

Congress puts online piracy bills on hold (Update 3)

January 20 2012



US Senate majority leader Harry Reid, pictured in December 2011, said Friday that he was delaying next week's scheduled vote on a controversial bill aimed at cracking down on online piracy. "In light of recent events, I have decided to postpone Tuesday's vote on the Protect IP Act," Reid said in a statement two days after Wikipedia and Google led a wave of online protest against the legislation.

US congressional leaders put anti-online piracy legislation on hold Friday following a wave of protests led by Google and Wikipedia

denouncing the bills as a threat to Internet freedom.

Senate majority leader Harry Reid said he was delaying next week's vote on the Protect IP Act (PIPA) and House Judiciary Committee chairman Lamar Smith said he would "revisit" the House version, the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA).

"In light of recent events, I have decided to postpone Tuesday's vote on the Protect IP Act," Reid announced in a statement two days after a wave of online protests against the bill swept the Internet.

"There is no reason that the legitimate issues raised by many about this bill cannot be resolved," the Democrat from Nevada added. "I am optimistic that we can reach a compromise in the coming weeks."

Smith, a Republican from Texas, said he would postpone consideration of the House bill in committee "until there is wider agreement on a solution."

"I have heard from the critics and I take seriously their concerns regarding proposed legislation to address the problem of online piracy," Smith said.

"It is clear that we need to revisit the approach on how best to address the problem of foreign thieves that steal and sell American inventions and products," he said.

The announcements by Reid and Smith came amid eroding congressional support for the bills intended to crack down on online piracy of movies and music and the sale of counterfeit goods.

Wikipedia shut down the English-language version of its online encyclopedia for 24 hours Wednesday to protest the legislation and

hundreds of other sites joined in the protest.

Google blotted out the logo on its US home page with a black banner and published an exhortation to users to "Tell Congress: Please don't censor the Web!"

Google said more than seven million people in the United States had signed an online petition against the bills.

The draft legislation has won the backing of Hollywood, the music industry, entertainment giants like Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., the National Association of Manufacturers, the US Chamber of Commerce and others.

But the bills have come under fire from online companies and digital rights groups for allegedly paving the way for US authorities to shut down websites accused of online piracy, including foreign sites, without due process.

On Thursday, US authorities shut down Megaupload.com, one of the world's largest file-sharing sites, and charged seven people in what they called one of "the largest criminal copyright cases ever brought by the United States."

The shutdown of Megaupload triggered a wave of retaliatory attacks by the online hacktivist group Anonymous, which temporarily disabled the websites of the Justice Department, FBI and Recording Industry Association of America.

In his statement, Reid said "counterfeiting and piracy cost the American economy billions of dollars and thousands of jobs each year, with the movie industry alone supporting over 2.2 million jobs.

"We must take action to stop these illegal practices," he said. "We live in a country where people rightfully expect to be fairly compensated for a day's work."

White House spokesman Jay Carney said Friday that Congress needs to find a solution "that both deals with online piracy and continues to ensure a free and open Internet."

The decision to delay the bills was welcomed by a wide range of groups.

"There is more still to be done to ensure the bills do no harm to technology innovation and the growth of the Internet," said Robert Holleyman, president and chief executive of the Business Software Alliance.

"Millions of Internet users let it be known that their rights and use of the Internet should not be easily tampered with, and Congress has wisely signaled it has heard their concerns," said Ed Black, president and chief executive of the Computer and Communications Industry Association.

In a joint statement, the American Federation of Musicians, American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, Screen Actors Guild and other groups said they hoped there would be a "new tone" in the debate going forward.

"We would hope a new tone can be set that does not pit the creativity and innovation of our directors, actors, performers, craftspeople, and technicians against those innovators in other industries," they said.

"We believe an Internet that does not allow outright stealing has to be the Internet of the future or all the promises it holds will be unrealized."

(c) 2012 AFP

Citation: Congress puts online piracy bills on hold (Update 3) (2012, January 20) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-01-senate-vote-online-piracy-bill.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.