

House Passage of CISPA Threatens Internet Privacy for All

May 3, 2012 - If you haven't heard of CISPA, you will. It is known as the Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act. But is a lot less about intelligence sharing than it is about government snooping on private communications. And now the House of Representatives has made the awful decision to pass it.

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CISPA is nothing short of a government snooping disaster. And as with many other legislative disasters, virtually nobody in Congress has bothered to read the bill which is frankly, more reminiscent of the laws found in repressive societies than anything we've seen before.

Under CISPA, every single piece of internet communication that you engage in will be watched by the federal government. Your online shopping habits will no longer be private. Your online viewing habits will no longer be private. Those private email messages you send to your kids will be archived and can be read by the government at any time.

CISPA basically means that that your entire online digital life will be available for government review at any time, for any reason. It throws the 4th Amendment under the bus.

Of course, it does all of these things under the auspices of stopping criminal activity and terrorism. But not all members of Congress are sold on the idea. Rep. Jared Polis (D-CO) has said that the law would "waive every single privacy law ever enacted in the name of cyber-security. Allowing the military and NSA (the National Security Agency) to spy on Americans on American soil goes against every principle this country was founded on."

Outwardly, the goal of the law is to protect American computer networks from cyber-attacks; either by hackers or unfriendly governments. That's fine. In fact, it is badly needed and overdue. But a look at many of the bill's supporters - many of whom are in the entertainment and software industries - and it quickly becomes apparent that the supporters of the bill are also trying to crack down on things like file sharing. And they are willing to trample on everyone's 4th Amendment rights in order to get what they want.

The bill still has two more hurdles before it can become law. First it has to pass the Senate. It is no sure bet that it will survive there. Then it would require the President's signature. Again, that is no sure bet. The White House has expressed concerns over the lack of privacy rights and the lack of oversight in the bill.

Unfortunately, even if this attempt fails, it certainly won't be the last attempt by certain industries, interest groups and government entities to pass similar legislation. Earlier this year, a similar bill known as SOPA died due to pressure from privacy rights groups and large internet sites such as Google and Facebook. While CISPA is still opposed by privacy rights organizations, opposition from industry has waned; largely because CISPA provides internet companies certain protections against legal issues that they wouldn't have had under SOPA.

If you want to maintain your privacy, now would be a good time to pick up the phone, call both of your US Senators and tell them that you don't want them to vote for CISPA. It is time to kill this bill.

byJim Malmberg

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