

Opinion

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Calling on lawmakers to rescue social media

Lately, it seems like each time I reach out to an old acquaintance through social media, I'm met with a page that reads, "This account doesn't exist anymore."

Many Gen-Zers are quietly quitting the platforms we grew up on.

This is understandable. While designed to be a public space spurring connection, many of these platforms now do the opposite: They are driving young people apart and making us more isolated.

The solution, however, should not be quiet quitting. Instead, young people need our legislators to hold Big Tech accountable for making these platforms usable and sustainable, instead of yet another tool to exploit our vulnerabilities. We need legislation that makes social media social again.

Although up to 95% of teens use social media daily, young people feel more isolated than ever. Over 60% have reported feeling no real sense of identity. And those who reported higher use of these "social" platforms were substantially more likely to experience depression, anxiety and other negative mental health impacts.

This is not a coincidence. It is by design. While many platforms originated out of a desire to connect people, their business models largely have shifted to prioritize profit over their consumers. Their product design reflects this.

For example, in 2016, Instagram, Meta and Twitter removed chronological feeds, which listed posts from people you follow in the order they were posted. Instead, they introduced algorithmic feeds, collecting user data in order to push trending or "relevant" content.

Research has found that these algorithmic feeds rely heavily on sensationalist content that garners intense emotion to keep users engaged longer. This longer engagement prompts the algorithm to show similar types of content, starting a negative feedback loop.

Similarly, the introduction of short-form video platforms like TikTok and Instagram brought with it the infinite scroll. Long gone are the days when you could scroll to the bottom of the page and be told that "you're all caught up." Instead, these platforms offer a never-ending feed of content.

When paired with predatory algorithmic feeds, this infinite feed creates an addictive dopamine loop, which can disrupt sleep patterns and trigger

anxiousness around "missing out." Research has found that infinite scrolls are particularly dangerous to young people, who have not yet fully developed impulse control.

Frustrated parents and teachers often argue that young people should just put down their phones or delete their social media. Some young people can do this. But for others, social media is the only landscape they know. It's their primary means to connect with their friends and family.

Moreover, some young people literally cannot put down the phone: Internal documents from Meta and YouTube showed these platforms knew the features they implemented were addictive, yet still released them. In March, these companies lost a landmark social media case, finding them liable for creating addictive platforms.

As the name would imply, social media platforms were meant to be social — not money grabs. My generation, and those behind us, need that to be true again.

We are starting to see efforts across the country to do so. On April 29, Michigan's state Senate passed SB 757, as part of the "Kids Over Clicks" legislative package, which would prohibit minors from addictive, data-driven algorithms. Also in April, Massachusetts' governor called for the disabling of infinite scroll and autoplay for users who are determined to be under 18.

These policy efforts are a great first step, but they are not enough. We must continue this momentum across the state and federal levels.

Young people across the country have been calling for design-based regulation, like allowing the disabling of infinite scroll and algorithmic feeds, as well as better labeling of sensitive content.

Putting the social back in social media is necessary to uphold the social fabric of my generation.

Sparkle Rainey is a youth activist and communications director at Young People's Alliance. She is a Public Voices Fellow on Youth Well-Being and Power with The OpEd Project and Hopelab.



SPARKLE RAINNEY



ALLISON ROBBERT/Associated Press

While testifying Tuesday before a House committee, Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said the administration will discard the \$1.8 billion fund to compensate people claiming to have been targets of a previous administration.

U.S. will scrap \$1.8B fund to repay president's allies

BY ERIC TUCKER AND
ALANNA DURKIN RICHER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration is scrapping plans for a \$1.8 billion fund that would have compensated allies

of the Republican president, the Justice Department's top official said Tuesday.

"We are not moving forward with the fund, period," Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said in response to questions at a House hearing on the Justice Department budget.

"Not moving forward ever?" asked Rep. Grace Meng, a New York Democrat.

"Correct," Blanche answered.

The blunt declaration marked an extraordinary Trump administration turnabout in the face of mounting political opposition to a fund that officials said was meant to compensate people who believe they have been improperly targeted by the criminal justice system.

