



## Biden, at 80, wades into the cutting-edge tech policy debates

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President [Joe Biden](#) is throwing his weight into the [Big Tech](#) controversy.

The highlight of Biden's Tuesday schedule was an [afternoon meeting](#) with his science and technology advisory council, which resulted in his calling on [Congress](#) to pass legislation to "protect kids and limit personal data" collected by tech companies.

"As I said in the State of the Union address to Congress, Congress needs to pass bipartisan privacy legislation that would impose strict limits on personal tech companies and all these things," Biden said.

But Congress has needed no urging from the [White House](#) to debate legislation that reins in technology firms. Big Tech and the dangers of artificial intelligence have been major talking points for both parties since at least the 2020 presidential election, and both chambers have looked at bills curtailing tech practices generally and individual companies specifically.

The White House meeting was held a week after Elon Musk and other artificial intelligence researchers [called for a pause](#) on the "dangerous race" to improve AI on a market level.

"We call on all AI labs to immediately pause for at least six months the training of AI systems more powerful than GPT-4," the group said. "This pause should be public and verifiable and include all key actors. If such a pause cannot be enacted quickly, governments should step in and institute a moratorium."

Several lawmakers from both parties have pushed for increased regulations on AI.

Sen. John Thune (R-SD) [spoke out last Friday](#) after SB 686, also known as the RESTRICT Act, received critical attention from civil liberties groups and many conservative commentators, who argue the bill would overextend government authority

and infringe civil liberties. The [Biden administration](#) has repeatedly backed the RESTRICT Act.

Meanwhile, Sens. [Marco Rubio](#) (R-FL) and Josh Hawley (R-MO) have [proposed](#) outright bans of TikTok for months over its data collection practices and its relationship with the Chinese Communist Party.

While support for tech restrictions is bipartisan, the backlash often is too. A coalition of Democratic lawmakers has formed to [fight a ban](#) on TikTok, arguing it's crucial to court young voters. Sen. [Rand Paul](#) (R-KY) made a similar argument in declining to back the ban himself.

"Congressional Republicans have come up with a national strategy to permanently lose elections for a generation: Ban a social media app called TikTok that 94 million, primarily young, Americans use," he wrote in a newsletter.

In fact, opposing a TikTok ban has united left-wing ["Squad" representatives](#) with Fox News host [Tucker Carlson](#).

"While many view the RESTRICT Act as a response to concerns about TikTok, the proposal could have a significant impact on many other apps and technologies," said CATO Institute scholar Jennifer Huddleston. "Like other TikTok bans, the RESTRICT Act raises significant concerns regarding its potential First Amendment violations for American users. Additionally, the proposal would negatively impact Americans' privacy."

For Biden, at 80 the oldest president in history, the issue may present unfamiliar territory. Biden still frequently [reads](#) print newspapers, though he also owns plenty of Apple devices, and in February struggled to remember the name of the videoconferencing software Zoom, comparing it to an [Aretha Franklin song from 1985](#).

White House press secretary [Karine Jean-Pierre](#) did not directly answer a question Tuesday about whether Biden had personally used AI.

Still, Biden has moved to ban TikTok on government phones and in February 2021 released an executive order aimed at promoting AI that could be trusted for government and industry use. Last October, the White House proposed an AI ["bill of rights"](#) meant to protect users from abuses by algorithms maintained by companies and agencies.

Though most of Tuesday's meeting was closed to the press, Biden did make comments at the beginning.

"Today, we're going to discuss the opportunities and risks of artificial intelligence," he said. "AI can help deal with some very difficult challenges like disease and climate change. But we also have to address the potential risks in our society, for our economy, for our national security."

The president said tech companies have a responsibility to make sure their products are safe before making them public, one he presumably thinks should be enforced by the government.

"Social media has already shown us the harm the technology can do without the right safeguards in place," Biden said.

The White House has faced accusations of tech interference itself, ranging from how Biden benefited from suppression of the Hunter Biden laptop story during the 2020 election to accusations of colluding with [social media companies](#) to censor "misinformation."

As such, Joe Biden may face an uphill battle as he backs the RESTRICT Act or any other tech-related legislation in Congress.

"The RESTRICT Act is the wrong answer, and it misreads the room in a Congress that is also interested in reining in the unaccountable intelligence community," said James Czerniawski, a senior policy analyst at Americans for Prosperity. "This legislation is littered with issues and should be soundly rejected."