Parler shuts down as new owner says conservative platform needs big revamp

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Parler, the self-described “uncancelable free speech platform,” has been sold and shut down while its new owner conducts a “strategic assessment.” The platform will be back eventually, new owner Starboard says.

The Parler website is now a simple page containing only today’s press release announcing the acquisition, which was completed without financial terms being disclosed. “No reasonable person believes that a Twitter clone just for conservatives is a viable business any more,” the acquisition announcement said, promising a revamp.

“While the Parler app as it is currently constituted will be pulled down from operation to undergo a strategic assessment, we at Starboard see tremendous opportunities across multiple sectors to continue to serve marginalized or even outright censored communities—even extending beyond domestic politics,” the press release said. No timing for a return was mentioned.

In an interview with The Wall Street Journal, Starboard founder and CEO Ryan Coyne said that Parler is “going to take

a breath of fresh air.”

New buyer emerged after canceled Kanye West deal

Starboard, formerly called Olympic Media, owns conservative news sites American Wire News and BizPac Review. “The team at Parler has built an exceptional audience, and we look forward to integrating that audience across all of our existing platforms,” Coyne said in the acquisition announcement.

Parlement Technologies, the previous owner, struck a deal to sell Parler to Ye (formerly Kanye West) in mid-October. But Parler canceled the deal weeks after Ye praised Adolf Hitler and Nazis in an appearance on Alex Jones’ Infowars show.

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Parlement then laid off about 75 percent of its staff in November and December, reportedly leaving it with only about 20 employees. Parler also once reportedly offered Donald Trump’s company a 40 percent ownership stake, but negotiations were cut off after a mob of Trump supporters attacked the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Parlement CEO George Farmer, who is leaving the company, “said Starboard was one of a handful of suitors interested in Parler,” the WSJ wrote today.

January 6 attack increased scrutiny

Parler’s extremely lax approach to removing Russian disinformation came under greater scrutiny in Congress after the attack on the Capitol. Parler was also kicked off Amazon Web Services right after January 6, taking it offline until it secured alternative hosting. Apple and Google booted Parler from their app stores but eventually allowed it back on after Parler agreed to change its content moderation approach.

Parler has said it has about 16.5 million registered users, but its active user base appears to be much smaller. Analytics firm SimilarWeb says Parler's website had 851,000 visits on desktop and mobile in the past month. In October, TechCrunch reported that Parler had 250,000 monthly active users on its iOS and Android apps.

Despite that, Coyne claimed in the acquisition announcement that "Parler's large user base and additional strategic assets represent an enormous opportunity for Starboard to continue to build aggressively in our media and publishing business."

Starboard also claims that artificial intelligence technology can help boost Parler's reach. "Advancements in AI technology, along with the existing code base and other new features, provide an opportunity for Starboard to begin servicing unsupported online communities—building a home for them away from the ad-hoc regulatory hand of platforms that hate them," the company said.

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