

Transcript: Tweeter Locks Trump

Twitter Locks Trump's Account, Warns Of 'Permanent Suspension' If Violations Continue

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STEVE INSKEEP, HOST:

Twitter and Facebook have locked the president, the departing president, out of his accounts. They acted after President Trump posted a video that was advertised yesterday afternoon as a message to calm the insurrection but instead was filled with disinformation and sympathy for the Capitol attackers. NPR tech reporter Bobby Allyn is on the line. Good morning.

BOBBY ALLYN, BYLINE: Morning, Steve.

INSKEEP: So how did this unfold yesterday?

ALLYN: So after rioters caused an emergency evacuation at the Capitol, Trump posted this 62-second video, as you mentioned, telling them to go home, but it was a mixed message. He also said he loved them and that they were, quote, "very special." He then used the video to fan outright lies about the election, and Twitter had the video removed. Twitter also took action against two other tweets from Trump that were falsely claiming victory in the election he lost. Twitter then locked down the president's account for 12 hours and put Trump on notice, basically saying, if you keep trying to sow doubt about this election, we're going to kick you off this platform for good.

INSKEEP: I'm thinking this through, though. I was able to see this video on Twitter before it was taken down. I've been able to see plenty of other things that the president has said that are blindingly false. The video spread on other Internet platforms. How are other platforms responding?

ALLYN: Right. And that's what critics say, this was too little, too late. Facebook also took down the video and placed Trump in a 24-hour timeout. YouTube removed it as well, but it found an audience. It found you and 11 million other people on Twitter alone. So the president had no trouble getting his message

out here, that is, Steve, when he wanted to, right? In the hours leading up to this video as calls were mounting across the political spectrum for Trump to discourage this mob as they were ransacking the Capitol, Trump remained silent. He said nothing.

INSKEEP: It is remarkable. Any other president in the history of video, anyway, would have gone on television and said something to the nation. But the president chose this means to speak specifically to the people that he wanted to reach and seems to have reached a lot of them. What are people who study misinformation saying about this?

ALLYN: Yeah. So Facebook and Twitter have long been criticized, you know, for not doing enough to curb the spread of disinformation, and their favorite response to falsehoods lately has been slapping these warning labels on tweets. You know, we probably have seen them on Facebook and Twitter saying this, you know, claim here may be disputed. But researchers say if you need any proof that misleading information amplified by social media can lead to real-world violence, look no further than the really terrifying events that unfolded on the Capitol yesterday. And sometimes it's the president himself who makes the conspiratorial ideas go viral and he's whipping up his supporters into a frenzy with false claims. So to answer your question, the people who study misinformation are saying these punishments against Trump, they are welcome. But like I already said, it's kind of too little, too late.

INSKEEP: Doesn't he also have a lot of other means to get his message out? There are media organizations very favorable to him. There are a lot of members of Congress who are saying things favorable to him.

ALLYN: He does. He certainly does, you know, and while Trump has spent his presidency, you know, railing against social media, it is his favorite megaphone. It has propelled Trump's political rise. And it's, you know, been his main way of reaching his supporters. But now that Twitter is saying we have a bright red line and if you cross it, you will be kicked off the platform, that is a major change.

INSKEEP: OK.

NPR's Bobby Allyn on NPR News.

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