



Websites Cut Service to Protest US Antipiracy Bills

This is the VOA Special English Economics Report.

Some popular websites have protested two proposed United States laws aimed at fighting illegal copying of writing, movies and other intellectual property on the Internet. Wednesday, Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, blacked out its English language website for twenty-four hours.

Jay Walsh is head of communications for the Wikimedia Foundation which operates Wikipedia.

JAY WALSH: "It is detrimental to the free and open web. It is detrimental to Wikipedia. And we want to make sure that we send a message."

The blogging site Boing Boing and Social news website Reddit also went black.

Erik Martin is General Manager of Reddit.

ERIK MARTIN: "This is a really big deal and this is something we're going to fight, and this is something we think threatens the entire tech sector."

Both Wikipedia and Reddit urged users to contact their Congressional representative to oppose the law. Even Internet search leader Google protested, although it continued to provide service.

The Stop Online Piracy Act and the Protect Intellectual Property Act are known as SOPA and PIPA for short. Supporters say they are a way to fight foreign websites that sell pirated copies of American movies and music.

Steven Tepp is a lawyer with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. He says piracy of books, music, movies and other forms of intellectual property hurt the economy and threaten jobs.

STEVEN TEPP: "These rogue sites are hurting American jobs, stealing American jobs, they're harming American consumers and they have no business being on the Internet."

But many online businesses like blogs, news sites and search engines say the laws force them to become censors.

David Smith is with the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies. He says the proposed laws would hurt Wikipedia and other sites that depend on material provided by people who use the sites. He says websites would be required to police all the material they carry.

DAVID SMITH: "It creates a legal situation in which a complainant can go before a judge and get an order, and it then makes the various Internet companies, the Internet service providers, responsible for what they're carrying. And, this is where the rub (problem) comes, because it basically turns the Internet service provider into a monitor."

The House and Senate are expected to work on the bills in the coming weeks. But after the online protests, some lawmakers have already said they have doubts about the bill. Republican Senator Marco Rubio urged lawmakers to take more time to consider the concerns of both supporters and opponents of the bills.

Obama administration spokesman John Carney said the president opposes any law that hurts freedom of expression or security.

On Wednesday, Speaker of the House of Representatives John Boehner admitted there is now a lack of agreement among lawmakers on the bills.

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