



FREEDOM VIEW: Internet oversight bill rebooting

THE POINT — This bill would be a direct assault on the First Amendment freedom of speech.

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"Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," abolitionist Wendell Phillips warned in 1852.

Nothing's changed.

Following the Democrats' weekly strategy session, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., talked to reporters about House legislation at the Capitol.

Just last month, literally millions of Americans rallied to prevent Congress from abridging free speech on the Internet. They sent tens of millions of emails, faxes and letters to their representatives and senators.

Congress was forced to shelve two similar bills that nearly made it into law, the Stop Online Privacy Act, commonly called SOPA, in the House of Representatives; and the Protect Intellectual Property Act, or PIPA, in the Senate. The bills would have allowed the government, after a court hearing but no immediate trial, to shut down virtually any site considered to violate copyright laws.

Now, like the ghosts in "Poltergeist II," they're ba-aaaaaack.

According to the Daily Caller, Reid "will lead his second effort of 2012 to push Internet-regulating legislation, this time in the form of a new cybersecurity bill. The expected bill is the latest attempt by the Democrats to broadly expand the authority of executive branch agencies over the Internet."

This time, they're doing it with more stealth. The Daily Caller added, "Details about the bill remain shrouded in secrecy. Clues available to the public suggest that the bill might be stronger than President Barack Obama's cybersecurity proposal, which was released in May 2011."

"They didn't even take a breath from SOPA before bringing back this issue," Jim Harper told us; he's director of information and policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute. He said no one knows for sure what could be in this ghastly bill because "everything is in flux. We don't know what the language is." But he said that all reports indicate that it includes "rather dramatic threats to privacy. That's the strategy that Harry Reid is apparently using. He's not letting people see the language until the last minute. We have to presume it's bad."

According to the Daily Caller, Sen. Reid wants to expand the current authority of the Department of Homeland Security over “critical infrastructure,” currently utilities and financial institutions, “to also include Internet service providers and private networks.”

The Hill website, which reports on Congress, wrote that Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn., “said the turf war over which agency should be in charge of implementing the government’s cybersecurity plan has been largely resolved, and there is a ‘broad consensus’ that DHS is best-suited to the task, with technical and intelligence support from the military and National Security Agency.” The NSA is the supersecret agency that has the ability, literally, to snoop on almost every phone conversation or Internet message on the planet.

This would be a direct assault on the First Amendment freedom of speech because the Internet includes newspaper websites as well as millions of blogs big and small. And it includes the personal emails of almost every person in America, as well as cellphone calls and texting.

“Senators are used to getting their way,” Mr. Harper said. “You saw real personal outrage because their plans were derailed” with the defeat of SOPA and PIPA. “They perhaps want to teach the public a lesson. You don’t tell them what to do. They tell you what to do.”

If our democracy and freedoms are to survive, senators Reid, Lieberman and the others are going to have to be defeated again — and again and again. Let us never rest in defending our sacred American freedoms.