

TikTok dragged into US election as Trump opposes ban

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Donald Trump speaks during a campaign event in Rome, Georgia, on March 9, 2024.

In a major reversal, former US president Donald Trump on Monday said he was against a ban of TikTok as the fate of the popular video-sharing

app was dragged into the US election campaign.

Years of on-and-off attempts of banning the Chinese owned app have resurged in the United States with the introduction of a [bill](#) in Congress that could see the app forced to cut ties with its Chinese owner, Bytedance.

The US House of Representatives could vote this week on the bill with furious lobbying on both sides making it hard to predict the outcome, and the stance of Trump could prove key for Republicans.

Trump's turnaround came as a surprise since he was a proponent of stripping TikTok away from Bytedance when he was president, before he was stopped by a US court.

He feared, as many still do, that the site was a national security threat with tens of millions of young people entertained by TikTok algorithms that are potentially subject to the whims of the Chinese Communist Party—a charge the company strenuously denies.

President Joe Biden has given his support to the bill, while also turning to Tiktok to address younger voters in video clips as part of his outreach to win a second term.

"We don't see this as banning these apps—that's not what this is," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters last week.

"But by ensuring that their ownership isn't in the hands of those who may do us harm, this is about our national security, obviously, and this is what we're focused on," she added.

The White House, leading the way for many western governments, last year banned the use of TikTok on government-issued smartphones.

But the White House had stopped short of pursuing an all-out ban, with worry in Washington that the move would infuriate influencers and the app's 170 million US users, mainly [young people](#) who will be key to Biden's re-election.

'Love it'

Trump said he opposed a ban of TikTok mainly because it would benefit Facebook-owner Meta and its founder Mark Zuckerberg, who he believes supports Democrats.

Meta was caught by surprise by the massive success of TikTok and his Instagram platform has since rolled out its Reels copycat to try to compete (YouTube did much the same with its Shorts feature).

"Frankly, there are a lot of people on TikTok that love it. There are a lot of young kids on TikTok who will go crazy without it," Trump told CNBC in an interview.

"There's a lot of good and there's a lot of bad with TikTok, but (what) I don't like is that without TikTok, you're going to make Facebook bigger and I consider Facebook to be an enemy of the people along with a lot of the media," Trump added.

Trump's new stance on TikTok, which could likely sink the bill, has raised eyebrows with observers.

The former US leader denied accusations that he changed his tune because a major investor in Bytedance, hedge funder Jeff Yass, is donating to his campaign.

According to Politico, his former senior aide Kellyanne Conway is lobbying against the bill in congress, working for a political group

funded by Yass.

The app raised alarm last week when a push notification, titled "Stop a TikTok shutdown," asked users to contact their political representatives to fight the bill, sparking a deluge of users' phone calls to Washington.

"Here you have an example of an adversary-controlled application lying to the American people and interfering with the legislative process in Congress," the bill's sponsors complained in a statement.

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