



Trump Appeals Facebook's Decision to Indefinitely Suspend Him

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Former President Donald Trump has appealed the suspension of his Facebook account, according to an oversight body that examines content-moderation verdicts by the social media giant.

Thirty-three million Facebook followers have been denied access to Trump's views for more than six weeks.

“We can confirm that a user statement has been received in the case before the Oversight Board concerning President Trump’s Facebook and Instagram accounts,” the Oversight Board confirmed on Tuesday.

The body, comprising 19 former politicians, academics and journalists from around the world, was launched five months ago. While funded by Facebook, it is purportedly independent, and its decisions are binding on Facebook. Of six cases finalized to date on Facebook content-moderation decisions, five have been overturned and one upheld.

Many conservatives, led by Media Research Center President Brent Bozell, have been troubled by the composition of the board, which includes only four Americans and just two right-leaning members -- Stanford University law professor Michael McConnell and John Samples, a vice president at the libertarian Cato Institute. (CNSNews.com is a division of the Media Research Center.)

The board has received more than 180,000 appeals since last October, but it says it prioritizes those with “the potential to affect lots of users around the world, are of critical importance to public discourse or raise important questions about Facebook’s policies.”

Late last month, it announced that it has taken on a case, at Facebook’s request, to examine its decision to remove Trump’s posts following the January 6 breach of the U.S. Capitol, and subsequently to impose indefinite restrictions on his access to Facebook and Instagram.

Facebook argued that it took the right and necessary decision, but that “[g]iven its significance, we think it is important for the board to review it and reach an independent judgment on whether it should be upheld.” While awaiting the board’s decision, Facebook said it would continue to suspend Trump’s access indefinitely.

A member of the Oversight Board, former Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt, told Britain's Channel 4 News on Tuesday night that while it aims to complete each case review within 90 days, in this case it would try to do so "a little bit faster."

"Obviously it's a very high-profile case but that is exactly why the Oversight Board was created in the first place, to take the most wide – cases that are of interest to a lot of people, and also are very principled cases," she said.

In addition to statements from the user – in this case, Trump – and from Facebook, the Oversight Board also invites public comments.

"We have also invited the public to comment on this and I can tell you we've already received public comments in the thousands and thousands on this case," said Thorning-Schmidt. "And of course we will look through those public comments and make them part of our decision-making."

All 19 board members would be involved in the review, she said.

"We will do a careful deliberation and there'll be a lot of transparency. Once we have decided this we will put out what the user said, what Facebook said, and why we reached the decision that we did."

'Censored, blocked, or diminished'

Thorning-Schmidt said that, as in all cases, the board would not be making available either the user statement or public comments while the review is underway.

Some public commentators have themselves released their submissions, however.

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, an umbrella group of more than 220 advocacy groups, urged the Oversight Board to make the suspension permanent, noting that "Twitter has permanently suspended Trump's account after he posted identical and similar material on its platform and said it will uphold the ban even if he runs for office again."

"The potential of incitement of more violence is a real threat should Trump continue to have the opportunity to spread lies and false information on Facebook," it said.

In their submission, a group of Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee argued that Facebook's policies on "deplatforming" users "are not applied in a fair and neutral manner," and drew attention to the use of the platform by Antifa to call for the killing of police officers, and Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to promote violence against the United States.

The lawmakers, led by Rep. Ken Buck (R-Colo.), also noted that "in the final days before the 2020 presidential election, Facebook prevented a damaging *New York Post* story regarding Hunter Biden from being shared, claiming it was disinformation. The article was completely factual, however, and Facebook's overaggressive actions demonstrated that it had a clear preference for the Biden-Harris campaign."

"Instances where conservative viewpoints have been censored, blocked, or diminished harm the free exchange of ideas and irreparably damage conservative Americans' faith in the fundamental fairness of purportedly neutral actors like Facebook," they wrote. "To effectively enforce content

moderation rules in the public domain, Facebook must act in an impartial manner or risk delegitimizing its efforts to prevent violence and hate.”