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How Trump and Congress can work together to prevent future government censorship

By: Chris Tremoglie

As the Biden administration finishes its last days, one unfortunate truth revealed during the term was the magnitude of government censorship, particularly on the internet. The matter first came to light during the COVID **pandemic**, in which Big Tech suppressed viewpoints on social media platforms that they considered incorrect. Later, the **“Twitter Files”** would provide insight into the malfeasance and how President **Joe Biden** and his accomplices in the Democrat Party, **Big Tech**, and legacy media were willing accomplices in this censorship.

With President-elect Donald Trump set to return to office on Jan. 20, he can work to ensure such suppression of viewpoints doesn't happen again. While Trump has previously made promises to eradicate ideological censorship, he cannot do it alone. However, Mike Matthys, co-founder of the [Institute for a Better Internet](#), suggests that he can accomplish these objectives by working with Congress.

“Trump **promised** to root out and terminate government funding of all types of online content labeling and viewpoint censorship,” Matthys said. “The reality is, only Congress can pass a law that survives the changes in Executive Orders from one White House administration to the next. With the Senate filibuster and the nearly even House, any effort by Congress will need to be a bipartisan mandate supported by at least a portion of the minority Democrat party.”

To say that great political division exists in the country would hardly be a shocking revelation. Public opinion on nearly every important political issue is more or less divided along political ideologies. However, censorship is a problem that, for the most part, people on both sides appear united and agree on.

“It turns out that online censorship is an issue that voters care deeply about,” Matthys said. “Strong majorities of both Democrat and Republican voters have placed free speech as their second highest concern after inflation in a recent **survey** from the highly respected National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.”

“Free speech was rated as ‘very important’ by 63% of all respondents and surprisingly ranked higher than other issues,

including immigration and abortion, in the run-up to the 2024 election,” Matthys noted. “Approximately 90% of both Democrats and Republicans said protection of free speech is either very important or somewhat important in this survey. While free speech is a big concern for everyone, Republicans are significantly more concerned about their ability to speak freely than Democrats by 63% to 42%.”

“You would expect Congress to be paying attention to this free speech issue that enjoys near universal support from voters,” Matthys said.

“It is not surprising to find free speech a concern of Republicans since many conservatives regularly report censorship of their viewpoints,” he added. “During the recent election, there were publicized reports of New York Times efforts to pressure YouTube to demonetize Daily Wire and Tucker Carlson videos online. Democrats have recently promoted the idea that Republicans cannot be trusted with free speech related to Israel and Hamas.”

Matthys referenced data from the Pew Research Center, which found that most people in the country felt “**social media censored their political viewpoints.**” He also mentioned a social media post from **Mollie Hemingway** highlighting reports showing the *New York Times* working to pressure YouTube to deplatform the right-wing publication *Daily Wire*. Additionally, he referenced an *NPR* **article** that discussed left-wing concerns over Republicans having freedom of speech about the conflict between Israel and Hamas. So, even within a united desire to uphold free speech, significant ideological divisions remain.

“At first, it might seem that free speech is an area where the two parties could find common ground before today,” Matthys said. “It turns out they cannot agree on the basics such as the definitions of online safety and viewpoint neutrality, who decides which content is true or false, which content is harmful and which content is simply unpopular opinion, whether government should be directly involved in regulating online content rules, and what are the quantified levels of enforcement actions already taking place today for violations of content rules.”

“We have witnessed multiple years of partisan and even bipartisan **proposals** going nowhere in Congress,” Matthys added.

Despite the gridlock, Matthys suggested a way to alleviate partisan concerns and reinforce the commitment to protect free speech.

“Congress could mandate transparency from major online platforms, requiring detailed reporting on their efforts to ensure online safety, protect viewpoint neutrality, and disclose enforcement actions and communications with government entities,” Matthys said. “This would exclude topics tied to legitimate national security or law enforcement exceptions.”

“Allowing the online platforms to continue operating with their own existing content moderation rules and enforcement actions will allow Congress to avoid the unwinnable fight over ‘Who Decides?’ and what are the appropriate guardrails for federal regulatory rules,” he added. “Academicians, media, government, and users will be able to measure and compare the online platforms for online safety and viewpoint neutrality on a peer-to-peer basis with

the transparency provided on all enforcement actions and the specific content categories and users who were subjected to these actions.”

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As Matthys noted, this is particularly true given the ideological shift in presidential administrations and the political realities of the GOP-led 119th Congress.

“Concerns about free speech have expanded beyond the conservatives who traditionally felt discriminated against by online media,” he said. “Now with Twitter usage growing and a Republican White House, we can reasonably expect Democrat voters to focus more on free speech as an issue which will enable the conditions for a bipartisan solution such as mandated transparency.”