

Opinion: Is Internet freedom or Web piracy the bigger issue?

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Wikipedia went dark for a day. Google hid its logo under a black shroud. And hundreds of other websites darkened their pages temporarily in a massive, coordinated protest against a pair of bills that would step up enforcement of copyrights and trademarks. Wednesday's demonstration provoked such an intense backlash against the Protect IP Act and the Stop Online Piracy Act (better known as PIPA and SOPA) that by the end of the week, more than 100 lawmakers had declared their opposition and both bills had been placed on hold.

It was a stunning – and in some ways troubling – show of lobbying muscle by some of the Web's most popular companies. Shell-shocked supporters of the bills complained that the tech industry had misled the public and glossed over the damage being done by foreign-based websites peddling unauthorized copies of U.S. movies, music and brands. But the bills went too far, giving rights holders the power to do much more than proponents said they would. That's a problem lawmakers need to solve before moving ahead.

The original versions of PIPA and SOPA would have enabled the Justice Department to seek court orders to seize the domain names of foreign sites that were either "dedicated to" infringing copyrights and trademarks or just facilitating infringement. Such orders would require Internet service providers to steer users away from the sites, search engines to block links to them, and payment processors and advertising networks to cut off their financial support. The measures

would also have authorized copyright holders to seek similar court orders against any site dedicated to infringement.

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