

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 26, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

This week, you signed into law H.R. 815, legislation formalizing what we have known for a long time—TikTok is a national security threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Yet your presidential campaign defiantly continues to use TikTok, ignoring the serious concerns your own administration’s officials have raised. We call on you to suspend the use of your TikTok account until ByteDance, TikTok’s Chinese owner, sells the application to a responsible U.S. buyer.

We should not need to remind you why your campaign’s use of TikTok is dangerous. Senior officials in your administration have repeatedly pointed out the grave national security risks TikTok causes under its current ownership. On March 17, John Kirby, the White House national security communications advisor, said, “We are concerned, as every American ought to be concerned, about data security and what ByteDance and what the Chinese Communist Party can do with the information they can glean off of Americans' use of the application.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, on March 12, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan expressed his support for forcing ByteDance to divest itself of TikTok, asking whether “we want the data from TikTok, children's data, and adults' data, to be staying here in America or going to China?”<sup>2</sup>

TikTok has a proven track record of spying on U.S. citizens. China-based ByteDance executives used TikTok to spy on American journalists reporting on the application's CCP ties.<sup>3</sup> ByteDance employees reportedly even had access to a search tool allowing them to access the friends list of U.S. politicians and their families—including members of your own family.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, the CCP is reportedly refusing to green-light the divestiture of TikTok from a Chinese-owned company. According to reports, “China is widely expected to block a deal” to

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<sup>1</sup> Fritz Farrow, “White House wants TikTok’s parent company to divest: ‘We don’t want to see a ban’”, *ABC News*, March 17, 2024, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/white-house-tiktoks-parent-company-divest-ban/story?id=108185890>.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Haines, “Sullivan: ‘We’re not banning TikTok, we want the data owned by an American company,’” *Real Clear Politics*, March 12, 2024, [https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2024/03/12/sullivan\\_were\\_not\\_banning\\_tiktok\\_we\\_want\\_the\\_data\\_owned\\_by\\_an\\_american\\_company.html](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2024/03/12/sullivan_were_not_banning_tiktok_we_want_the_data_owned_by_an_american_company.html).

<sup>3</sup> David Shepardon, “ByteDance finds employees obtained TikTok user data of two journalists,” *Reuters*, December 22, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/bytedance-finds-employees-obtained-tiktok-user-data-two-us-journalists-2022-12-22/>.

<sup>4</sup> Alexandra S. Levine, “How TikTok has exposed celebrities and politicians’ closest personal contacts,” *Forbes*, September 27, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexandralevine/2023/09/27/tiktok-exposed-politicians-celebrities-contacts-privacy-security-election-china/>.

keep TikTok operating in the United States, despite ByteDance standing to see a windfall of tens of billions of dollars, an investor's dream.<sup>5</sup> This begs the question: If TikTok's value to ByteDance and China isn't to turn a profit, why is it valuable to them?

Unfortunately, your campaign appears poised to ignore your own administration officials' warnings. On February 12, 2024, your campaign joined TikTok, despite the long-standing security problems associated with using the CCP spyware.<sup>6</sup> We are similarly worried that many members of your party also have TikTok accounts, using it to disseminate their political message despite the risks associated with the application.

Rob Flaherty, your campaign's deputy manager, defended the campaign's decision to keep using TikTok, saying, "We would be silly to write off any place where people are getting information about the president."<sup>7</sup> We disagree. What would be silly is to prioritize politics over protecting national security.

The national security threats TikTok poses are grave. Until TikTok is out of CCP hands, we call on you to suspend your TikTok account. Leadership starts at the very top, and we hope you can set a good example to the many Americans using TikTok by suspending the use of this application until we know for sure that it is safe for use.



Joni K. Ernst  
United States Senator



Troy Nehls  
Member of Congress

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<sup>5</sup> Wendy Lee and Andrea Chang, "Questions swirl over the future of TikTok. Who could own it? How will the platform operate?" *Los Angeles Times*, April 24, 2024, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2024-04-24/tiktok-byte-dance-biden-china-oracle-microsoft#:~:text=If%20ByteDance%20sells%20TikTok%20with,managing%20director%20with%20Wedbush%20Securities.>

<sup>6</sup> Lora Kolodny and Christina Wilkie, "Biden campaign debuts official TikTok account, but app is still banned on most government devices," *CNBC*, February 12, 2024, <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/02/12/biden-campaign-debuts-official-tiktok.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Will Weissert, "Biden just signed a bill that could ban TikTok. His campaign plans to stay on the app anyway," *Associated Press*, April 25, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/biden-tiktok-campaign-account-young-voters-ban-d351ccb17c59890473af1685a0a756f3>.