

TikTok devotees say platform unfairly targeted for US ban

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TikTok creators opposed to a bill that could result in the platform shutting down in the United States say accusations it is controlled by the Chinese government lack proof.

TikTok creators voiced outrage Wednesday over proposed legislation that could scuttle the platform in the United States, saying it defies

common sense and financial wisdom.

The House of Representatives approved a bill that would force TikTok to divest from its Chinese owner or be banned over its alleged links to the Communist Party in Beijing.

"If it was really about all the things they were saying, then we would be having this conversation with (X owner) Elon Musk, who basically could change American politics at a whim," TikTok creator Ariella Elm told AFP outside the White House.

Elm, a self-described political activist, has some 287,000 followers on TikTok.

President Joe Biden says he would sign the bill into law if it came to his desk, but the bill must make it through the Senate first.

"It's a big possibility that it could be banned, which is crazy," fellow TikTok creator Nathan Espinoza, whose uses the handle 'beowulftiktok', told AFP. "Lawmakers don't understand how huge of an issue this is."

"My entire comment section of videos that I've posted about this topic are just flooded with an overwhelmingly negative response, where people are not happy with it at all."

TikTok has been adamant that the Chinese government does not pull its strings.

"A lot of these lawmakers are making it sound like it's just full of Chinese propaganda or it's full of messages from the Chinese Communist Party," Espinoza said.

"But for me, it's actually been the only social media where I've seen an

even representation of all sides of politics."

Young users, young voters

TikTok plays a major role in the digital media industry and when it comes to marketing, particularly for small businesses, Espinoza reasoned.

Millions of people from politicians to teenagers and entrepreneurs would feel the blow if TikTok was shut down in the United States, agreed lifestyle content creator Steven King, whose 'btypep' account has 6.8 million followers.

"There is no sense of community on any other platform in comparison to what TikTok has created," King said.

Summer Lucille, whose TikTok account dubbed Juicy Body Goddess has 1.4 million followers, described the platform as rich with raw information in real time and having a recommendation algorithm "like gold."

Espinoza, who recently turned 18 years old, also believes elected officials backing the bill will be in for a "big shock" with he and his TikTok-loving demographic express their ire at the ballot box.

"This is my first-year voting and a lot of people my age are against this TikTok ban," Espinoza said.

Some TikTok users, however, told AFP they are open to legislation that could protect them as well as defend national security.

"The addiction aspect of it is something we don't really talk about," Victor Pelatere, a 20-year-old Boston resident, told AFP.

"The whole TikTok brain rot idea—massive dopamine spikes and no attention span—those kinds of things are good for banning."

Annmarie Fitzgerald, 22 of Boston, was among those who spoke of perhaps using TikTok too much.

"Think about a couple of years ago, we didn't have it. It'll be OK if we don't have it again," she said.

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