

# [***Tik, Tok: Time Is Running Out for Senate To Pass ByteDance Bill | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BTP-BS51-JBR6-9001-00000-00&context=1516831)

Newsweek.com

April 17, 2024 Wednesday 2:09 PM EST

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**Length:** 1007 words

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**Highlight:** The law, if passed, would force ByteDance to divest from TikTok and sever its ties to the Chinese Communist Party or cease its U.S. operations.

**Body**

Last week, [*Senate*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/senate?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Majority Leader [*Chuck Schumer*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/chuck-schumer?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) offered a glimmer of hope that the [*Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act*](https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/7521) might finally become law. The law, if passed, would force ByteDance to divest from [*TikTok*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/tiktok?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and sever its ties to the Chinese Communist Party or cease its U.S. operations. However, despite enjoying near-universal bipartisan support and the overwhelming backing of [*the American people*](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/03/31/by-a-more-than-two-to-one-margin-americans-support-us-government-banning-tiktok/), the bill remains mired in the Senate.

Why?

The Senate Commerce Committee, led by Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), [*holds the key*](https://apnews.com/article/tiktok-ban-house-vote-china-national-security-8fa7258fae1a4902d344c9d978d58a37) to the bill's success or failure. Despite consensus on the urgent threat posed by TikTok, the senator has stubbornly insisted on subjecting the bill to a series of hearings and markups that could [*derail its progress*](https://www.newsweek.com/congress-closert-tiktok-crackdown-1881500?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships). While most of her fellow senators recognize the need for swift and decisive action, Cantwell has expressed doubts about the House bill's ability to withstand [*legal scrutiny*](https://punchbowl.news/article/cantwell-tiktok-bill-guard-act/#:~:text=Cantwell%20has%20her%20own%20TikTok,on%20her%20TikTok%20plan%2C%20however.), using this as a pretext to delay the legislative process.

More troubling, though, is Cantwell's apparent desire to make this issue about herself rather than the grave national security threat at hand. Despite failing to secure a single [*Republican*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republican?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) cosponsor or gain any meaningful traction, Cantwell continues pushing her own TikTok proposal, [*the GUARD Act*](https://punchbowl.news/article/cantwell-tiktok-bill-guard-act/#:~:text=Cantwell%20has%20her%20own%20TikTok,on%20her%20TikTok%20plan%2C%20however.). It increasingly appears that her opposition to the current proposal stems more from a desire to secure a win for herself and her own legislation than a genuine commitment to addressing the clear and present danger posed by TikTok.

The Commerce Committee's stagnant position stands in stark contrast to the urgent need for decisive action against the growing threat posed by TikTok. American user data has been [*accessed*](https://news.yahoo.com/tiktok-confirms-stores-us-user-183006782.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAANzJdUAbklNv4qvWb5Junqt_sgBGF7IIM7F2mwTbz3ASySPIom-zqaX_y_kKisW9uPupOIMH0cgwYdHISAPxeLiNMyQb6NBdaplAV7jbXkygNekle4gIbafQXz2HsJJ_KKbGyJG-j8but_eUo2z31MiHIOkbV8gBB_jNYFAXhu1l#:~:text=Amid%20heightened%20scrutiny%20by%20U.S.,U.S.%20users'%20data%20in%20China.) in China, ByteDance has [*spied on American journalists*](https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilybaker-white/2022/12/22/tiktok-tracks-forbes-journalists-bytedance/?sh=3fc4b3b37da5), and a former ByteDance executive claims the CCP has a [*backdoor*](https://www.foxbusiness.com/technology/former-bytedance-exec-counters-tiktok-ceo-testimony-ccp-backdoor-access-user-data-stored-us) to the app's vast trove of user data. Each day that the bill remains stalled in committee is another day that TikTok is allowed to operate unchecked, not only threatening our national security but also jeopardizing the personal privacy and security of its more than 150 million American users.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence has already sounded the alarm, [*warning*](https://www.politico.com/news/2024/03/11/china-is-using-tiktok-for-influence-campaigns-odni-says-00146336) that TikTok accounts operated by a Chinese propaganda arm targeted candidates from both political parties during the 2022 U.S. midterms. Even more chilling is the revelation that China is working hard to [*develop*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/01/business/media/china-online-disinformation-us-election.html) sophisticated generative [*AI tools*](https://time.com/6963787/china-influence-operations-artificial-intelligence-cyber-threats-microsoft/) to manipulate U.S. public opinion.

