

Lawmakers Set Their Sights on Spyware

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Senators George Allen (R-Virginia) and Gordon Smith (R-Oregon) introduced new anti-spyware legislation Wednesday that focuses on improving enforcement of existing laws rather than creating new ones.

The new anti-spyware bill would significantly increase civil and criminal penalties for spyware distributors and creators, according to Allen. He says that illegal profits from spyware should be seized and given to improve law enforcement, as is currently the case under federal drug laws with regard to profits from illegal drug sales.

Allen announced his bill, which has not yet officially been named, at a meeting of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation committee. It follows the SPY BLOCK bill, which was introduced last year and then reintroduced in the Senate in March. SPY BLOCK aims to introduce new rules to protect consumers from the growing spyware problem. Allen says that his bill will give law enforcement more resources to go after spyware makers under existing laws and will add stiff new penalties.

Right now, Allen's bill competes with SPY BLOCK. Theoretically, only one of the two bills should make it to the Senate floor for a vote. But the two bills may be combined into a single compromise bill before either moves forward.

SPY BLOCK and Allen's new bill each would create a national standard that would supersede current state anti-spyware laws.

Whichever bill moves forward, senators and witnesses at Wednesday's hearing agreed that spyware is a vast and expensive threat to consumers and the economy, and that it needs to be addressed.

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