

Conservative social network Parler sues Amazon over web shutdown

11 January 2021, by Juliette Michel



Parler was forced offline, after Amazon warned the company would lose access to its servers for its failure to properly police violent content

The social platform Parler sued Amazon on Monday after the tech giant's web division forced the conservative-favored network offline for failing to rein in incitements to violence.

Nevada-based Parler asked a federal court for a restraining order to block Amazon Web Services from cutting off access to internet servers.

The suit comes amid a wave of action by online giants blocking access to President Donald Trump's supporters in the wake of last week's US Capitol invasion and purported plans for new violent demonstrations, especially on the day President-elect Joe Biden is due to take office.

Twitter announced Monday that it had suspended "more than 70,000" accounts linked to the QAnon conspiracy theory in light of last Wednesday's attack, in which five people died.

The lawsuit said Parler was due to go dark late Monday, but web trackers said it already was

offline early in the day and had failed to find a new hosting service.

Shutting down the servers would be "the equivalent of pulling the plug on a hospital patient on life support," the lawsuit said. "It will kill Parler's business—at the very time it is set to skyrocket."

Parler alleged Amazon was violating antitrust laws and acting to help social rival Twitter, which also has banned Trump for language that could incite violence.

"AWS's decision to effectively terminate Parler's account is apparently motivated by political animus. It is also apparently designed to reduce competition in the microblogging services market to the benefit of Twitter," the complaint said.

Amazon said there was "no merit" to the lawsuit.

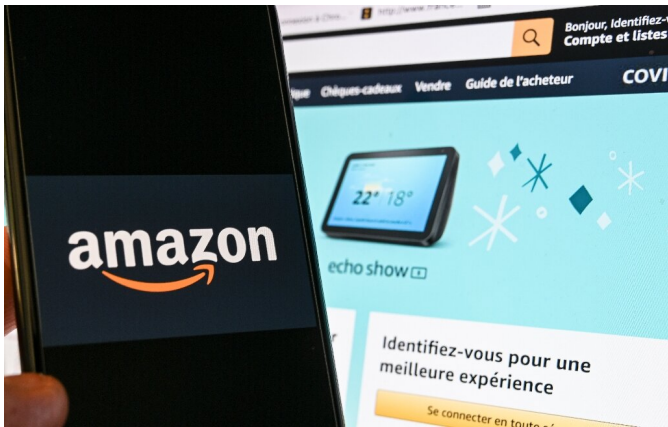
"We respect Parler's right to determine for itself what content it will allow," an AWS spokesperson said.

"However, it is clear that there is significant content on Parler that encourages and incites violence against others, and that Parler is unable or unwilling to promptly identify and remove this content, which is a violation of our terms of service."

Amazon said it had been in contact with Parler "over a number of weeks" and that during that time "we saw a significant increase in this type of dangerous content, not a decrease, which led to our suspension of their services Sunday evening."

'War' on speech

In a series of posts on Parler before the site went down, CEO John Matze accused the tech giants of a "war on free speech."



Amazon said its web hosting division pulled the plug on Parler after the social network failed to crack down on incitements of violence

Matze also denied allegations that it enables violent content.

"Our team worked hard to produce a strong set of community guidelines, which expressly forbids content which incites or threatens violence, or other activity which breaks the law," he said in a statement.

But he also maintained that it is problematic to police all content because "Parler is not a surveillance app, so we can't just write a few algorithms that will quickly locate 100 percent of objectionable content."

The lawsuit is the latest twist in a tussle between online operators and supporters of the president that hit a new phase after the siege of the US Capitol last week.

Twitter and Facebook each suspended Trump's account, while online payment service Stripe said it would stop handling transactions on Trump's website following last week's assault.

Twitter also said that it had begun purging QAnon-linked accounts Friday, permanently suspending "more than 70,000 accounts... with many instances of a single individual operating numerous accounts.

"These accounts were engaged in sharing harmful QAnon-associated content at scale and were primarily dedicated to the propagation of this conspiracy theory across the service," Twitter said in a blog post.

The far-right QAnon conspiracy theory claims Trump is waging a secret war against a global liberal cult of Satan-worshipping pedophiles.

Twitter said its decision to suspend Trump's account and others also factored in that plans for more armed protests have been proliferating on and off the service, including a proposed second attack on the US Capitol and state capitol buildings on January 17.

Parler, which launched in 2018, operates much like Twitter, with profiles to follow and "parleys" instead of tweets.

In its early days, the platform attracted a crowd of ultraconservative and even extreme-right users. But more recently, it has signed up many more traditional Republican voices.

Trump supporters expressed outrage at the news the platform was being taken down.

Ahead of the shutdown, the president's son, Donald Trump Jr., complained that "big tech has totally eliminated the notion of free speech in America."

The platform drew fierce criticism in 2018 when investigators found that the shooter who killed 11 people in an attack on a Pittsburgh synagogue had earlier posted anti-Semitic messages on the site.

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