

[Lawmakers trade barbs in hearing on Stop Online Piracy Act](#) (Washington Post – December 15, 2011)

By Cecilia Kang

In a raucous House debate on Thursday over a bill to stop piracy on the Internet, lawmakers representing the interests of old media and new media drew their swords in passionate attacks and counterattacks over the controversial proposal. The circus atmosphere of the hearing on the Stop Online Piracy Act, introduced by Rep. Lamar Smith (R-Tex.), reflected the high-stakes, emotional nature of the debate over how to protect copyrighted movies, songs or books online without trampling on the free speech of individuals and companies. The measure has been praised by Hollywood titans, pharmaceutical giants and record labels who want stronger enforcement of copyright-infringement laws online. But it has drawn the ire of Silicon Valley types, including founding Internet engineers such as Vint Cerf and Web giants Yahoo and Facebook, who worry that the bill gives law enforcement too much power to shut down their sites. During the marathon House Judiciary Committee markup of the proposal, known as SOPA, representatives agreed to revisions to better protect U.S. Web sites if they inadvertently host copyrighted movies, songs or books. A similar Senate bill was approved last May in the Judiciary Committee, but analysts said any legislation won't be considered until next year. "There is bipartisan support as well as bipartisan opposition," Smith said in his opening remarks. "I hope we remember we are among Judiciary friends." Those words fell on deaf ears. After hours of discussion, a frustrated Rep. **Mel Watt (D-N.C.)** blasted Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah) and other opponents of the bill, who had called for a hearing with Internet engineers and resorted to procedural tactics such as forcing a clerk to read an entire amendment aloud for 45 minutes. At one point, **Watt** said that other lawmakers didn't care about copyright and were being too easy on piracy. Chaffetz responded that he's been a champion of intellectual-property enforcement but thought another hearing focused on Internet engineering was needed. "Bring in the nerds!" he said. Some opponents say the bill would give companies and the government too much surveillance power over the Web. Google co-founder Sergey Brin earlier Thursday compared SOPA to censorship in China and Iran. "Once the government has the taste of power, the temptation to exert ever greater control over the Internet . . . will be even greater," said Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.). "Nonsense!" said Rep. Howard L. Berman (D-Calif.), who slammed the comparisons. He added: "There's a big difference between regulating commercial activity . . . and seeking to suppress political conduct and dissent." And then things got personal. When Lofgren alluded to Hollywood's financial influence on the issue, Rep. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-Va.) scolded her for the accusations. "A lot of money has been floating around on a lot of different issues," Scott

said. "It's not worthy for us to be talking about who got bought off by whom." And even though no one accused him of being a laggard, Scott wanted to make clear he was no "Johnny-come-lately" on anti-piracy efforts. "I don't like that. Let's put down the name-calling," he said. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Tex.) didn't like tweets from Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa.), complaining that his staff wrote on Twitter: "Bored by the dialogue of Rep. Jackson Lee." She said she was "offended," a word King said he didn't like. After several minutes of muted debate, Jackson Lee agreed to revise her complaint, entering into the record that she found his tweet "impolitic and unkind."