

House OKs cybersecurity bill despite veto threat

April 27 2012, By DONNA CASSATA , Associated Press



House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio speaks during his weekly news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, Thursday, April 26, 2012. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin)

The House ignored Obama administration objections Thursday and approved legislation aimed at helping stop electronic attacks on critical U.S. infrastructure and private companies.

On a bipartisan vote of 248-168, the GOP-controlled House backed the Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act, which would encourage companies and the federal government to share information collected on the Internet to prevent electronic attacks from cybercriminals, foreign governments and terrorists.

"This is the last bastion of things we need to do to protect this country,"

Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Mich., chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said after more than five hours of debate.

More than 10 years after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, proponents cast the bill as an initial step to deal with an evolving threat of the [Internet age](#). The information sharing would be voluntary to avoid imposing new regulations on businesses, an imperative for Republicans.

The legislation would allow the government to relay [cyber threat](#) information to a company to prevent attacks from Russia or China. In the private sector, corporations could alert the government and provide data that could stop an attack intended to disrupt the country's water supply or take down the [banking system](#).

The Obama administration has threatened a veto of the House bill, preferring a Senate measure that would give the Homeland Security Department the primary role in overseeing domestic [cybersecurity](#) and the authority to set [security standards](#). That [Senate bill](#) remains stalled.

House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, said the administration's approach was misguided.

"The White House believes the government ought to control the Internet, government ought to set standards and government ought to take care of everything that's needed for cybersecurity," Boehner told reporters at his weekly news conference. "They're in a camp all by themselves."

Faced with widespread privacy concerns, Rogers and Rep. C.A. "Dutch" Ruppertsberger of Maryland, the Intelligence panel's top Democrat, pulled together an amendment that limits the government's use of threat information to five specific purposes: cybersecurity; investigation and prosecution of cybersecurity crimes; protection of individuals from death or serious bodily harm; protection of minors from child

pornography; and the protection of national security.

The House passed the amendment, 410-3.

The White House, along with a coalition of liberal and conservative groups and some lawmakers, strongly opposed the measure, complaining that Americans' privacy could be violated. They argued that companies could share an employee's personal information with the government, data that could end up in the hands of officials from the National Security Agency or the Defense Department. They also challenged the bill's liability waiver for private companies that disclose information, complaining that it was too broad.

"Once in government hands, this information can be used for undefined 'national security' purposes unrelated to cybersecurity," a coalition that included the American Civil Liberties Union and former conservative Rep. Bob Barr, R-Ga., wrote lawmakers Thursday.

Echoing those concerns were several Republicans and Democrats who warned of potential government spying on its citizens with the help of employers.

"In an effort to foster information sharing, this bill would erode the privacy protections of every single American using the Internet. It would create a 'Wild West' of information sharing," said Rep. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, the top Democrat on the House Homeland Security Committee.

Said Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas: "Until we protect the privacy rights of our citizens, the solution is worse than the problem."

Countering criticism of Big Brother run amok, proponents argued that the bill does not allow the government to monitor private networks, read

private emails or close a website. It urges companies that share data to remove personal information.

"There is no government surveillance, none, not any in this bill," Rogers said.

Among the amendments the House approved was one by Rep. Justin Amash, R-Mich., that put certain personal information off limits: library, medical and gun sale records, tax returns and education documents.

"I don't know why the [government](#) would want to snoop through library records or tax returns to counter the cybersecurity threat," Amash said.

The House approved his amendment, 415-0.

Trumping any [privacy concerns](#) were the national security argument, always powerful in an election year, and Republicans' political desire to complete a bill that would then force the Democratic-led Senate to act.

The administration backs a Senate bill sponsored by Sens. Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., and Susan Collins, R-Maine, that gives Homeland Security the authority to establish security standards.

However, that legislation faces opposition from senior Senate Republicans.

Arizona Sen. John McCain, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said during a hearing last month that the [Homeland Security Department](#) is "probably the most inefficient bureaucracy that I have ever encountered" and is ill-equipped to determine how best to secure the nation's essential infrastructure. McCain has introduced a competing bill.

©2012 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: House OKs cybersecurity bill despite veto threat (2012, April 27) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-04-house-oks-cybersecurity-bill-veto.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.