

# HELD HOSTAGE BY THE BARMY BIRD

[NB: check the byline, thanks. /~Rayne]

Of all the journalists suspended by Elmo on the bird site, I was bothered most by that of Voice of America's Steve Herman.

I mentioned before he's a straight news kind of guy. I'd followed his account at Twitter so far back I can't remember which of us had a Twitter account first. He was one of the few early Twitter sources I could rely on for news about earthquakes in Japan. His coverage of the Fukushima nuclear power plant in 2011 was invaluable.

But the most important factor about Herman's suspension is that he is a U.S. government employee.

Herman works for us. He's paid with our tax dollars.

And a single foreign-born billionaire offering weak excuses after the fact had OUR public employee suspended for doing their job.

Once again, I'll point out that Elmo was exercising his own free speech rights by suspending journalists on the social media platform he owns.

Popehat said it better, of course:

Remember: Twitter is Elon's company, he has the free speech and free association right to run it pretty much however he wants and to ban people for petty narcissistic reasons.

And we have the right to laugh and point at his ridiculousness and at the free-speech pretenses of his gullible fans.

But even Popehat said that on Mastodon.

Elmo may be within his rights to capriciously decide to suspend journalists, but in suspending VOA's Herman it became crystal clear that the U.S. government should not allow its resources to be subject to the whim of a single individual when the entire country relies on those resources.

Thankfully, Herman was already on Mastodon before the suspension and has been ramping up posting on that open platform since he launched his account.

But it's who else is NOT on Mastodon which is now a problem.

Every member of Congress who has an account on Twitter is vulnerable to suspension.

Every U.S. government department and agency still on Twitter is likewise at risk.

Let's say Musk becomes annoyed with the Federal Aviation Administration because of its regulations on airspace and planes, commercial and private. Could he suspend the FAA's account?

Or perhaps Musk gets his pants in a knot about National Aeronautics and Space Administration because he and NASA don't see eye to eye about a SpaceX-related matter. Could he suspend NASA accounts (there are multiple for this agency).

One might say, "Surely Musk wouldn't be stupid/crazed enough to do that."

Except he's already suspended one employee of a U.S. government agency, and holding that person's account hostage until content is deleted from that person's account.

Elmo might have the right to do this, but the U.S. should not be held hostage by a pasty excessively-monied git with an unmanaged ego.

Look at this situation from another angle: this is ransomware denying service to a user until a specific deliverable has been provided.

In VOA's case, Musk by way of Twitter Safety has demanded Herman delete a tweet before service

will be resumed.

How should a government agency respond to demands for ransom like this, when an open platform is ready and waiting to provide alternative service?

There's no good reason why each department and agency is still on Twitter but not on Mastodon, nor is there any good reason why each member of Congress doesn't have an account on Mastodon.

None of the work government departments, agencies, and employees do should be impeded by the private sector let alone by a single butt-hurt billionaire.

Contact your members of Congress and tell them this needs to be fixed going into the next session of Congress. Each of them and their caucuses need to have a non-commercialized open social media platform account.

Congressional switchboard: (202) 224-3121 or use Resist.bot (which has a Mastodon account, by the way).