

Politicians Cynically Exploit Child Sex Victims in Attack on Your Freedom

On February 10, the US Senate's Judiciary Committee advanced the EARN IT (Eliminating Abusive and Rampant Neglect of Interactive Technologies) Act, setting it up for possible adoption as a free-standing bill or, more likely, as a last-minute sneak amendment to one of Congress's periodic so-called "must pass" legislative packages.

An earlier version of EARN IT fortunately failed to pass in 2020 after civil liberties groups brought heavy public pressure to bear against it. It's time to go break out the torches and pitchforks again.

EARN IT is a one-two punch against freedom and privacy that would effectively destroy the Internet we've come to know and love (and, yes, hate) over the last 30 years.

This pernicious and unconstitutional bill would both mandate Internet censorship by platforms on behalf of government and de facto illegalize "end to end" encryption, while pretending to do neither.

First, EARN IT would mandate Internet censorship by removing "Section 230" liability protections for platforms, with respect to content generated by those platforms' users, not the platforms themselves, if the content involved is "Child Sex Abuse Material." This would effectively require platforms to scan all user-generated content in advance to protect themselves.

Second, while EARN IT does not specifically outlaw "end to end" encryption, the bill's lead sponsor, US Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) has made it clear that inability to scan content because it's encrypted is not a "get-out-of-jail-free card" with respect to liability. In other words, don't allow content you can't scan, because you're potentially liable for it whether you can scan it or not.

What could possibly go wrong?

What's the over-under on how long it would take for Congress to decide that other content types — for example, "extremist" content, defined as any political content they dislike — should be scanned for and banned as well?

EARN IT's supporters present it as a useful and necessary tool to combat child sexual abuse. It's no such thing.

Child sex predators don't need large Internet platforms or "end to end encrypted" apps. They already have their own Dark Web hangouts and off-the-shelf encryption software.

EARN IT would have little if any effect on them. They're not its target. You are.

The politicians behind EARN IT hate your privacy and your freedom to speak as you please. They're using child sex victims as cheap props to justify, and expand, their power to run your life.

What should we do with EARN IT? BURN IT.