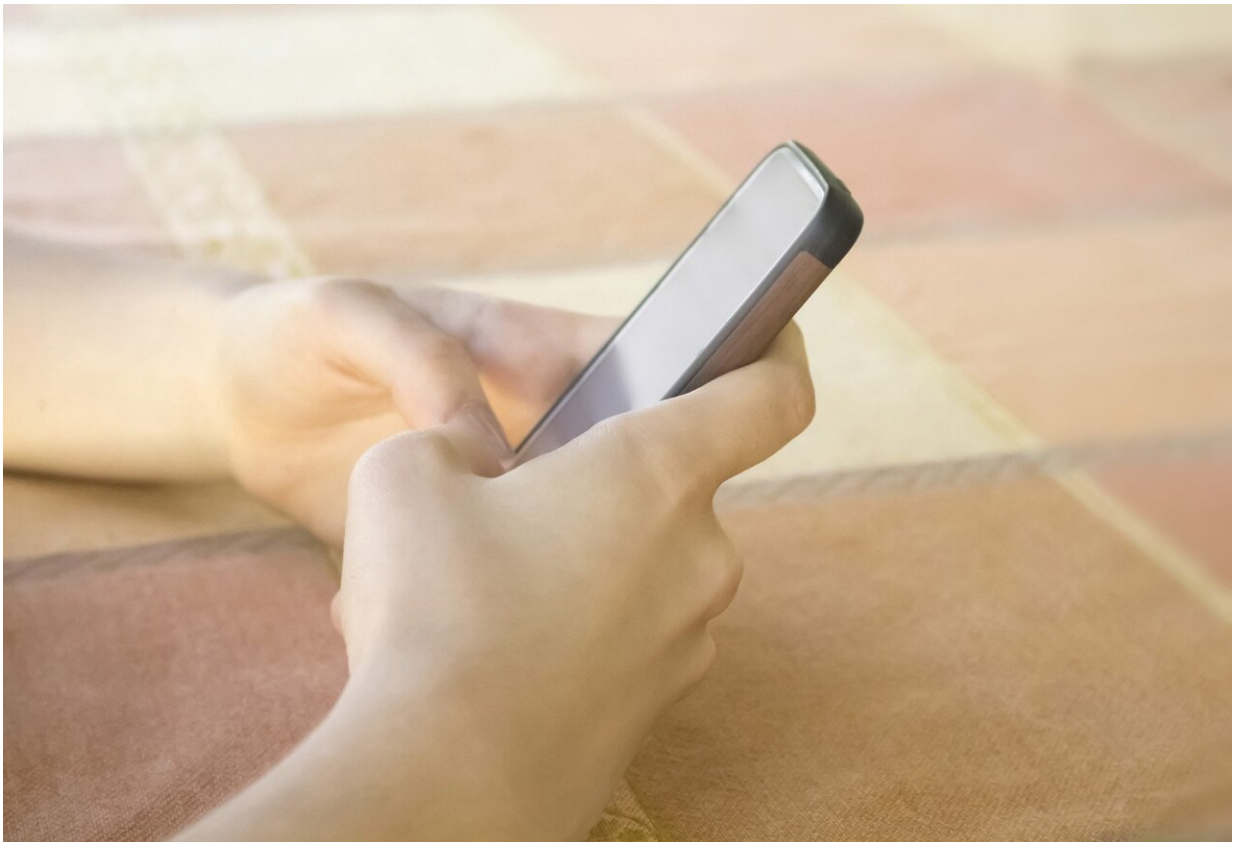


US Senate votes to ban TikTok on government phones

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The US Senate voted Thursday to bar TikTok from being downloaded onto US government employees' telephones, intensifying US scrutiny of the popular Chinese-owned video app.

The bill passed by the Republican controlled Senate now goes to the House of Representatives, led by Democrats.

"TikTok is a major security risk and has no place on government devices," said Republican Senator Josh Hawley, the sponsor of the bill.

President Donald Trump, who has locked horns with China on a range of issues including trade and the coronavirus pandemic, has set a deadline of mid-September for TikTok to be acquired by a US firm or be banned in the United States.

TikTok is owned by the Chinese firm ByteDance, and Microsoft is in talks to buy the app's US operations.

The bill passed Thursday says no government employee, members of Congress or people at government corporations may download or use TikTok or any successor app developed by ByteDance "on any device issued by the United States or a government corporation."

It states that the only exceptions are "any investigation, cybersecurity research activity, enforcement action, disciplinary action, or intelligence activity."

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Wednesday that the US wants to bar from US phones not just TikTok but other Chinese apps which it deems to be threats to Americans' personal data.

Washington says TikTok gleans massive amounts of personal data from hundreds of millions of users, which could be passed on to Chinese intelligence and used for spying purposes.

TikTok denies sending American user data back to China.

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