

# [***TikTok creators warn of economic impact if app sees ban, call it a vital space for the marginalized***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BJT-0N41-DYMD-61YX-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Alex Pearlman shut the door on dreams of a standup comedy career almost a decade ago, pivoting from the stage to an office cubicle where he worked a customer service job.

Then he started posting random jokes and commentary about pop culture and ***politics*** on TikTok. Just over 2.5 million followers later, he quit his nine-to-five and recently booked his first nationwide tour.

Pearlman is among the many TikTok creators across the U.S. outraged over a bipartisan bill [*passed by the House of Representatives*](https://apnews.com/article/tiktok-ban-house-vote-china-national-security-8fa7258fae1a4902d344c9d978d58a37) on Wednesday that would lead to a nationwide ban of the popular video app if its China-based owner, ByteDance, doesn’t sell its stake. The bill still needs to go through the Senate, where its prospects are unclear.

Content creators say a ban would hurt countless people and businesses that rely on TikTok for a significant portion of their income, while also arguing TikTok has become an unrivaled platform for dialogue and community.

Pearlman, who lives outside Philadelphia, said TikTok has transformed his life, allowing him to live a dream, provide for his family and spend the first three months of his newborn son's life at home. His customer service job only offered paternity leave equivalent to three weeks off, with two weeks paid.

“I don’t take a day for granted on this app, because it’s been so shocking," said Pearlman, 39. "In reality, TikTok has been the driver of American social media for the last four years. Something will step into that place if TikTok vanishes tomorrow. Whether or not that will be better or worse, Congress has no way of knowing.”

TikTok, which launched in 2016, has skyrocketed in popularity, growing faster than Instagram, YouTube or Facebook. The [*push to remove the app from Chinese authority*](https://apnews.com/article/tiktok-ban-bytedance-bill-divest-5b5a685e8f1e19d22182d62526bf19b8) follows concerns from lawmakers, law enforcement and intelligence officials about the insecurity of user data, potential suppression of content unfavorable to the Chinese government and the possibility that the platform could boost pro-Beijing propaganda, all of which TikTok denies.

To date, the U.S. government hasn't provided any evidence showing TikTok shared U.S. user data with Chinese authorities.

The move comes as the pandemic saw huge growth in digital marketing as people were stuck at home consuming — and creating — content at levels not seen before.

Jensen Savannah, a 29-year-old from Charlotte, began making TikToks of her travels around the Carolinas during the pandemic. Now a full-time influencer, she has tripled her income since leaving her telecommunications sales job.

“'Social media Influencer' is almost to be looked at as the new print and the new form of radio and TV advertising,” she said. “It’s going to bring your dollar much farther than it is in traditional marketing.”

Some creators describe it as a digital equalizer of sorts, providing a platform for people of color and other marginalized groups to get opportunities and exposure.

“I’ve always had Twitter, I’ve had Facebook, I’ve had Instagram. But TikTok was the first one where, if you want to find somebody who looks like yourself and represents you in any type of way, you can find it,” said Joshua Dairen, a Black, 30-year-old content creator in Auburn, Alabama. Dairen makes videos about his state's ghost stories, urban legends and history.

Growing up, he loved researching everything paranormal, but he didn't see a lot of Black representation in the field. Exposure on TikTok has led to jobs writing freelance pieces and contributing to documentaries about paranormal occurrences and unsolved mysteries. The app also gave Dairen the flexibility and confidence to open his own coffee shop, where he gets visits at least once a day from fans of his work.

He thinks banning TikTok sets “a dangerous precedent about how much power our highest levels of government can wield.”

Others say the app is both a financial and social safety net.

Chris Bautista, a food truck owner in Los Angeles catering to television and movie sets, started using TikTok during the pandemic to connect with members of the LGBTQ+ community and show support for those who might be having a hard time.

Bautista, 37, grew up in a conservative Christian community outside LA and didn't come out until his late 20s. As a young person, he struggled with his mental health and considered suicide. He wanted to create a platform he could have used as a teenager, one showing that someone like him could go to that dark place and come out the other side a “well-adjusted, confident person.”

“I just find the corners of TikTok that I find myself in to be so wildly important and profound," according to Bautista, who said it would be “heartbreaking” if the app was banned.

Bautista didn't start posting with the intention of monetizing the experience, but money from projects tied to the app came at the right time: If it wasn't for the extra income he earned through TikTok during the pandemic and then the [*Hollywood strikes*](https://apnews.com/hub/hollywood-strikes/) last year, his business would have shut down.

Almost since its inception, concerns have been raised about the [*addictive nature of the app*](https://apnews.com/article/data-privacy-regulation-facebook-instagram-social-media-798dbfa6004da3a2aa2c36031369a909), especially for young audiences whose minds are still developing. Marcus Bridgewater, a former private school teacher and administrator who owns his own business and posts TikTok gardening videos, wants Congress to be focused on those issues, and not whether the app is Chinese-owned.

“Social media is a powerful tool," said Bridgewater, who lives in Spring, Texas. "And powerful tools are just that: They are capable of helping us transcend ourselves, but in their transcendence, they’re also capable of completely severing us from those we love.”

Pearlman said he has long feared politicians would come after TikTok. He compared the experience of finding out about the House vote to finally getting the call that an ailing loved one has died.

“The part that’s disturbing to me is, I feel like for a lot of Americans, TikTok and social media in general is a release valve — it’s kind of become a default complaint box," he said. “So to many people, it feels like they’re trying to ban the complaint box instead of dealing with the complaint.”

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