

# US billionaire eyes TikTok takeover to save internet from Big Tech

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US real estate billionaire Frank McCourt speaks during an interview at the Collision 2024 tech conference.

Frank McCourt, a US real estate billionaire, aims to buy TikTok to rescue the internet from the clutches of major platforms that he firmly

believes are destroying society and endangering children.

In the United States, McCourt is best known as the former owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team, while in Europe he is the current proprietor of storied football club Olympique de Marseille that counts French President Emmanuel Macron among its fans.

For years, McCourt has railed against the power of the big tech platforms, accusing them of harming children and helping send the world off the rails.

"We are being manipulated by these big platforms. And that's why we see in free societies everywhere, there's sort of the world on fire, right?" McCourt told AFP at the Collision tech conference in Toronto.

He cited political upheaval in France, where the far-right could secure a decisive victory in the upcoming parliamentary elections, as the latest example.

"There's a lot of agitation, a lot of chaos, a lot of polarization. Well, you know what, the algorithms are working well. They're keeping us in that constant state. It's time for change."

McCourt said he was initially motivated to act by the threat posed by social media to his own seven children.

"This internet is predatory. It's doing a lot of damage to kids. We see the anxiety, the depression, and an epidemic now of children taking their lives," he said.

To address the problem, McCourt is campaigning for a "new internet" which, he claims, would wrest control of the web away from major platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, or X.

"These platforms have hundreds of thousands of individual attributes about each of us. And it's not just where we shop or what we like to eat or where we physically are present. It's about how we think, how we emote, how we react, how we behave," he said.

McCourt envisions a new internet that he describes as an [open-source](#), decentralized protocol where users control their own data, regardless of the social media app they use.

Acquiring TikTok would give his project known as Project Liberty a whole new scale, bringing in its legions of users, mostly [younger people](#), he said.

Project Liberty counts internet pioneer Tim Berners-Lee as a supporter, along with Jonathan Haidt, an NYU professor whose latest book, "The Anxious Generation," argues that the effects of [social media](#) on young people have been devastating.

## 'Undemocratic'

McCourt is not alone in eyeing the Chinese-owned [platform](#), with Trump's former secretary of the treasury, Steve Mnuchin, also advancing a bid.

These plans, which some say are far-fetched, follow a bill signed by US President Joe Biden in April that gives TikTok 270 days to find a non-Chinese buyer or face a ban in the country.

However, it is hardly a sure thing that TikTok will end up being for sale.

The company is fighting the law in US courts, and the Chinese government has said it would not accept the divestment of one of the country's most successful tech brands.

"The US government's concern is that the data of 170 million Americans is being scraped and sent to China," which "of course" poses a [national security threat](#), McCourt said.

However, he added, "I hope that this TikTok issue will make that [light bulb](#) go off for people, and they'll realize (that even on other platforms) their data is being scraped and shipped somewhere."

"Maybe it's not going to China, but it's going somewhere controlled by someone who has everything about you, and that's not correct. That's undemocratic," he said.

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