

# Donald Trump flip-flops on TikTok and now rails against a ban

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Donald Trump, who flirted with a US ban on the Chinese owners of TikTok while president, has come out in favor of the popular phone app. "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 on Monday, saying that without it "you can make Facebook bigger and I consider Facebook to be an enemy of the people". He said that while he still believes TikTok is a national security risk, other apps are a risk as well, and singled out the Meta-owned platform: "I think Facebook has been very bad for our country, especially when it comes to elections." Last week, he said banning TikTok would help "Facebook and Zuckerschmuck double their business", referring to Meta's CEO, Mark Zuckerberg. Trump was suspended and then permanently banned from Meta-owned Facebook soon after the 6 January 2021 riots "due to the risk of further incitement of violence", though he was allowed back approximately two years later. He separately founded his own social media site, Truth Social, where he now does most of his posting. Trump's newfound support for TikTok, and by extension owner ByteDance, came soon after Joe Biden said he'd sign legislation making its way through Congress that could ban TikTok. The US House is slated to vote on the bill on Wednesday. If passed, it would require ByteDance to divest TikTok, an app used by about 150 million Americans, or face a ban on US app stores and web-hosting services, banning users from accessing the platform, within six months. A spokesperson for TikTok said the bill has a "predetermined outcome: a total ban of TikTok in the United States" and launched a campaign to urge users to call Congress to "stop a TikTok shutdown". The company said in a statement: "This legislation will trample the First Amendment rights of 170 million Americans and deprive 5 million small businesses of a platform they rely on to grow and create jobs." The American Civil Liberties Union said in a statement that a potential TikTok ban was an attempt by political leaders "to trade our First Amendment rights for cheap political points during an election year" and said "there's no denying" it would suppress free speech. Trump, who told CNBC "there's a lot of good and there's a lot of bad" with TikTok, had met with Republican mega-donor Jeff Yass – who reportedly has a major financial stake in the popular social media platform – at a Club for Growth donor retreat in Palm Beach, Florida, earlier this month. Soon after the meeting, the former president wrote on Truth Social: "If you get rid of TikTok, Facebook and Zuckerschmuck will double their business. I don't want Facebook, who cheated in the last Election, doing better." On Monday, it was reported that the former Trump White House aide Kellyanne Conway had in recent months been lobbying for TikTok in Congress on behalf of the pro-business organization. Conway told Politico that alienating US TikTok users, including many voters, was "draconian" and "ill-advised". "If you want to hold China accountable, why are you starting with TikTok, and not the origins of the Covid crisis, the fentanyl crisis, the persecution of Uyghurs and the vulnerability of Taiwan," Conway added. David McIntosh, the Club

for Growth president, wrote in a Fox News column last year that banning TikTok using the Data Act would be “a huge blow to the freedoms that Americans have enjoyed since the first smartphones came on the market”. Yass’s hedge fund, Susquehanna International Group, took a stake in ByteDance in 2012 estimated by the Wall Street Journal last year at about 15%, with Yass personally owning 7%, valued at \$21bn. Yass told the outlet last year that “TikTok is about free speech and innovation, the epitome of libertarian and free market ideals. The idea of banning TikTok is an anathema to everything I believe.” But while the hedge funder has donated \$10m to the Super Pac arm of the Club for Growth – which currently has \$22m in cash, according to an FCC filing – Trump has yet to win its support in this election cycle. Meta shares fell by 4.42% on Monday. • This article was amended on 13 March 2024 to include details of Donald Trump’s Facebook ban being lifted.