



Conservatives lining up in opposition to SOPA

By [Timothy B. Lee](#) | Published 12/27/2011

Views on copyright law have never broken down cleanly along ideological or partisan lines, but many of the key supporters for the Stop Online Piracy Act have come from the political right. The legislation is sponsored by Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX) and it enjoys support from right-leaning, corporate-funded organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and Americans for Tax Reform.

But a growing number of right-leaning individuals and organizations have come out against SOPA. Last Wednesday, the Heritage Foundation, one of the nation's largest and most influential conservative think tanks, [published an article](#) by senior research fellow James Gattuso warning about the "unintended consequences" of SOPA. And on Thursday, he was joined in opposing SOPA by Erick Erickson, editor of the popular conservative blog RedState.

In his article, Gattuso noted that SOPA would undermine Internet security by [delaying the implementation of DNSSEC](#) and by causing Internet users to use offshore DNS servers to circumvent DNS blocks. He also warned that government regulation of search results would be "the first step down a classic slippery slope of government interference that has no clear stopping point."

Gattuso's stance is notable because Heritage has traditionally supported strong enforcement of copyright law. As former US attorney general Edwin Meese [put it](#) in a 2005 article for Heritage, "stealing is stealing, and it must stop."

Gattuso agrees with Meese that the "stealing" needs to stop, but he argues Congress should deal with the problem "in a way that does not disrupt the growth of technology, does not weaken Internet security, and respects free speech rights." And he doesn't think SOPA fits the bill.

Erickson also opposes SOPA, and he is taking a more activist approach to the issue. In a Thursday blog post, he pledged to [recruit primary challengers](#) to run against conservatives who support SOPA.

"I love Marsha Blackburn (R-TN). She is a delightful lady and a solidly conservative member of Congress," he wrote. However, because Blackburn is a SOPA cosponsor,

Erickson pledged to "do everything in my power to defeat her in her 2012 re-election bid."

Erickson proposed that liberals and conservative SOPA opponents make a pact in which each agrees to support primary challenges against SOPA cosponsors in their own parties.

Erickson and Gattuso are jumping on a bandwagon that has long been occupied by the more libertarian sectors of the American right. GOP presidential candidate Ron Paul [came out against SOPA](#) last month, and his libertarian-leaning son, Senator Rand Paul has [criticized the Senate version](#) of the legislation. Scholars from libertarian think tanks such as the [Cato Institute](#) (where I'm an adjunct scholar), the [Competitive Enterprise Institute](#), and the [Mercatus Center](#) have all criticized PIPA and SOPA.

In short, the fight over SOPA is less about left versus right than it is about declining industries—Hollywood and major labels—versus the Internet community. Conservative bloggers like Erickson, [Matt Drudge](#), and [Glenn "Instapundit" Reynolds](#) are as offended by the legislation as are their liberal and libertarian counterparts. Conversely, even [staunch civil libertarians](#) seem to get confused about copyright issues if they're too closely tied to Hollywood.

Speaking to CNET last week, Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA) [predicted](#) that Republican opposition would help kill SOPA. "I think the Republican House leadership will look and say, 'Unless we have the support of the vast majority of Republicans, we're not going to take the bill to the floor,'" he said.

[Photograph by Nathan Gibbs](#)