Since the establishment of the fund two weeks ago, it's been paused by a judge and lambasted by Democrats and Republi-

cans alike who said they were troubled by a lack of oversight and the potential for payouts to participants in the violent Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol.

The furor especially complicated matters in the Senate, where Republicans defiantly left town nearly two weeks ago without passing legislation to fund President Donald Trump's immigration enforcement agencies after Democrats said they would offer amendments to scrap or scale back the compensation fund.

Furious, Senate Republicans jettisoned White House security money from the bill and made clear they would not pass the legislation at all unless the administration made major changes to the plan. They had sought reassurances from Blanche before moving forward.

The \$1.776 billion "Anti-Weaponization Fund" was established last month to resolve Trump's lawsuit against the Internal Revenue Service over the leak of his tax returns. The Justice Department had said it was an appropriate measure to correct what

officials have insisted was the weaponization of federal law enforcement during the Biden administration, when Trump faced criminal charges and several of his allies were investigated and prosecuted.

The administration had said that anyone who felt unfairly persecuted could apply for compensation regardless of political affiliation, but Blanche's refusal to publicly foreclose the possibility that people convicted of crimes of violence in the Jan. 6 riot could get payouts alarmed lawmakers. A five-member commission was to have been responsible for deciding on the payouts, though no commissioners had yet been named and the criteria for eligibility remained unclear.

Blanche made clear Tuesday that he stood behind the rationale for the fund even as he was abandoning its implementation, saying: "This Department of Justice, unfortunately, was weaponized against many, many Americans, and we're trying every day to fix it. And we've made a lot of progress, but we have a lot more to do."

Judge shuts out press, public from Luigi Mangione hearing

BY MICHAEL R. SISAK
ASSOCIATED PRESS

A hearing in Luigi Mangione's state murder case in the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson was held in secret Wednesday after the judge shut out the press and public without explanation.

New York Judge Gregory Carro said he sealed the virtual proceeding at the request of the defense but provided no other details, raising questions about transparency in the closely watched case.

Court hearings in the U.S. are presumptively open to the public, but judges are permitted to close them in certain circumstances, such as to protect sensitive or confidential information.

Carro held the hearing in his chambers at the Manhattan courthouse where Mangione is set to go to trial on Sept. 8. Mangione, his lawyers and prosecutors all appeared via video conference. A lawyer representing news organizations sent a letter to Carro asking his reasons for sealing the hearing but was ignored by the judge and rebuffed by his staff.

When the lawyer, Jeremy Chase, called Carro's chambers Wednesday morning, he said the judge's clerk told him: "We don't



JEENAH MOON/Associated Press

Luigi Mangione appears at a hearing in Manhattan Criminal Court in New York on May 18.

read emails or letters at night. We go home." She then hung up on him, he said in an email to news organizations.

After Wednesday's hearing, Carro returned to the courtroom and announced it's "sealed at the moment." He scheduled an in-person hearing for June 16. That one, he said, will be open to the public.

Spokespeople for Mangione's defense team and for the Manhattan district attorney's office, which is prosecuting the case, declined to comment. A message seeking comment was left for a spokesperson for New York's state court system.

Laura Italiano, a veteran New York City courts reporter who was in Carro's courtroom on Wednesday, said this is the third time

in six months that the judge and court staff have silenced or ignored journalists seeking access to evidence or proceedings in Mangione's case.

At a pretrial hearing in December, court officers ejected a reporter from the courtroom after she tried objecting to Carro's decision to seal certain evidence. In February, Carro held a 27-minute, off-the-record bench conference during an otherwise public hearing. Reporters emailed the judge to no avail and asked a court officer to relay a note to him, but the officer refused.

"We're seeing serious transparency problems and the trial hasn't even begun," Italiano said. "There's huge public interest in this case and the judge is carrying on as if that were not the case."

