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Proposed cyber snooping bill too broad

From an editorial published in the Sun Journal of New Bern on Wednesday:

Congress just won't leave the Internet alone. In January, online companies such as Wikipedia and [Google](#) organized people to protest two bills, the Stop Online Piracy Act in the House of Representatives and the Protect Intellectual Property Act in the Senate. SOPA and PIPA would have allowed the government easily to shut down websites accused of violating intellectual-property protections.

At the time, Jim Harper, director of information and policy studies at the **Cato Institute**, observed that Congress would cook up something similar. He warned, "They perhaps want to teach the public a lesson. You don't tell them what to do. They tell you what to do."

The new mischief is HR3523, the Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act of 2011, by Rep. Mike J. Rogers, R-Mich. Weren't Republicans put back in charge of the House in November 2010 by an electorate that demanded less government?

The Electronic Frontier Foundation says HR3523 "would let companies spy on users and share private information with the federal government and other companies with near-total immunity from civil and criminal liability. It effectively creates a 'cybersecurity' exemption to all existing laws." That means [Google](#), [Facebook](#) or your phone company could collect your emails or phone messages for "cybersecurity purposes" – broadly defined – and share your information with other companies and government agencies.

"The upshot is that no law applies" to what government and companies can do with your information. "That has sent me through the roof. It would create a legal-free zone," Harper said.

He explained that HR3523 is a bit different from the bills spiked in January, which involved disabling websites. HR3523 allows almost unlimited snooping.

Authorities already can obtain warrants to snoop on people, as required by the Fourth Amendment, if they were suspected terrorists, for example.

But HR3523 would go much further. "Cybersecurity is thousands of different problems," said Harper. "And Congress doesn't know what they are. They don't know what the information or what the law is. So, they write a new law that is extremely broad in defining cybersecurity."

Broad laws are the definition of tyranny. The American Revolution was rightly fought,

in part, to prevent them.

The views in N.C. Opinions are not necessarily those of the Observer's editorial board.