While our senators have been deliberating, TikTok has launched a [*$2.1 million advertising blitz*](https://www.cnbc.com/2024/03/27/tiktok-makes-2point1-million-ad-buy-as-senate-reviews-bill-that-could-ban-app.html) targeting vulnerable Senate [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) in battleground states and key media markets. This, on top of the company's already outrageous [*lobbying budget*](https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2023/07/bytedance-spends-millions-lobbying-outpacing-prior-years-amid-crackdown-on-tiktoks-china-ties/). The goal is clear: to buy influence, sway public opinion, and pressure lawmakers into abandoning their duty to protect our national security. By weaponizing its user base—the app's fans have flooded congressional offices with emotional appeals and even threats of violence—TikTok is demonstrating its power over American ***politics*** and making it all the more clear that time is of the essence.

The calls for a full amendment process, emanating from a small faction of senators on [*both sides of the aisle*](https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/4545872-cruz-says-controversial-tiktok-bill-will-benefit-the-apps-users/#:~:text=Cruz%20said%20he%20expects%20the,serious%20threat%2C%E2%80%9D%20he%20said.), may appear innocuous at first glance. These senators argue that the amendment process presents an opportunity to refine the language of the bill, potentially resulting in a more polished and effective piece of legislation. However, this seemingly harmless approach could have severe unintended consequences, slowing the bill's momentum and exposing it to the risk of poison pills and bad-faith efforts designed to derail its passage entirely.

While the intentions of these senators may be noble, the reality is that subjecting the bill to a protracted amendment process could lead to an unraveling of its integrity, potentially eroding the bipartisan support it currently enjoys. This is particularly concerning given that the bill, in its current form, does not implicate companies like X or Rumble, despite the [*claims of some detractors*](https://thehill.com/policy/technology/4528899-greene-tik-tok-bill-opposition-twitter-ban/). Opening the legislation up to amendments could potentially expand its scope, inviting partisan politicking and diluting its effectiveness in addressing the urgent national security threat posed by TikTok.

The battle over TikTok is about more than just the fate of a single app; it is about America's ability to counter the ever-evolving threats posed by foreign adversaries in the digital age. If we can't come together to pass one of the rare bipartisan bills that enjoys near-universal support in the face of a clear and present danger, what hope do we have of ever being able to counter the influence of bad actors in the future?

While policymakers engage in endless deliberation, our enemies are exploiting every weakness in our system to advance their own interests. They aren't constrained by the same procedural norms and political considerations that paralyze our legislative process. They are willing and able to use every tool at their disposal, from economic coercion to cyber espionage and disinformation campaigns, to undermine our democracy and erode our global standing.

We cannot afford to sit idly by, hoping that our old ways of doing things will be enough to counter the ever-evolving threats we face in the digital age. If the Senate fails to act decisively on the TikTok matter, it will send a clear signal to our adversaries that we lack the resolve and adaptability necessary to protect our digital sovereignty and defend our national interests. This failure would be an open invitation for China to push even harder in the digital realm, leveraging its vast resources and authoritarian control to gain a competitive edge in the critical technologies that will shape the 21st century. The time has come for the Senate to put America first and put an end to this threat.

*Jake Denton is a Research Associate in the Tech Policy Center at The Heritage Foundation.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2379687/tiktok-logo-us-chinese-flags.jpg)

**Graphic**

TikTok logo with U.S. and Chinese flags

Hasan Mrad/UCG/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

TUNISIA, In this photo illustration, the TikTok logo is displayed on a smartphone screen with the United States flag and China flag in the background, on March 19, 2024.

**Load-Date:** April 17, 2024

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