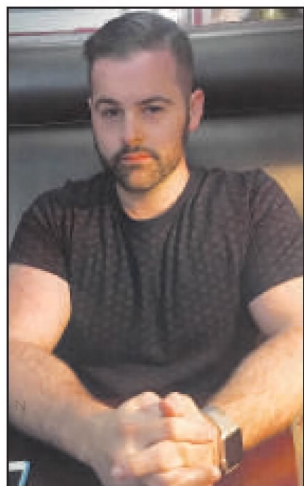


# FREE SPEECH OR A 'CESSPOOL'?

*Moosic native says his social network site is like a less-censored version of Twitter.*



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Andrew Torba**

**BY TERRIE  
MORGAN-BESECKER**  
STAFF WRITER

A political conservative, Moosic native Andrew Torba has long believed Facebook and other social media giants blocked right-wing news content from their sites.

When the technology blog Gizmodo posted a story in May quoting an anonymous Facebook employee who admitted censoring content, it was all the proof Mr. Torba needed.

"That pushed me over the edge," he said. "It got me

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starting to think, something has to be done here."

The 25-year-old internet entrepreneur got to work and within weeks created Gab, a social network that allows users to post virtually any type of content without fear of being barred or having their views censored.

"Folks are tired of trying to express their opinions online and have it suppressed," Mr. Torba said in a phone inter-

view from San Mateo, California, where he moved two years ago. "I felt it was my moral responsibility to take on this problem."

Launched Aug. 15, Gab is similar to Twitter. Users can post comments up to 300 characters in length. They can follow other users and be followed.

The network has 22,000 users. Another 55,000 people are on a wait list as Mr. Torba continues to work to expand his internet server's capacity.

*Please see **GAB**, Page A6*

Terrie Morgan-Besecker. (Sep. 16, 2016). Free Speech or a 'Cesspool'? re. Andrew Torba. The Times-Tribune (Scanton, PA).

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# GAB: Site has received national attention

FROM PAGE A1

The venture comes four years after Mr. Torba, a 2013 University of Scranton graduate with a bachelor's degree in philosophy, launched Kuhcoon, a Scranton-based company that manages social networking sites for small businesses. He served as CEO of Kuhcoon until August, when he left to devote his time to establishing Gab.

The social network quickly garnered national media coverage — not all of which is positive. The site has been portrayed as attracting supporters of the alt-right movement, which has been accused of being racist.

An avid Donald Trump supporter, Mr. Torba said he does not identify with the alt-right political ideology. He does support their right to have a forum to express their opinions.

"Facebook says hate speech is not allowed. The problem is in 2016, what one

person views as hate speech another views as a form of expression. ... Our mission is simple: We put people first and promote free speech to everyone," he said. "Is there some questionable content? Yes. ... We don't suppress any viewpoints."

Gab does have some rules. Users are not permitted to post illegal pornography or any content that incites violence or terrorism or exposes another person's private information.

"Otherwise, you can do whatever you want. You can speak freely and not be afraid of being suspended or removed permanently," he said.

Freedom of speech has become a hot-button issue in America. The First Amendment protects most types of speech, including those who criticize the government and support unpopular, even abhorrent, ideas. But, University of Scranton associate professor Matthew Reavy, Ph.D., said, the amendment was writ-

ten during a simpler time.

"People's speech was protected, but people were known," he said, adding that today, the internet affords a platform where people do not have to attach their name to what they write.

"I think you should be allowed to say something offensive, but you have to own it," the communications and ethics professor said. Regarding Gab, he added, "I would feel a lot more comfortable if (users) were identified with their real names."

Not having that accountability could turn Gab "into a site for, basically, online graffiti ... a cesspool."

Gab does contain the option of setting up filters that will block any content that contains a specific keyword. That can include racially offensive terms — or any other topic, such as sports.

"You are not relying on us as a social media company to block that for you. You are choosing to block that word,"

Mr. Torba said. "That can be anything. (If) I don't want to see anything to do with the NFL ... I can add the NFL or any other sport teams to my filter list and I won't see any of that."

The network is free for users and contains no ads. He hopes to make money by having users subscribe to certain people they wish to follow. He would get a percentage of those fees.

It's a unique business model that faces challenges, given that Twitter allows users to follow anyone they want without any fees. Mr. Torba said he thinks he can succeed by offering exclusive content.

"If a content creator wants to provide exclusive content or a behind-the-scenes look at something, that adds a little extra value. Core fans will be willing to pay them to subscribe for that additional content," he said.

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Page A6, GAB, continued

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