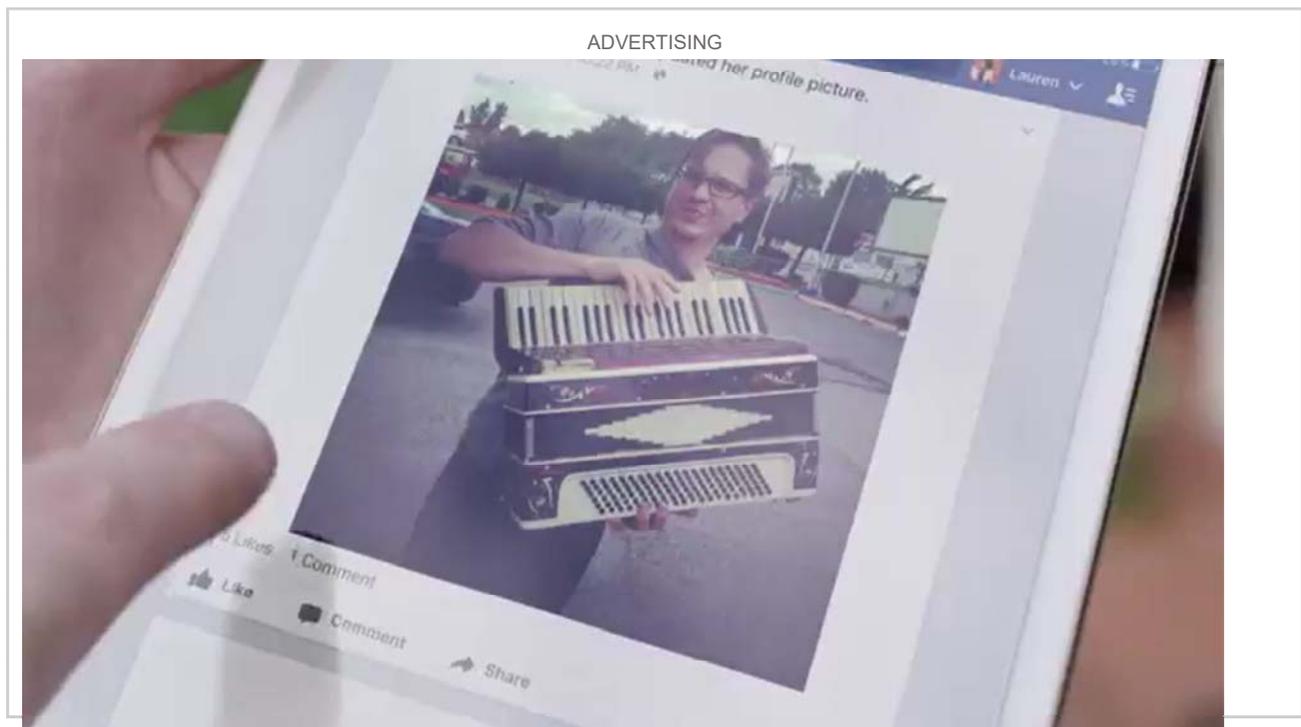
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When Apple [announced](#) late Tuesday it would not help the FBI break open an iPhone used by a shooter in the San Bernardino attacks, the tech giant did not fall back on that dry hallmark of corporate America, the public statement.

Instead, Apple's resistance came in the form of a forceful, fiercely worded [letter](#) personally signed by its chief executive, Tim Cook, who has quickly become one of America's most prominent and outspoken corporate activists.

"We can find no precedent for an American company being forced to expose its customers to a greater risk of attack," Cook [wrote](#). "We feel we must speak up in the face of what we see as an overreach by the U.S. government."



Cook has become a surprisingly candid firebrand atop the most valuable company on the planet, which was made infamous for corporate stealth and secrecy under its co-founder and former chief executive, the late Steve Jobs.

But while Apple, now worth more than half a trillion dollars, has remained guarded, Cook has opened up – speaking out vehemently on gender discrimination, cybersecurity, climate change and "political crap."

Cook's strong stance on digital privacy, which he has called a "[fundamental human right](#)," is a long-standing one, and it has earned him applause from groups like the Electronic Privacy Information Center, which honored him at its annual "Champions of Freedom" [event](#) last summer in Washington.

In 2014, Cook [told](#) journalist Charlie Rose that "if the government laid a subpoena to get iMessages, we can't provide it," adding, "Our business is not based on having information about you. You're not our product."

In December, on "60 Minutes," he repeated that view: "I don't believe that the tradeoff here is privacy versus national security. I think that's an overly simplistic view. We're America. We should have both."

But Cook has also charged into arenas far removed from modern tech. He [told](#) climate-change-denying investors in 2014 to "get out of this stock" after they complained about the company's pledge to slash greenhouse-gas emissions.

Under Cook, Apple has also publicly supported workplace-equality bills, advocated for same-sex marriage and opposed state measures that would discriminate against gays and lesbians, including in Alabama, his native state.

He became the first openly gay chief of a major American company in 2014 when he [wrote](#) in a public essay that he was "proud to be gay," adding that he "will personally continue to advocate for equality for all people until my toes point up."

Since then, Cook has penned aggressive editorials, including an [essay](#) last March in the *Washington Post*, saying "religious freedom" bills "rationalize injustice by pretending to defend something many of us hold dear."

He has also used some of that oratory firepower to stand up for Apple, [calling](#) Congressional claims that the company profits off an overseas tax scheme "total political crap."

Cook's high-profile advocacy has earned him love from Apple's peers and rivals in Silicon Valley. After Cook came out, Facebook head Mark Zuckerberg [wrote](#), "Thank you Tim for showing what it means to be a real, courageous and authentic leader."

Cook's headline-grabbing stare-down with the FBI could, as cynics have said, be seen an incredible promotional opportunity for Apple, the chief seller and protector of the virtually uncrackable iPhone. Cook's letter is titled "A Message to Our Customers," and can be found at apple.com/customer-letter.

But Cook's deep involvement could help boost his prestige, too, in the eyes of customers and, perhaps more importantly, in the minds that Silicon Valley spends heavily to recruit. Who doesn't want a gutsy, stands-up-to-the-man CEO to make their phone, or be their boss?

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