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Story of the Week: Privacy advocates wary of CISPA

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Three months after the defeat of SOPA, a new bill in Congress had internet users, privacy advocates and civil rights groups up in arms this week. On Thursday, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act (CISPA), a bill that the authors claim will allow the government and private companies to work together in order to fight against cyber terrorism.

Unlike SOPA, where Silicon Valley fought against the bill as a whole, opinions on CISPA seem to be split. The bill, which will now be heading to the Senate, has support from several internet giants, including Facebook and Microsoft, but faces strong opposition from advocacy groups such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation and American Civil Liberties Union.

Following Thursday's news, the Electronic Frontier Foundation vowed to continue to fight a bill that it claimed would let companies "bypass all existing privacy law to spy on communications and pass sensitive user data to the government."

The American Civil Liberties Union's legislative counsel Michelle Richardson stated: "CISPA goes too far for little reason. Cybersecurity does not have to mean abdication of Americans' online privacy. As we've seen repeatedly, once the government gets expansive national security authorities, there's no going back."

Elsewhere, Fred Wilson wrote on his blog, A VC, that it's "not the least bit surprising" that Facebook supports CISPA.

"Facebook was once an insurgent. But now they are an incumbent. And we can expect them to be supportive of the ultimate incumbent, our government, particularly when it comes to sharing data on all of us with them," Wilson wrote.

Facebook users might agree. Azazz.org, which specializes in online petitions, has gathered more than 600,000 signatures to date, asking Facebook and Microsoft to drop their support of the bill.

Over at Cato Institute's blog, research fellow Julian Sanchez offered his own suggestions on how the government could handle cyber security information sharing:

Instead of indiscriminately adding a cyber security loophole to every statute on the books, why not figure out which specific kinds of information are useful to security professionals without compromising privacy, figure out which laws raise obstacles to that sharing, and then craft appropriately narrow exemptions?