BRIEFS

From wire reports

AMANDA IS FIRST TROPICAL STORM OF THE SEASON

Tropical Storm Amanda formed Wednesday in the Pacific Ocean, marking the first tropical cyclone of the season, the National Hurricane Center said.

Amanda was located about 1,475 miles west-southwest of the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula of Mexico, according to the Miami-based weather center. With the center of the storm at sea, the cyclone posed no immediate threat to land.

Amanda had maximum sustained winds of 40 mph, meteorologists said. The storm was forecast to strengthen over the next couple of days and then weaken over the weekend.

The Pacific hurricane season started May 15. The Atlantic hurricane season began Monday and no cyclones have formed in that basin yet this year.

NINE STUDENTS SUSPECTED OF KENYA ARSON

Kenyan detectives have been granted 21 days to hold nine students suspected of planning an arson attack at a school in central Kenya. The fire killed 16 children and has gripped the nation.

A court in Naivasha ruled the girls will be remanded at a children's home to allow investigators to complete their inquiries.

Hezron Mogire, a lawyer representing the nine girls, told the court there were "no compelling reasons" to detain the girls for 30 days, as requested by investigators.

"Nonetheless, the court has taken a different view. We have already briefed our clients, and they are well informed," he said.

The fire on May 28 ripped through the Utumishi Girls School dormitory. Investigators said the school matron failed to open an emergency door. Police arrested the girls after reviewing CCTV footage. No motive has been revealed so far.

PORTUGAL, AUSTRIA WIN SEATS ON U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL

Portugal and Austria defeated Germany for seats on the deeply divided U.N. Security Council Wednesday in a hotly contested race after intense campaigning. The 10 rotating seats on the 15-member Security Council are earmarked for different regions of the world. The assembly elects five countries by secret ballot every year to serve two-year terms alongside the council's five permanent veto-wielding members — the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France.

In the other contested race, after four rounds of voting in the 193-member General Assembly, Kyrgyzstan defeated the Philippines by a vote of 143-49 and will join the council for the first time.

Zimbabwe, the African candidate, and Caribbean candidate Trinidad and Tobago had no opponents and both were elected with more than 180 votes.

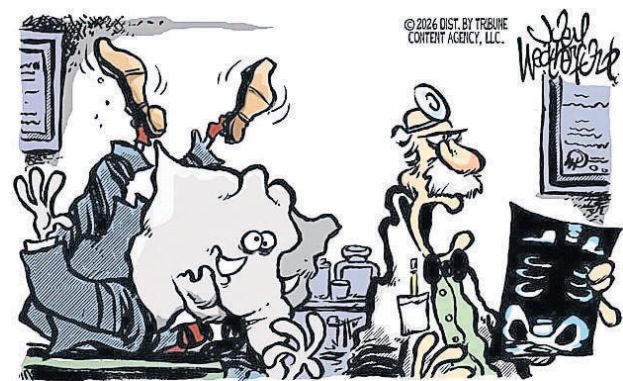
SHIA LABEOUF PLEADS GUILTY IN BAR FIGHT

Actor Shia LaBeouf pleaded guilty Wednesday to three counts of simple battery for punching people outside a New Orleans bar in February during Mardi Gras.

Video of the Feb. 17 encounter shows a shirtless LaBeouf shoving one person to the ground and hitting another person in the face, "causing his nose to possibly dislocate," according to a New Orleans police report.

LaBeouf pleaded guilty to three counts of simple battery. Orleans Parish Judge Juana Marine-Lombard handed the actor a six-month suspended sentence and two years of probation. LaBeouf also must stay away from the victims and the bar.

Sarah Chervinsky, an attorney for the actor, said LaBeouf wanted "to take accountability for his part in what happened" and called it a "minor Mardi Gras bar tussle." Chervinsky said there was "no evidence it was about bias or prejudice."



I THINK YOUR PROBLEM IS THAT YOU DON'T HAVE A BACKBONE TO ACTUALLY ARREST ANY ELECTED OFFICIAL FOR FRAUD...

TODAY'S QUOTE

"Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them humanity cannot survive."

— Dalai Lama, Tibetan leader