

US lawmakers push for TikTok to cut ByteDance ties or face ban

March 6 2024, by Beiyi SEOW



A bipartisan group of lawmakers have introduced a bill prohibiting TikTok from operating in the United States unless it cuts ties to ByteDance.

US lawmakers moved Wednesday to pressure TikTok to sever ties with its Chinese parent company ByteDance or face a ban, in a push to keep

social media apps out of foreign adversaries' control.

A bipartisan group of 20 lawmakers introduced a bill barring platforms controlled by ByteDance from US app stores or web hosting services unless they are no longer linked to China.

The legislation would also allow the president to extend such a ban to social media platforms that pose a similar national security risk.

"I would submit this bill provides the only path for the app to continue its operations in the United States without threatening Americans' online freedom, privacy and security," said Mike Gallagher, who chairs the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party.

Referring to TikTok at a Wednesday press briefing, the Wisconsin Republican added, "We simply cannot allow an app controlled by our nation's foremost adversary and competitor to take over the American media landscape."

In discussing the bill, policymakers raised concern that TikTok has become a key news source for young people.

But a TikTok spokesperson told AFP: "This bill is an outright ban of TikTok, no matter how much the authors try to disguise it."

The new bill would give ByteDance roughly six months to divest, said Raja Krishnamoorthi, an Illinois Democrat and ranking member of the Select Committee.

He stressed that the bill is not solely about TikTok.

'Important' step

A National Security Council spokesperson told AFP that the bill is "an important and welcome step" to addressing threats to sensitive US data and national security.

"We look forward to working with Congress to further strengthening this legislation to put it on the strongest possible legal footing," the council spokesperson added.

An effort last year also threatening a ban on TikTok stalled in Congress amid lobbying by the company.

The White House has noted national security concerns about the use of TikTok on government devices.

A range of US politicians accuse the app owned by ByteDance of being under the tutelage of the Chinese government and a tool of espionage by Beijing, something the company denies.

Regulators across the world are worried that user data may be accessed by Chinese-based employees or government entities in Beijing, although the platform said user data is securely stored in Singapore and the United States.

TikTok saw its popularity rocket during pandemic lockdowns and boasts more than one billion global users.

But scrutiny has intensified after ByteDance admitted in December 2022 that employees accessed the data of two journalists during an internal probe into corporate leaks.

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Citation: US lawmakers push for TikTok to cut ByteDance ties or face ban (2024, March 6)

retrieved 28 April 2024 from

<https://techxplore.com/news/2024-03-lawmakers-tiktok-bytedance.html>

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