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## **Twitter: the new sheriff in town**

*Steve Bakke  January 20, 2021*



Strange and unusual things are happening, and we citizens are left trying to figure things out. One interesting twist comes from recalling recent months and the concern about “big tech’s” impact on things ranging from commerce to politics.

A common definition of big tech includes technology companies, internet platforms, and social media giants. This would include Apple, Microsoft, Google, Facebook, Amazon, YouTube, Twitter, and some others. Politicians in Washington seem to be hesitant or unsure how to act as they face issues of freedom of speech conflicting with rights of legally operating businesses.

In the face of recently expressed concerns about big tech, democrats seem quietly appreciative of the recent subtle support received from social media in silencing internet traffic about Hunter Biden’s substantiated and questionable family business deals, primarily in China, but also in the Ukraine during Joe Biden’s vice presidency.

Twitter seemed to assume leadership in this by silencing Trump’s Twitter account, followed by leaked videos proclaiming Twitter’s intent to silence far more - perhaps hundreds of thousands, or even more conservative twitter subscribers. Others are putting their own mark on this new activism. Small upstart social media companies, Parler, Rumble and others, have been silenced by competition smothering actions.

It seems that the Biden administration has big tech as its new sidekick/wingman, at least for now. And Twitter is the new sheriff in town. This has lent encouragement to left wing activist companies. A PBS corporate attorney (now fired) expressed support for deprogramming and reeducation centers for children of Trump supporters. Alex Stamos, former chief security officer of Facebook also spoke out stating, “We have to turn down the capability of these conservative influencers to reach these huge audiences.”

General Mills will be redirecting their political support following the events at the Capitol. And, in protest of the Capitol “insurrection,” the editor of Forbes has sent notice that if another organization hires one of Trump’s (insert “press secretaries”), Forbes will assume

that “everything your company or firm talks about is a lie.” Many other prominent personalities are also joining the “reeducate-the-cult” conversation.

Moving to a politician’s comments, one of the most shocking things I’ve witnessed was Tennessee Democrat Representative Steve Cohen suggesting that since almost half of white males vote Republican, and since our military is mostly white and male, specifically the National Guard temporarily guarding the Capitol, he wanted extra vetting of those white guardsmen. This reminds me of having a partisan political litmus test for those choosing military service.

Rather than working to widen their tent by attracting republicans, democrats supported silencing dissenters. Opportunistic big tech came knocking, and democrats answered. Big tech needed to get on the good side of somebody, and who better than the new ruling democrats who are looking to go hunting for perceived enemies? It looks like democrats are nestled in the nurturing arms of big tech. Maybe “group hug” better describes the relationship. I hope the new administration doesn’t get too comfortable.

What can be done about this? Can these tech giants do this legally? Social media companies are protected under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996. They are protected from liability stemming from what third parties post on their interactive site. While operating with the protection of Section 230, these technology and social media giants were to promote free flow of conversation on the internet.

Unfortunately, as shown by recent developments, they are limiting some of that communication. They do this legally because they are private companies with the right to do business with whomever they choose. Recall that conservatives supported bakers and other service companies who tried to withhold services based on religious beliefs.

But there are differences. Big tech now borders on being monopolistic. And our Founders didn’t anticipate businesses becoming almost more powerful than the federal government. It’s time we settle our emotions and figure out a practical, legal solution to this new threat.

Maybe we’ve witnessed the creation of another public utility without realizing it. If we regulate big tech like a public utility, would that be a better solution than rescinding or amending Section 230? Somehow, we must eliminate the abuses, albeit currently legal, and the exploitation of opportunities inherent in crony capitalism.

In the meantime, Twitter will be operating like a new sheriff in town. It must stop.