



Internet Blackout Changes Minds of Some SOPA & PIPA Cosponsors

After the major Internet blackout on Wednesday, January 18, a number of co-sponsors for the draconian Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) have backed away from the controversial legislation. Likewise, 18 Senators have withdrawn their support of the Protect IP [Intellectual Property] Act, PIPA, the Senate version of SOPA.

Seven of the 13 Senators who voiced opposition to the bill yesterday were co-sponsors of PIPA. Ars Technica reports that of the newly opposed Senators, just two are Democrats — Ben Cardin (left) and Jeff Merkley. Those Senators joined the bill's original opponents, which include Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), Rand Paul (R-Ky.), Mark Warner (D-Va.), and Ron Wyden (D-Ore.).



Senator Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), a co-sponsor of the bill, actually blamed Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) for “pushing forward with a flawed bill that still needs much work.” Another co-sponsor, Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), described PIPA as “simply not ready for prime time.”

Prior to the sudden change of heart among Senators, PIPA was co-sponsored by 16 Republicans and 23 Democrats. Its future is now completely uncertain. According to Ars Technica:

Neither side is close to having a majority. A whip count by OpenCongress found 35 supporters (including 34 co-sponsors), 18 opponents, and 12 more Senators leaning toward opposition. About 35 Senators have not committed to a position, perhaps reluctant to do so for fear of angering either deep-pocketed Hollywood campaign contributors or their constituents back home.

Senator Rand Paul came out on Wednesday pledging to filibuster PIPA, which Senator Reid has promised to bring to the floor for a vote on January 24.

Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), one of the original co-sponsors of PIPA, [said](#) on his Facebook page on Wednesday, “I have been a co-sponsor of the Protect IP Act because I believe its [sic] important to protect American ingenuity, ideas and jobs from being stolen through Internet piracy, much of it occurring overseas through rogue websites in China.”

“As a senator from Florida, a state with a large presence of artists, creators and businesses connected to the creation of intellectual property, I have a strong interest in stopping online piracy that costs Florida jobs.”

“However,” the Senator added, “we must do this while simultaneously promoting an open, dynamic Internet environment that is ripe for innovation and promotes new technologies.”

Similarly, Senator Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) said on his Twitter, “I support intellectual property rights, but I



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oppose SOPA & PIPA. They're misguided bills that will cause more harm than good."

Representative Justin Amash (R-Mich.) went so far as to change his Facebook profile picture to one that shows the words SOPA and PIPA crossed out. He also disabled his Facebook page so that guests could not post comments, and wrote, "These bills give the federal government unprecedented power to censor Internet content and will stifle the free flow of information and ideas. Demand that Congress and the president keep the Internet open and free."

Six Republican Senators — Chuck Grassley (Iowa), Orrin Hatch (Utah), Jeff Sessions (Ala.), John Cornyn (Texas), Mike Lee (Utah), and Tom Coburn (Okla.) — submitted a letter to Senator Reid, which reads in part:

We have increasingly heard from a large number of constituents and other stakeholders with vocal concerns about possible unintended consequences of the proposed legislation, including breaches in cybersecurity, damaging the integrity of the Internet, costly and burdensome litigation, and dilution of First Amendment rights.

Over 10,000 websites participated in the Internet blackout yesterday, including Wikipedia and Google, to showcase their opposition to the legislation, prompting users all over Facebook and other social network sites to comment on the legislation and circulate petitions against SOPA. [Millions](#) signed the petitions that circulated throughout the Internet yesterday.

Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg posted his own statement about SOPA and PIPA on his Facebook page:

The Internet is the most powerful tool we have for creating a more open and connected world. We can't let poorly thought out laws get in the way of the internet's development. Facebook opposes SOPA and PIPA, and we will continue to oppose any laws that will hurt the internet.

The world today needs political leaders who are pro-internet. We have been working with many of these folks for months on better alternatives to these current proposals. I encourage you to learn more about these issues and tell your congressmen that you want them to be pro-internet.

The offices of elected officials were flooded yesterday with phone calls from their constituents criticizing the bills.

But in addition to the opposition from individuals on Wednesday, a number of conservative think tanks voiced their criticism of the bills as well — most notably the Heritage Foundation, as well as the conservative blog redstate.com.

Meanwhile, of all the Republican presidential candidates, Ron Paul has been the only one to publicly [declare](#) opposition to the bill. He stated,

My campaign, and the entire freedom movement, would not be as strong as they are today without a free Internet, and that's just one of the reasons why the establishment hopes to censor it with SOPA and PIPA. I'm proud to see so many taking a stand today. Contact your representative and senators and tell them to oppose these disastrous bills.

And yet some of the bill's advocates remain steadfast in their support.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Rep. Lamar Smith (R-Texas) called Wikipedia's blackout a "publicity stunt" which promotes "fear instead of facts." "Perhaps during the blackout, Internet users can look elsewhere for an accurate definition of online piracy," he added.



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Likewise, Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont, who authored PIPA, insisted that the protesters are “misunderstanding” the legislation. “The PROTECT IP Act will not affect Wikipedia, will not affect reddit, and will not affect any website that has any legitimate use,” he declared, adding, “Perhaps if these companies would participate constructively, they could point to what in the actual legislation they contend threatens their websites, and then we could dispel their misunderstandings. That is what debate on legislation is intended to do, to fine-tune the bill to confront the problem of stealing while protecting against unintended consequences.”

There was a small breakthrough last week when Smith and Leahy both agreed to remove a provision in the legislation which would have permitted the government to seek a court order to block access to the domain names, or any websites they believed were pirating copyrighted material.

Much of the problem with the two bills is the vagueness of their terms, which could ultimately lead to entire websites being seized and shut down. Some of the felonies defined under the laws could carry five-year prison sentences.

“Indeed, the bill imposes stiff penalties on anyone who doesn’t [comply], and offers immunity to ad networks and payment processors that follow orders. As such, SOPA is chock-full of incentives for ISPs, content-hosting sites and other such entities to go along with the government’s demands,” writes Omar El Akkad of [The Globe & Mail](#).

The main driver behind the bills comes from intense lobbying from the entertainment industry to protect movies and music on the Internet, but the end result would be massive government restriction and censorship.

Critics of SOPA and PIPA believe that they are merely government efforts to regulate alternative and independent sources of information which have gained popularity in recent years. Likewise, they contend that the measures would infringe upon e-commerce and in turn place further strain on an economy already in dire straits.



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