

At Facebook, real question isn't whether to ban Trump

Words can be empty or full of firepower. Many of former President Donald Trump's words are empty, for they lack honesty, compassion and logic. But the words Trump used on, and leading up to, Jan. 6 were full of firepower – inciting an insurrection and based on the lie of widespread voter fraud. These words, spread so easily on social media, led to his loss of Twitter and Facebook as megaphones.

The president and his supporters have decried his removal from these giant social media platforms as the loss of free speech, which is nonsense. No one has stopped the president or his

supporters from speaking. As private platforms, Facebook and Twitter have every right to suspend or ban users for violating policies.

Facebook, acting through its oversight board, recently upheld the suspension of Trump's account, which was put in



Jerome Adamstein / Los Angeles Times

Facebook should permanently ban former President Donald Trump from the platform. A much harder decision is how to handle false speech.

place after the horrific attack on the Capitol. "At the time of Mr. Trump's posts, there was a clear, immediate risk of harm and his words of support for those involved in the riots legitimized their violent actions," the Facebook Oversight Board wrote in the announcement upholding its decision. "Given the seriousness of the violations and ongoing risk of violence, Facebook was justified in suspending Mr. Trump's accounts."

Applauded by critics of the former president, the decision came with a caveat: While upholding the decision, the board determined the indefinite ban is wrong, saying the suspension should be permanent or limited to a specific period of time.

There is precedent for a permanent ban. Twitter banned Trump for good. Facebook, though, has been less clear.

"(Facebook) will determine an action that is clear and proportionate," Nick Clegg, vice president of global affairs and communications, said in a statement.

For his part, Trump has remained unrepentant, indicating the suspension, far from chastening him, has emboldened him. It certainly has not restricted his freedom of speech. He has blasted the Facebook Oversight Board's decision.

"What Facebook, Twitter, and Google have done is a total disgrace and an embarrassment to our Country," Trump said in a statement following the decision. "Free Speech has been taken away from the President of the United States."

Oh, the irony to release a statement widely quoted in media about one's free speech being taken away.

True to form, the former president has continued to spread misinformation about the 2020 election and COVID-19; no individual, according to a Cornell University study, has done more to undermine the public education effort regarding the pandemic.

The Facebook Oversight Board's decision was a positive move in terms of symbolism, but it fails to provide any clear path forward for the handling of false speech on massive social media platforms, which rely on algorithms to evoke responses and attract (distract, really) our attention.

Put another way, the far more interesting and challenging question doesn't revolve around whether the former president should be allowed to post on Facebook – that is crystal clear; ban him – but how social media platforms handle false politicized speech from ordinary Americans. How are these decisions being made? Are they being meted out equally? What are the social consequences of inaction?

These are profound questions, and we have little confidence social media platforms are prepared to provide meaningful answers.



"GOOD NEWS... WE'RE ALMOST OUT OF THE WOODS."

YOUR TURN

Absent for these kids

Re: "Gov. Abbott gives no proof to back claims of child abuse," Editorial, Friday.

This was an excellent editorial, but you left out a relevant point: Gov. Greg Abbott was prompt to publicize accusations of abuse and mistreatment about asylum-seeking minors in the care of the Biden administration. Unfortunately, he gets an unexcused absence when it comes to advocating for the foster care children of Texas.

For years, the Texas foster care system has been rife with abuse, neglect and corruption to the extent that it is under court order to clean up those problems. Sadly, the state has slow-walked the improvements to the point that not much progress



Abbott

has been made, according to recent articles in the Express-News.

Like he did for the children at Freeman Coliseum, Abbott needs to speak up for the children of Texas.

Charles R. Allen

Start civil dialogue

Can we have an honest discussion about how some people believe the 2020 presidential election was rigged or somehow stolen?

In my opinion, there were incidents of voter fraud here and there on both sides, but not to the extent that it swayed the outcome of the election.

I would like to hear your side – without using name-calling, threats or unfounded facts.

Richard Caldwell, Boerne

Easement issues

Re: "Pipes in protected areas put on hold," Front page, Sunday:

In June and January, San Antonio Water System board members were left in the dark: Sewer lines they were approving run through properties with conservation easements that protect our endangered Edwards Aquifer's critical water supply.

This lack of notification on a critical issue was either total incompetence or someone is in the pocket of the developer.

Steve Hixon

ANOTHER VIEW



A man orders daiquiris from a drive-thru in Universal City. As Texas gets close to making alcohol-to-go sales permanent, a task force is needed to help keep such drinks from teens.

Marvin Pfeiffer / Staff photographer

Hold to-go booze till law scrutinized

By Nicole Holt
FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS



In a move that will have implications in communities across the state, Texas is moving forward with a policy to permanently allow to-go purchases of alcoholic beverages, creating new, unique challenges to ensuring the safety of Texas youth.

We should more thoughtfully consider the risks and consequences of to-go alcohol sales and – more importantly – take action to limit those risks and protect kids.

Having passed the Texas Legislature and now headed for Gov. Greg Abbott's signature, this measure is well on its way to becoming law. Even through these final steps of the legislative process, the need for ensuring important protections for our youth remains as crucial as ever.

Youth alcohol use is linked to serious consequences, including impaired-driving crashes and fatalities, poor academic performance, increased dropout rates and sexual assault. Young people who drink are at higher risk for low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, addiction and suicide. And yet alcohol remains the most widely used substance by youth and the easiest to get.

By creating expanded access to alcohol without having appropriate oversight and enforcement policies for these new purchase options, we're creating a scenario ripe for underage drinkers to exploit. We should be protecting our kids and making it harder – not easier – for them to access anything that can cause them harm.

As state officials move forward, they must do so

thoughtfully, with steps taken to ensure youth are protected.

A statewide task force – which we've proposed – would directly address the risks and consequences of increased youth access. Charged with determining the full scope of the legislation's public health and safety impact, the task force would also determine effective, enforceable protocols for the safe sale of alcohol to-go.

Alcohol is simply not the same as any other product and presents significant risks, especially to youth. Because of this, changing alcohol policies cannot be a business decision alone; the public health and safety implications can't be side notes, and targeted protections must be identified and put in place.

Public health experts with experience on alcohol policy should have a significant role in this task force. With expertise informed by science, data and methodologies, these professionals should be leveraged as a valuable resource in shaping this policy the right way. And to ensure full transparency, the task force's findings and proposals must be made public.

As this policy continues to move toward becoming law, we must ensure that the task force becomes a reality. It would ensure health experts are provided a strong platform from which they can help guide policy, and provide the oversight and enforcement necessary for protecting Texas youth.

We call on Abbott to do right by voicing his support for the task force and taking action to make it happen.

Nicole Holt is CEO of Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth.

GUIDELINES Send letters to: letters@express-news.net

Letters may also be mailed to Letters, Express-News, P.O. Box 2171, San Antonio, TX 78297. Include your name, address and daytime phone number. Length? The shorter the better – long enough to make your point. All letters are subject to editing for length and clarity.