Internet IDs Are On the Way

Under the guise of security, the Obama administration is creating an Internet ID for all Americans. The program for the National Strategy for Trusted Identities in Cyberspace was announced last week by Commerce Secretary Gary Locke.

The new program will allow Americans to obtain Internet IDs so they may engage in sending emails, doing their online banking, accessing health records, and a number of other transactions.

Locke contends that the program will allow the private sector to facilitate online activities untouched, without the federal government taking full control. He explains:

> The Internet will not reach its full potential until users and consumers feel more secure and confident than they do today when they go online. A coordinated national strategy to significantly improve online trust will put e-commerce on stronger footing.

> The National Program office will engage the best minds in the field from both the public and private sectors to give people greater confidence that their personal information is safe when they engage in online transactions.

Fox News reports, "White House officials insist this will not lead to Big Brother on the Internet, but rather a strong partnership in which the private sector will take the lead."

According to a senior administration official,

> Frankly, what we're trying to do is create a marketplace of providers, both public and private, who can do this so there's not one single thing. But how do we create a system that works? We think the private sector can do a better job than we can. That's what we're exploring. The big thing we're trying not to do is have big government running this. It has to be a shared partnership.

Some groups have already indicated their support of the program, including the Center for Democracy and Technology. Jim Dempsey, the vice president of the organization, states,

> You know the problem here at some level is that the government needs an identity ecosystem or identity infrastructure. It needs it for its own services as well as part of the solution to the broader cyber-security problem as well as one of the foundations of e-commerce.

Other groups are skeptical, leery of potential privacy breaches. The Electronic Frontier Foundation — an organization that supports privacy interests — believes that the program is threatening to free speech and privacy. Lee Tien, a senior staff attorney at the company, contends,

> It's not entirely clear to me what, even now after having followed this program for months, what problems it's really trying to solve and how what it's proposing will solve it.

Likewise, Tien asserts that there appears to be no benefit worth the privacy intrusion.

Additionally, the American Civil Liberties Union has posted a press release entitled, "Don't Put Your Trust in 'Trusted Identities,' wherein the group questions whether the alleged national security protections are worth the privacy infringements.

> In short, it's possible that if all the stars lined up perfectly, this "online identity ecosystem" could be a good thing. Unfortunately, there are too many reasons to doubt that all the stars will line up perfectly.

The group also adds that the administration must divulge further details on the assignment of IDs:

> Unless the Obama administration comes out with a detailed proposal for an identity scheme that does these things in ways that are hard-wired into the system, and can convince us that its protections won't fall by the wayside at any point, this scheme appears to be a sweeping, utopian intervention in the Internet driven by anti-freedom security agendas that promises to do more harm than good.

Concerns that the Department of Homeland Security may play a role in the program have been allayed, at least temporarily, by the role the Commerce Department will be playing in the program.

Locke declares, "The whole point of this whole initiative is to make cyberspace more secure. We'll look at every angle of this thing to stay one step ahead of the people with nefarious intent."

Conservative pundit Glenn Beck warned his viewers that the federal government would be taking such extreme measures to control the Internet, particularly following the Wikileaks crisis.

On his December 2, 2010 episode, Beck stated:

> I warned you that there will come a time when radicals see an opportunity to take us non-sentient human beings down and they will dog pile. When that happens, the ends will justify the means.

What's worse, according to Beck, is that crises such as that pertaining to Wikileaks will force the American people to virtually "beg" for government intervention.

He warned, however, "Before you beg for someone to step in, let's take a deeper look at who the [culprits and radicals] are."

Many Americans who cherish their Constitutional liberties feel that the Internet IDs are one of a number of "security measures" being introduced to the American public as a veiled means for the federal government to "step in."

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