

Another One Bites (Settles) the Dust?

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By settling lawsuits, are tech giants creating a new Big Tech playbook? Is this a dangerous precedent or just business as usual? This blog will explore Meta's recent settlement with President Trump, and its potential implications.

In January 2025, Meta Platforms, Inc., the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, agreed to a \$25 million settlement in response to a lawsuit filed by President Donald Trump. In the aftermath of the January 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol, nearly every major tech company suspended Trump's accounts. Subsequent litigation ensued, with a wave of lawsuits brought by Trump against several major social media companies. The lawsuits alleged censorship and violations of his First Amendment rights.

A Meta spokesperson confirmed that under the settlement, \$22 million would go toward a fund for Trump's presidential library, while the remaining \$3 million would cover legal fees. Meta is now the second major corporation to pay to settle a Trump lawsuit. Notably, in December 2024, ABC agreed to pay \$15 million to settle a defamation lawsuit in which Trump alleged anchor George Stephanopoulos defamed him.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg justified the platform's initial decision to suspend Trump's accounts, stating in a January 7, 2021, post that Trump's refusal to condemn the Capitol rioters demonstrated his intent "to use his remaining time in office to undermine the peaceful and lawful transition of power to his elected successor, Joe Biden." Meta's suspension of Trump's accounts was initially indefinite, but was later defined as a two-year ban with the possibility of reinstatement contingent upon assessments of public safety risks. In February 2023, Meta reinstated Trump's accounts.

Since the November 2024 election, it appears Zuckerberg is trying to rebuild ties with Trump. Trump has previously been critical of Zuckerberg and Meta, as recently as August 2024, in which he said Zuckerberg "will spend the rest of his life in prison" if he did "anything illegal" to influence the presidential election. Meta has recently overhauled its content moderation policies that more closely align with the Trump administration. Additionally, Zuckerberg has made other gestures—such as donating to his inaugural fund, securing a prime seat at his swearing-in, and hours later hosting a party in Trump's honor. Gestures like these have sparked conversation about Meta's evolving relationship with the President. Could he be wary of a federal investigation into Meta's business practices?

As this settlement closes the chapter on a four-year old lawsuit, could it be the door to new concerns? In an era where fearmongering runs rampant, it would be easy to claim that the media

giants are setting a dangerous precedent. But what's clear, is that we should be paying close attention, as there are obvious concerns. These settlements raise concerns about journalistic freedom, corporate influence, and the role of media in holding public figures accountable. Freedom of press is essential to our democracy, as it serves as a check on powerful individuals—so when tech and social media companies acquiesce that responsibility so easily, we should be on alert. Meta, along with other tech and media companies settling lawsuits, further ignites the discussion over the power of social media platforms in moderating content and the legal challenges that accompany free speech in the digital age we live in.

How these legal precedents will influence future policies is yet to be seen. How tech companies will navigate the complex world of content regulation is another unknown. But what we do know, is that the debate over balancing platform authority and user rights is here to stay.

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