

Obama Seeks Privacy Bill of Rights for Internet Users

This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

The Obama administration last week announced a plan to protect Internet users in the United States.

The administration has proposed what it calls a Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights.



The bill is meant to give Americans more control over their personal information.

President Obama said last Thursday that "never has privacy been more important than today, in the age of Internet, the World Wide Web and smartphones."

Under the Privacy Bill of Rights, Americans would have more control over what personal data companies collect from them and how they use it. It also would require the companies to be more open about their privacy and security policies.

Darren Hayes is head of the Computer Information Systems Program at Pace University in New York. He says many countries in Europe and Asia already have online privacy laws in place.

DARREN HAYES: "I think that, you know, this legislation is just, it's long overdue. I think that in its present form it looks very effective and I think that it is a step in the right direction and the average online user does need more transparency and more control over the use of their information."

Professor Hayes says the Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights holds companies like Facebook and Google to a higher level of responsibility.

DARREN HAYES: "I think in practical terms it's going to make online companies more accountable for what they do. It also seeks to provide more transparency about how third parties are sharing their information and give the user, hopefully, the ability to opt out of having their information shared."

The new measures are part of a larger government effort to improve online privacy. The administration has urged Congress to pass federal legislation in support of the measures. It also wants lawmakers to give the Federal Trade Commission and State Attorneys Generals additional powers to enforce the measures. Professor Hayes says the effectiveness of the bill will depend strongly on that.

DARREN HAYES: "What's also going to be important about this legislation are the penalties and fines that will ultimately be imposed for non-compliance."

Also last week, a group of Internet browser companies agreed to support plans for adding "do-not-track" technology to their web browsers. The group agreed not to use tracking information to target personalized ads to users who do not wish to be identified. The companies will, however, still collect the information.

And that's the VOA Special English Technology Report, written by June Simms. For a link to our report on Google's new privacy policies, which are set to take effect on March first, go to voaspecialenglish.com. While there, you can also find transcripts, MP3s and podcasts of our reports. I'm Steve Ember.