

Cybersecurity: Senate takes initial step to bill's passage (Update)

October 22 2015, by Tami Abdollah



In this Sept. 24, 2015 file photo, Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., right, and Committee Vice Chair Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif. listen as Director of the National Security Agency (NSA) Adm. Michael Rogers testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington. The Senate is set to pass a bill aimed at improving cybersecurity by encouraging the sharing of threat information among companies and the U.S. government. The Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act is co-sponsored by Feinstein and Burr, who said it was critical to limit increasingly high-profile cyberattacks, such as one suffered by Sony Pictures last year. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais, File)

The Senate is set to pass a bill aimed at improving cybersecurity by encouraging the sharing of threat information among companies and the U.S. government.

A procedural vote of 83-14 on Thursday represented a healthy endorsement of a bill opposed by companies such as Apple and Dropbox, who said it lacks key privacy protections and may result in personal information ending up in the government's hands.

The Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act is co-sponsored by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., who said it was critical to limit increasingly high-profile cyberattacks, such as one suffered by Sony Pictures last year.

"This is a good bill. It is a first step. It's not going to prevent all cyberattacks or penetrations, but it will allow companies to share information about the cyber threats they see and the defensive measures to implement to protect their networks," Feinstein said. She said the same tactics are used repeatedly against different targets, which shouldn't happen.

More than 21 million Americans recently had their personal information stolen when the Office of Personnel Management was hacked in what that the U.S. believes was a Chinese espionage operation.

Companies would receive legal protections from antitrust and consumer privacy liabilities for participating in the voluntary program.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., who opposed the bill, said it provides liability protection for companies, which are required to remove personal and unrelated information provided to the government only if they know it is personal and unrelated.

"How would they know? ...They're required to virtually do no looking. It is the most cursory review," Wyden said. He said Americans would call it "another surveillance bill."

The U.S. and the technology industry already operate groups intended to improve sharing of information among the government and businesses, including the Homeland Security Department's U.S. Computer Emergency Readiness Team.

The Senate's vote on final passage is expected next week. The House passed its version of the bill earlier this year with strong bipartisan support. If the Senate were to pass the bill on Tuesday, the two versions would need to be reconciled before being sent to the White House for the president's signature.

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