

TECH INSIDER: An Expert Blog on the State of Federal Technology

Take Responsibility for Your Cookies

BY ALIYA STERNSTEIN 08/11/09 04:28 pm ET

The Cato Institute's Jim Harper on Tuesday [blogged](#) that a recent White House proposal to reverse a long-standing ban on cookies is an acknowledgment that Americans can control their own cookie intake.

No, this was not a commentary on the administration's healthcare overhaul plan.

This was about Web-tracking programs that deposit code on a visitor's computer to collect information on usage -- also called "cookies." A 2000 policy barred federal Web sites from tracking visitors with cookies to protect citizens' privacy, but critics and some administration officials now say the rule obstructs citizen outreach. In July, the government issued a request for comments on [revisions](#) to the policy.

"Because you can control cookies, a government regulation restricting cookies is needless nannying," said Harper, director of information policy studies at the libertarian institute. His post explains that Web browsers permit users to block all cookies, accept all cookies or decide which cookies to accept based on who is offering them.

"The answer to the cookie problem is personal responsibility. Did you skip over the instructions above? The nation's cookie problem is your fault," Harper wrote. "Hopefully, the debate about whether to regulate cookies is over, but further 'Net nannying is a constant offering of the federal government (and other elitists). By moving away from the stultifying limitation on federal cookies, the federal government acknowledges that American grown-ups can and should look out for their own privacy."

COMMENTS

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You (authors-Cato Institute) guys give hypocrisy a bad name. This is a civil liberties issue of access to personal data and an e-commerce issue of data mining, and you manage to come down on the wrong side of both.

ARTHUR SHANTZ 08/12/09 08:53 am ET