

TikTok chief faces off with US lawmakers as ban looms

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TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew is facing skeptical Washington lawmakers over the company's alleged ties to the Chinese government.

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew battled for the survival of the hugely popular video-sharing app in the United States on Thursday, as he faced

a barrage of accusations from Washington lawmakers over the company's alleged ties to China and its danger to teens.

The 40-year-old Singaporean addressed the powerful House Energy and Commerce Committee for hours of relentless grilling by both Republicans and Democrats who fear that Beijing could subvert the site for spying, data harvesting and to secretly push a Communist Party agenda.

TikTok, owned by Chinese company ByteDance, is under immense pressure across Western countries, with government officials in Washington, the United Kingdom and Canada forced to delete the app from their devices.

The app's gravest threat is from the United States, where the administration of President Joe Biden has set an ultimatum that the company either dump its Chinese ownership or face an outright ban.

"ByteDance is not owned or controlled by the Chinese government and is a private company," Chew told lawmakers in his opening remarks.

"We believe what's needed are clear transparent rules that apply broadly to all tech companies—ownership is not at the core of addressing these concerns," Chew added.

A ban would be an unprecedented act on a media company by the US government, cutting off 150 million monthly users in the country from an application that has become a cultural powerhouse—especially for young people—and the nation's most viewed source of online entertainment after Netflix.



Republican US lawmaker and committee chair Cathy Rodgers said TikTok should be banned in the United States.

Despite Chew's constant stream of assurances, the cards in Washington seemed to be stacked against the young CEO, with several pieces of legislation—including one bill backed by the White House—already paving the way for a ban of the app.

"TikTok has repeatedly chosen the path for more control, more surveillance and more manipulation. Your platform should be banned," Cathy McMorris Rodgers, chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said as she began the hearing.

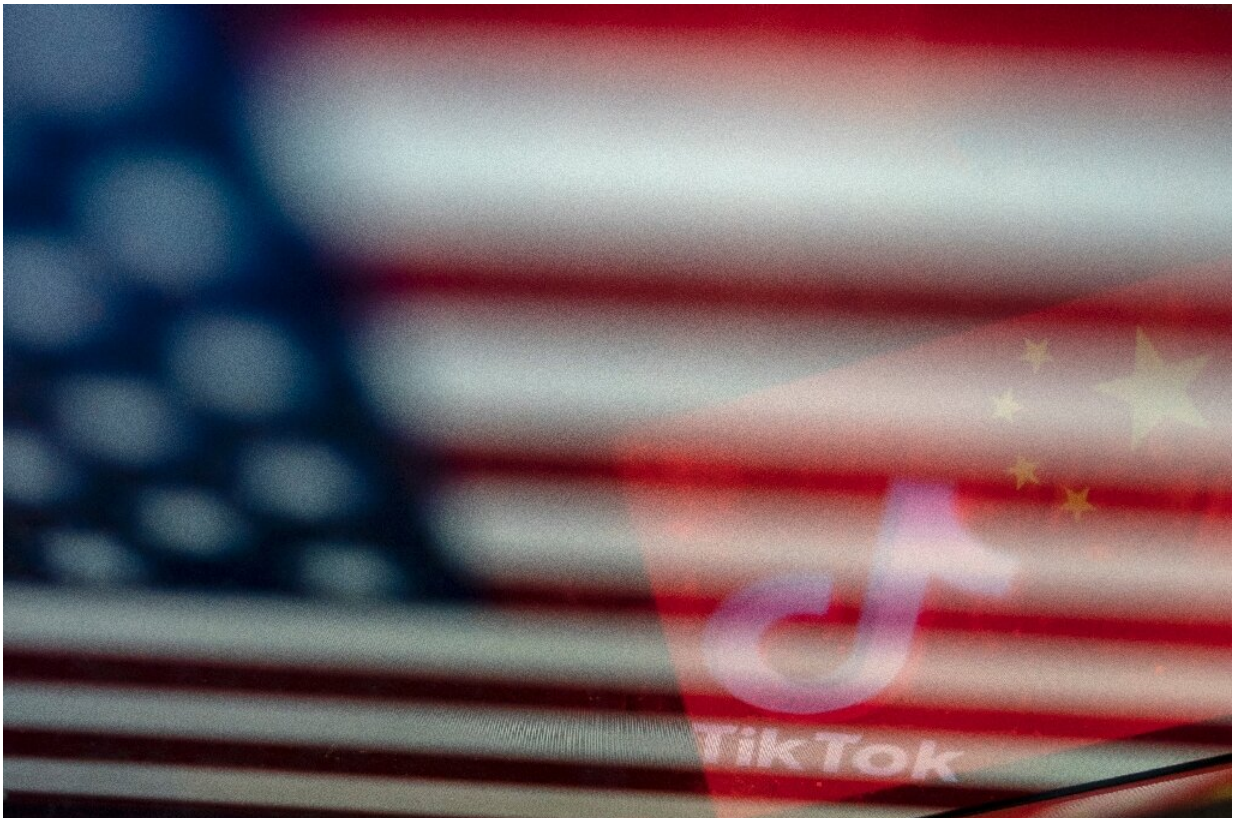
The 150 million American users on TikTok, are "Americans that the

CCP can collect sensitive information on, and control what we ultimately see, hear and believe," added the Republican, referring to the Chinese Communist Party.

In one particularly uncomfortable moment for Chew, he was forced to acknowledge that some personal data of Americans was still subject to Chinese law, but insisted that would soon be changed.

The US representatives also confronted Chew with dire examples of young users promoting suicide or dangerous stunts that have proved fatal and angered authorities globally.

"Your technology is literally leading to death," said Congressman Gus Bilirakis as he pointed to a family in the audience whose son was killed in a train tragedy that his family says was linked to TikTok.



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The White House was reported to have told TikTok that it will be banned in the United States if it continues to be owned by the Beijing-based tech firm ByteDance.

Warning from Beijing

Ahead of the hearing, the commerce ministry in Beijing said it would

"firmly oppose" a forced sale, underlining that any sale or spin-off of TikTok would require approval by Chinese authorities.

"Forcing the sale of TikTok... will seriously undermine the confidence of investors from various countries, including China, to invest in the US," added spokesperson Shu Jueting.

On Wednesday, a group of around a dozen teenagers, teachers and business owners rallied at the US Capitol to express their opposition to a potential ban.

"Are there other platforms out there? Absolutely—I'm on them. But none of them have the reach that TikTok has," aspiring soapmaking entrepreneur @countrylather2020 told her 70,000 followers in a video recorded after she arrived in Washington.

TikTok still hopes to appease the authorities.

Chew's testimony promoted the company's elaborate plan—known as Project Texas—to satisfy national security concerns, under which the handling of US data will be ring-fenced into a US-run division.

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