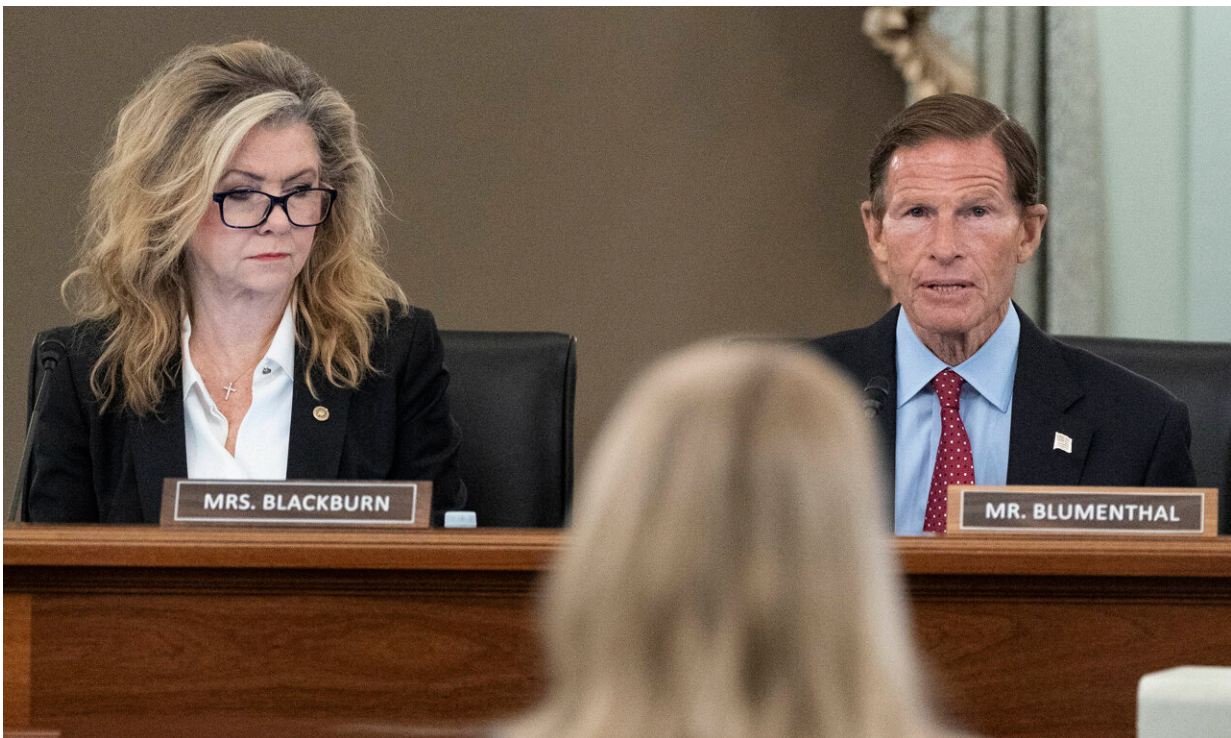


Senators call on TikTok CEO to explain 'inaccurate' statements about how company manages US data

June 7 2023, by Haleluya Hadero



Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., left, and Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., right speak during a hearing, Oct. 5, 2021, in Washington. The two U.S. senators are asking TikTok to explain what they called “misleading or inaccurate” statements about how it stores and provides access to U.S. user data. In a letter sent Tuesday, June 6, 2023 to TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew, U.S. Sens Richard Blumenthal and Marsha Blackburn cited recent news reports from Forbes and The New York Times that raised questions about how the company some handles sensitive U.S. user information. Credit: AP Photo/Alex Brandon, File

Two U.S. senators are asking TikTok to explain what they called "misleading or inaccurate" responses about how it stores and provides access to U.S. user data after recent news reports raised questions about how the Chinese-owned social media platform handles some sensitive information.

In a letter sent Tuesday to TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew, U.S. Sens. Richard Blumenthal and Marsha Blackburn cited a [report](#) from Forbes that said TikTok had stored financial information of U.S. content creators who get paid by the [company](#)—including their Social Security numbers and tax IDs—on China-based servers.

The senators also cited another report from The New York Times, published in late May, that said TikTok employees regularly shared [user information](#), such as driver's licenses information of some American users, on an internal messaging app called Lark that employees from TikTok's Beijing-based parent company, ByteDance, could easily access.

Forbes first reported Wednesday on the letter.

TikTok spokesperson Alex Haurek said, ""We are reviewing the letter. We remain confident in the accuracy of our testimony and responses to Congress."

TikTok has said servers that contain U.S. user data have been physically stored in Virginia and Singapore, where its headquartered. But who can access that data—and from where—is an ongoing question.

Chew, the company's CEO, said at a [congressional hearing in March](#) that access to the data was provided "as-required" to engineers globally for business purposes. He also said some ByteDance employees still

maintained access to some U.S. user data, but that would end once Project Texas—the company's plan to siphon off U.S. user data from China—was completed.

The popular social media app has been under scrutiny from Western governments, who've been wary of the company's Chinese ownership and have prohibited its use on government issued devices. Earlier this year, the Biden administration threatened to ban the platform nationwide if the company's Chinese owners don't sell their stakes.

To assuage concerns from U.S. lawmakers, TikTok has been touting its Project Texas plan to store U.S. user data on servers owned and maintained by the software giant Oracle. Last year, the company said it began directing all U.S. user traffic to those servers but also continued to back up data on its own servers.

Chew said the company began deleting all historic U.S. user data from non-Oracle servers in March, and the process expected to be completed this year.

In their letter, the senators also said the recent news reports appear to contradict testimonies from another TikTok official about where U.S. user data is stored.

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