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In Trump's America, Your Privacy Is for Sale

https://www.democracynow.org/2017/3/30/in_trump_s_america_your_privacy_is

By Amy Goodman & Denis Moynihan

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Unless you're reading this column in a good old newspaper, odds are your internet service provider (ISP) knows what you're up to. ISPs are the on-ramp to the internet; it is through these gatekeepers that we all access the internet. They set the price and the speed of your connection, but were legally prevented from sharing or selling details about your personal internet usage without your permission—until now. Through a resolution that narrowly passed both the House and the Senate on partisan lines, internet privacy protections implemented by the Obama administration will be entirely eliminated.

Companies like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon now can sift through your personal information, your web browsing history, where and when you access the internet and what you do while online, and peddle that private data to whomever is willing to pay. President Donald Trump, while obsessed with the imagined invasion of his own privacy (as indicated by his tweeted charge that President Barack Obama wiretapped him during his campaign), is expected to sign this bill into law, stripping privacy away from hundreds of millions of Americans.

“Americans pay for [internet] service. They don't expect that information to be shared or used for other purposes or sold without their permission,” Laura Moy said on the “Democracy Now!”

news hour. Moy is the deputy director of the Center on Privacy and Technology at the Georgetown University Law Center.

“Americans absolutely need internet connectivity in today’s modern era,” Moy continued. “You need to go online to search for a job. You need to go online to complete your education. You need to go online often to communicate with your health care provider or conduct your banking.” All of this communication, all of this internet use, can be conducted from the privacy of your home. But don’t think it is going to remain private. Your ISP can vacuum up your searches, your interests, what movies you watch online, your age, weight, Social Security number, medical conditions, financial troubles ... if you start searching online for a bankruptcy lawyer or for treatment for addiction, your ISP will add that to your profile.

“We want people to use the internet, to view it as a safe space to communicate with others, to express their political viewpoints, to carry out these vitally important everyday activities, and to do so without fear that the information that they share with their internet service provider will be used to harm them in some way,” Laura Moy concluded. That was the hope.

The internet privacy rules that are being eliminated fill 219 pages, and were worked on at the Federal Communications Commission for over a year, supported by over 275,000 comments from citizens and advocacy organizations. They were published in the Federal Register last December. The effort to eliminate them was championed by Tennessee Republican Rep. Marsha Blackburn, who chairs the subcommittee of the House Energy and Commerce Committee that oversees the FCC. As reported in Vocativ, Blackburn, during her 14 years in Congress, has received at least \$693,000 in campaign contributions from companies and individuals from AT&T, Comcast, Verizon and other industry members that stand to profit from the rules change.

Blackburn’s willing partner in the repeal of the rules is the FCC’s new commissioner, Ajit Pai, who used to serve as associate general counsel for Verizon. He was one of the two Republicans on the five-seat FCC during Obama’s second term, and was promoted to FCC chair by President Donald Trump. According to the Los Angeles Times, Pai gave a speech last December in which he promised to “take a weed wacker” to another hard-won progressive victory, net neutrality. Immediately after the House voted to repeal the privacy rules, Free Press, the national media policy advocacy and activist organization, stated, “The broadband-privacy fight is the Trump administration’s first attack on the open internet. And now that it has a win on its hands, it’ll be pushing for another.”

It is absolutely shocking that Donald Trump, in the midst of his accusations that his own privacy was invaded by illegal wiretaps, is signing into law permission to invade, sell, trade and monetize the most private, intimate details of every internet-connected American. This law is the ultimate hack: allowing corporations to take all of our information and sell it for profit.

In Donald Trump’s America, the information isn’t stolen by hackers in the dark of night. It is taken with the government’s blessing. Unless people organize and fight back, the promises of the open internet will fade away.