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# Combating Online Infringements and Counterfeits Act (2010)

## Initial Coverage and Introduction

On September 20th 2010 a new bill (S.3804) was introduced to the legislative process called Combating Online Infringements and Counterfeits Act[1]. This bill would allow the government to block and shut down any domain name it deemed “dedicated to infringing copyright” without trial or due process. A domain name is the textual representation of a website’s address on the internet. For example, facebook.com points to a numeric address that is understood by a computer, and when it is entered in to the address bar, it makes various connections to other computers to display the webpage.

This bill was introduced by the Senator of Vermont, Patrick Leahy. This bill is intended to stop online piracy, however, there are many ways to bypass the restrictions of the bill. This bill is heavily supported by the RIAA[3], which is a Record Company dedicated to turning profit by selling music and taking legal actions against average citizens infringing on copyright[2]. This bill would limit the sites accessible to average users for download and listening to music from the RIAA label. This bill is also strongly supported by the MPAA, a similar company to the RIAA but for movies.

On September 21st the EFF stated they were highly opposed to the new bill. The EFF, or Electronic Frontier Foundation, is dedicated to protecting the rights of citizens online. It is mainly concerned with the First Amendment, which the EFF believes to be completely violated by this new bill [4]. The EFF also states that this bill complicates current laws, and would vastly expand the already misused DMCA.

On September 23rd the bill started to gain more attention by the public, and articles concerning the bill began showing up on many different websites such as DomainNews.com, techeye.net, and cnet.com. On September 28th, the WashingtonPost.com reported there was much protest from key participants in the engineering industry[5]. Educated engineers are opposing the bill, stating that it could “lead to censorship and destabilize the architecture of the Web”. These people clearly understand how the internet works and how this bill would be a terrible idea.

## Recent Coverage

On September 28th, InformationWeek.com posted an article that also opposed the new bill[8].

On September 29th, FoxNews.com posted an article slightly biased towards the affect on online entrepreneurs. Making them appear as the victims to piracy and this new bill offering protection[6].

On September 30th, FoxNews.com reported that the senate is easing off the new bill until after elections[9].

CNET.com reports the bill has been shelved on October 4th[10].

## Compare and Contrast

There are many key news sources contributing to spreading knowledge of this bill. For the most part, the news sites are not biased against or in support of the bill. However, FoxNews and the EFF.org have made their positions on the bill clear. The EFF is dedicated to protecting our rights online, and therefore their stance should be taken in to great consideration. The RIAA and MPAA are notorious for lobbying to alter copyright laws in order to make more profit and sue average citizens [11]. So their statement that the bill not being passed “puts citizens at risk” should be regarded as a fabrications to gain support for the bill that will end up being misused just like the DMCA[3][4]. Like most forms of media, the internet provides a way of accessing entertainment. Groups like the MPAA and RIAA refuse to evolve and find more creative ways to make profit. Viacom is also in support of the bill because every time a television episode is downloaded off of the internet, they see that as lost profit, instead of trying to find a better way to sell advertising.

CNET.com was an excellent resource for getting impartial information. They reported on statements from the EFF, RIAA, and official statements pertaining to the bill. TechDirt, on the other hand, was heavily critical of the RIAA’s statement concerning the bill, which states that the Americans that are “put at risk” are likely constrained to the RIAA themselves, and that no others Americans are being hurt by “infringing sites”. I tend to lean more towards the view expressed by TechDirt, specifically, “inability to adapt your [RIAA’s] business model to a changing market”.

This bill has received a lot of attention from technical professionals in the field. 87 engineers of the internet wrote letters to the bill’s committee explaining what a terrible idea the bill is, and it seems to have been taken under consideration since the bill has been revised and is being put on hold.

The new bill has not been covered extensively in the television and radio news, probably because it is still in its early stages and most bills do not make it past the first committee review. However, these online sources are popular among the technical community, and therefore the people who it will affect the most, will be able to find coverage.

## Conclusion

It is pretty widely agreed that this bill needs some serious revising. Companies like the RIAA and the MPAA will always be in support of finding ways to restrict people from using the internet the way they want instead of adapting to changing technologies. Fortunately, organizations like the EFF and engineers who actually understand the technology the bill is restricting are there to fight back against malicious corporations.

## Sources

1. <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s111-3804>
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