

Stop online privacy act



The Stop Online Privacy Act, generally known as SOPA is a United States bill that was introduced into the House of Representatives on October 26th, 2011 and broadly protested on January 18th, 2012. A few things SOPA is capable of according to Joshua Topolsky is, "...search engines or payment services to shut down access to a website that the owner believes violated its copyright. On its face, the bill is designed to stop access to foreign websites that are profiting off of stolen content" (1).

To protest this bill, on January 18th, "...backers of several popular web sites were visibly dramatizing the " censorship" they say SOPA and PIPA would cause. On Wikipedia, users see a brief flash of the entry they were seeking - then a black screen descends, obscuring the site. Social site Reddit is closed, too, offering instead a breakdown of arguments in opposition to the bills. Mozilla, too, is redirecting its web pages to an " action page" and Google's search homepage is blacking out the Google logo" (Clayton 1).

Although not the only form of protest for the greatly opposed bill it was the most recognized. From writing to Congress to signing an online petition, supporters and those opposed expressed their concerns and made their voices heard. If SOPA were to be passed, essentially, " The legislation would allow copyright holders and the Justice Department to seek court orders against websites associated with copyright infringement. SOPA, the House version, applies to both domestic and foreign websites ... If that court order is granted, the entire website would be taken down.

Internet users who typed in the site's URL address would receive an error message, and for all appearances, the site would never have existed. Importantly, the court does not need to hear a defense from the actual

website before issuing its ruling. The entire website can be condemned without a trial or even a traditional court hearing” (Johnson 1). The amount of power SOPA would grant to copyright holders would be astronomical, and cause the copyright holders to go rogue themselves with power. For example, “...if a website was streaming " The Hangover" without permission, Warner Bros. could ask the Justice Department to obtain a court order for to shut down the entire site -- not merely remove the specific film, as required under current law.

Alternatively, Warner Bros. could force credit card companies to stop processing payments to the site, make Google to remove it from search results, and the force the site's ISP from hosting it on the Web” (1). Although SOPA would get rid of foreign websites engaging in piracy or fraud, the broadness of it and power given to copyright holders could easily be abused.

Most supporters of SOPA argue that, “ The House bill known as the Stop Online Piracy Act, or SOPA, and its Senate counterpart are far more modest than this cyber tantrum suggests. By our reading they would create new tools to target the worst-of-the-worst black markets. The notion that a SOPA dragnet will catch a stray Facebook post or Twitter link is false” (“ Brake” 1). Other details left out by those who oppose the bill are apart of the reason why there probably are more opposed than for SOPA. Some may suggest that, “ Compromises have narrowed several vague and overly broad provisions.

The bill's drafters also removed a feature requiring Internet service providers to filter the domain name system for thieves—which would have meant basically removing them from the Internet's phone book to deny consumer

access. But the anti-SOPA activists don't care about these crucial details" (1). Even though service providers wouldn't filter domains some suggest it could include, " using less reputable DNS systems in other countries - would pop up and put Internet users at great risk of unknowingly ending up on criminal scam websites" (Clayton 2).

The provision that enabled this DNS rewriting was reported taken out or at least tested before used, making it potentially harmless. Besides bringing the rogue sites down, more problems arise for those being victim to theft of their content or product. Some might say, " Without rights that protect the creativity and innovation that bring fresh ideas and products to market, there will be far fewer ideas and products to steal" (" Brake" 2). This idea shows that passing SOPA even though with issues could help maintain new products and ideas coming to the Market.

Those in opposition of SOPA worry about how broad and how powerful the law would be and the damage to the Internet it would do. User content posted online would never be the same after SOPA and could be completely ruined do the generalization of SOPA. In the words of Joshua Topolsky, " As a content creator, I fully understand how precious ownership is and how painful theft can be" (1). Many supporters of SOPA are the people whose content are either stolen on a regular basis or have been before. But not all whose content has been stolen in the past support SOPA, like Topolsky.

Topolsky gives an example of the injustice SOPA would bring, saying, " Say a French company just started a social networking site in which users can upload videos of themselves singing. Now let's say some kids upload a video of themselves singing their favorite Brittany Spears song, not even playing

back the original recording but simply singing along innocently to a song they like. In the eyes of Spears's record label or any number of parties associated with her continued cash flow, that might very well look like an instance of piracy" (1). This is an issue the general public fears.

Some may suggest that SOPA would, "...chill the free flow of expression of ideas on the Internet simply because it creates greater liability and exposure for websites and for others" (Clayton 2). The struggle to keep user generated information and media would be excruciatingly difficult. Other people opposed to SOPA were more worried that, "...the bill would put the US in the same category as Syria and China, whose authoritarian regimes impose a similar type of blocking - but for websites that contain information those governments don't like" (Clayton 2).

The fear of becoming more of a communist nation went through the heads of some if not most Americans; when the idea of censorship in the bill came to place. According to Luke Johnson, " Under current law, companies that think that their material has been improperly used can request for it to be removed, but cannot ask for entire websites to be taken down--hence the frequent sight of videos no longer available on sites like YouTube" (2). People in opposition have said that the current law is already enough for now, and that there should be other legislation towards online piracy if needed.

As stated by Luke Johnson, " Critics emphasize that copyright holders frequently abuse even existing copyright infringement tools that require websites to remove improper content, and believe those problems would be dramatically escalated by SOPA" (2). Like Joshua Topolsky I agree that, "

SOPA and PIPA are like taking a sledgehammer to something when you need a scalpel. The laws are too far-reaching and too simplistic to accurately police real piracy online” (2).

If the goal is to stop online piracy, whatever law used to do so should be precise and effective towards that goal, not the opposite. In conclusion, rushing a bill through Congress as broad and revolutionary as SOPA will not go unseen, for the people are watching. Although there is a huge issue with legal products and intellectual products being stolen, the freedoms of posting user based content should not have to suffer. Online piracy should be dealt with in a way that accurately targets the sites and people that are out of control with a law that isn't as general as SOPA.