

US Senators Fight to Arm Biden with New Powers to Ban TikTok Once and for All



US Senators Mark Warner, a Democrat, and John Thune, a Republican, have defended their proposed Restrict Act, which would give the Commerce Department new powers to review and address foreign information and communication technology transactions that pose national security risks. The act, supported by the White House and 26 other senators, targets foreign technologies from China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, Venezuela, and Cuba. Its critics argue that it is overbroad and harms the civil liberties of Americans, including TikTok's more than 150 million US users.

In response to criticism, Senators Warner and Thune argued in a Wall Street Journal essay that their bill is designed to modernize the president's international economic authorities for the digital era, put significant guardrails on presidential authority, give Congress the authority to overturn certain decisions made by the president and establish a risk-based process to deal with foreign-adversary technology. The senators denied that the bill targets individual users or people using a virtual private network to access TikTok. They added that the legislation establishes a risk-based process to deal with foreign-adversary technology and establishes congressional oversight.

Last week, Republican Senator Rand Paul blocked a bid to fast-track a separate bill to ban TikTok, introduced by Senator Josh Hawley, who said the Restrict Act "doesn't ban TikTok. It gives the president a whole bunch of new authority." Hawley has also argued that TikTok seriously threatens US national security.

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew appeared before Congress last month and faced tough questions about national security concerns over the ByteDance-owned app. TikTok, which says it has spent more than \$1.5 billion on rigorous data security efforts, has rejected spying allegations.

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However, the Republican House Financial Services Committee tweeted last week that the Restrict Act would make the Commerce Department "a dictator over trade, sanctions, investment, cryptocurrency, and more." Critics of the bill argue that it will give too much power to the executive branch and could have unintended consequences, such as harming US companies that do business with foreign firms.

Democratic Representative Cori Bush has argued that Congress should pass comprehensive data privacy legislation rather than targeting one company for industry-wide concerns. Bush's comments reflect a growing awareness among lawmakers that data privacy and security are major issues that require a comprehensive solution.

The Biden administration has demanded that TikTok's Chinese owners divest their stakes in the company or face a US ban. In 2020, former President Donald Trump attempted to ban TikTok, but US courts blocked his efforts. Since then, the Biden administration has continued to pursue the issue, reflecting concerns about the potential threat posed by Chinese-owned technology companies.

In conclusion, the proposed Restrict Act has generated controversy, with some lawmakers arguing that it gives too much power to the executive branch and could harm the civil liberties of Americans. However, supporters of the bill argue that addressing national security concerns posed by foreign-owned technology companies, particularly those from China, is necessary. The ongoing debate reflects a broader awareness among lawmakers about the importance of data privacy and security and the need for comprehensive solutions to these issues.