

Online Protests Hit Hard Against Anti-Piracy Bills

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Organized online protests over two bills in Congress targeting online copyright infringement — the House's Stop Online Privacy Act (SOPA) and the Senate's Protect Intellectual Property Act (PIPA) — seem to have crippled these bills' progress and ended their chances of becoming law in their present form.

[We have previously written about the protests](#) mounting against the bills.

Just this week, high-profile protests cropped up all over the Internet. On January 18, Wikipedia shut down all English content on the site in protest; Reddit.com also went offline for the day; Google covered its homepage logo with a black box; and an estimated 10,000 smaller websites participated in some kind of protest over the bills.

Google's online petition to Congress expressing opposition to the bills obtained over 7 million signatures in the United States in a very short period of time.

The bills' supporters continue to argue that the legislation is important to protecting intellectual property. The bill would allow the Justice Department as well as private parties to seek court orders against foreign websites that steal content from American authors and would prohibit advertising networks and payment facilitators from doing business with the offending companies. The bills would also criminalize the streaming of restricted content, with a maximum penalty of five years in prison.

The bills enjoy strong support from organizations that rely on copyright protection, such as movie, music, and cable companies. The bills have also garnered the support of business groups such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber estimates that American industry loses roughly \$135 billion every year to online piracy.

The protests have been led by Internet businesses that argue the bills will lead to censorship of the Internet. Under SOPA, websites such as Facebook and YouTube could be found to be liable if they host infringing content. This would require these sites to police the content that users post, opponents say, and essentially have a censoring effect on the content.

Supporters of the bill stress that the bill is targeting activity that is already illegal and targets foreign websites that infringe on American copyrights.

Due to the protests, at least 13 lawmakers who co-sponsored the legislation have withdrawn their support. According to one media outlet, from the beginning of January 18 to the end of January 19, [seventy members of Congress announced their new opposition to the bill.](#)

The Senate has a procedural vote scheduled on January 24 on proceeding with PIPA. Senate leaders currently still plan to move forward with the vote, but it remains unclear if the bill has the 60 votes it needs to pass the procedural vote. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R.-Ky.) has called for a delay of the bill because of “serious legal, policy, and operational concerns.”

In the event the bills were to make it out of Congress, President Obama might veto them, but he has not yet made a definitive statement that he intends to do so. The Obama administration did respond to a petition against the bill stating that it would not support legislation that could lead to Internet censorship or reduced Internet security.

Opponents of the current bills are looking toward another proposed bill, the Online Protection & Enforcement of Digital Trade Act, known as the OPEN Act, which takes a much narrower approach to copyright issues by trying to cut off the money that flows to foreign piracy sites.

The online protests have placed a major roadblock in the way of these bills. The bills’ potential to stifle speech and Internet entrepreneurship are too great and the strength of the online protests appear to have put Congress on notice that these bills in their current form should not go forward.

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