

US House passes bipartisan bill to ban TikTok or force its sale

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On Wednesday, the US House of Representatives passed, by a significant bipartisan majority, a bill that will shut down or force the sale of the video-sharing app TikTok by its Chinese owners. The right-wing, authoritarian and anti-Chinese legislation, which was moved unanimously by the House Energy and Commerce Committee less than a week ago, was approved by a vote of 352 to 65.

In the lower chamber of the US Congress, where nearly every bill stalls in gridlock, Democrats came together with Republicans in a supermajority to fast-track the passage of the bill, which asserts without substantiation that TikTok is a threat to US national security because it is owned by Beijing-based ByteDance, and thereby enables the Chinese government to spy on the American public.

After its passage, Republican Representative Mike Gallagher from Wisconsin, who wrote the bill with Democratic Representative Raja Krishnamoorthi from Illinois, said, “TikTok cannot continue to operate in the United States under its current ownership structure.”

The bill, called the “Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act,” will now move on to the US Senate where there is also considerable support for it. However, according to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*, passage by the Senate is uncertain, “because of questions about possible changes to the bill’s language, uncertainty about leaders’ positions and internal Senate dynamics.”

When asked how the Senate would vote on the TikTok ban, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Democrat from New York, “declined to say whether he would bring it up for a vote and said he would consult with Democratic committee chairs,” according to the *Journal* report.

President Joe Biden already said on Friday that he would sign the bill if Congress passed it. On Wednesday, during a press briefing, White House Press Secretary

Karine Jean-Pierre said, “We hope the Senate takes action and takes this up very quickly.”

TikTok is the most rapidly adopted app in the history of computer technology. Launched in 2016 by ByteDance, it achieved 100 million worldwide users within a year. This number grew to nearly 2 billion users by 2023. By comparison, it took Facebook nearly twice as long—approximately 13 years—to achieve the same number of global users as TikTok. The TikTok app has been downloaded more than 4 billion times.

In the US, monthly active users are reported to have reached 170 million in 2023. More than forty-five percent of these users are between the ages of 18 and 34, which is approximately equivalent to the entire demographic of 77 million Americans. Users over the age of 18 are estimated to be on TikTok an average of 55.8 minutes per day, a span of time greater than any other social media app.

In a video posted on social media platforms on Wednesday evening, TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew said, “Over the last few years we have invested to keep your data safe, and our platform free from outside manipulation. We have committed that we will continue to do so.”

Chew and other representatives of TikTok—the ByteDance subsidiary was incorporated in the Cayman Islands and has offices in Los Angeles and Singapore—have repeatedly pointed out that the platform does not share data with the Chinese government. In his video, Chew made it clear that if the legislation is signed into law, it “will lead to a ban of TikTok in the United States. Even the bill’s sponsors admit that that’s their goal.”

Chew also pointed out that TikTok is used by 7 million small businesses, and shutting it down will eliminate approximately 300,000 jobs in the US. Some estimates say that TikTok generated \$24.2 billion in US GDP and drove \$14.7 billion in small-business revenue in 2023.

The language in the House bill states that TikTok must divest from ByteDance within 180 days of its passage or face fines of up to \$500 per user, or a total amount of \$85 billion. Additionally, while the bill specifically mentions TikTok and ByteDance, the law can be used to shut down, in a similar manner, any other social media app with more than 1,000,000 users which is deemed a threat to national security for being a vaguely defined, “foreign adversary controlled application.”

It is a measure of the extreme crisis of the American political system that such a bill can win such widespread support of both political parties while it is universally opposed by the broad public. The bill to ban TikTok brings together in a unified way the anticommunism and rapid drive of the American ruling class to war with China, with attacks on democratic rights and the desperate effort to impose censorship on social media platforms that are influencing the views of wide layers of the population, especially young people.

The hysterical and unproven denunciations of the Beijing government for using TikTok to conduct electronic surveillance of the American public are aimed both at whipping up support for war with China and covering up the fact, for which there is ample evidence, that the US government itself has been spying on US citizens for decades, in complete violation of Fourth Amendment rights.

The timing of the passage of the legislation is no doubt connected to the fact that Democrats, Republicans and the corporate media are losing the battle over the official narratives about the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and US support for Israel’s criminal operation in Gaza.

While opponents of the TikTok ban have pointed to the bill’s infringement on First Amendment rights—millions of young people are learning the truth of what is happening in the wars sponsored and armed by the US government through videos on TikTok—the Democrats and Republicans supporting it are clearly seeking to shut down this avenue to news and information.

A report in the *New York Times* on Wednesday said that, while there was no unified support for the ban just a few months ago, “concern among lawmakers has grown even more in recent months, with many of them saying that TikTok’s content recommendations could be used for misinformation, a concern that has escalated in the United States since the Israel-Hamas war began.”

Democrat Krishnamoorthi told the *Times*, “It was a lot of things in the interim, including Oct. 7, including the

fact that the Osama bin Laden ‘Letter to America’ went viral on TikTok and the platform continued to show dramatic differences in content relative to other social media platforms.”

Aware that young people are opposed to the ban, Donald Trump—who previously attempted and failed to ban the platform with executive orders in the run-up to the 2020 elections and while he was President—said on CNBC that TikTok is a national security threat but, “There are a lot of young kids on TikTok who will go crazy without it.”

According to a report in the *Washington Post*, Trump’s reversal is “partially the product of a lobbying campaign connected to a GOP megadonor with connections that reach into Trump’s inner circle.” The *Post* report goes on to say that Trump supporter and “billionaire Jeff Yass owns 15 percent of ByteDance, which would amount to roughly \$40 billion of the company’s \$268 billion valuation.” Trump claimed on CNBC that he and the GOP donor “never mentioned TikTok” in their conversation.

However, the *Post* report says, “Trump and his aides have spoken about TikTok to people with direct financial ties to Yass. Yass is the biggest donor to the conservative organization Club for Growth, which is currently paying former Trump senior counselor Kellyanne Conway to defend TikTok on Capitol Hill, and which recently reconciled with Trump after a feud last year. Conway has also spoken to Trump about the importance of defending the social media app, according to two other people familiar with the matter, who also spoke on the condition of anonymity to reflect private deliberations.”



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