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SCHAKOWSKY HAILS PASSAGE OF PRO-CONSUMER ANTI-SPYWARE BILL TO PROTECT CONSTITUENTS' PERSONAL AND FINANCIAL PRIVACY FROM ONLINE PREDATORS

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today applauded the passage of H.R. 29, the 'Securely Protect Yourself Against Cyber Trespass Act' or the 'SPY ACT', a bill to protect online consumers' personal information and identities from the dangers of spyware programs. H.R. 29, which passed the House with strong bipartisan support, creates strong regulations and penalties for illegal and deceptive use of spyware programs.

Below is Schakowsky's floor statement:

"Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a cosponsor and in support of a strong consumer and privacy protection bill, H.R. 29, the Securely Protect Yourself Against Cyber Trespass Act, or the Spy Act.

I want to thank my colleagues, Chairman Barton, Ranking Member Dingell, Subcommittee Chairman Stearns, and my friends, Representatives Towns and Bono, for their work on the Spy Act. I would like to commend the manner in which this bill was handled. The process was thorough, we were open to hearing and willing to address each other's concerns, and most importantly, the work was organized around the goal of creating a strong and effective consumer protection bill. I believe we have accomplished our goal.

Spyware is software that has tracking capability so pervasive that it can record every keystroke computer users enter. It can take pictures of personal computer screens. It can snatch personal information from consumers' hard drives. People can see their bank account numbers, passwords, and other personal information stolen because they, quite innocently, went to a bad website or clicked a misleading agreement. Spyware is a serious threat to consumer privacy and potentially a powerful tool for identity theft, a serious crime that is on the rise.

Spyware is a non-partisan issue. As we learned last year, while not yet a household word,

spyware is a household phenomenon. America Online recently released a study which found that 80 percent of families with broadband access had spyware on their computers. Earthlink found that in 3 million scans of computers, there was an average of 26 instances of spyware on each and every computer. With those kinds of numbers, spyware will soon be a part of everyone's vocabulary.

Technological advances have brought "the world into our homes." And, the purveyors of spyware have interpreted that as an open door to come in whenever they want, whether invited or not. Still, because the software does have shady purposes, it usually comes in through the back door of consumers' computers.

Because consumers do not know that spyware is on their computers, people are still surprised to hear about it. They experience the noticeable effects of the software - impossibly slow computers, hijacked homepages, unstoppable pop-ups - but they do not know where their problems are coming from or what is going on behind the scenes.

For instance, someone's computer may be sluggish because she may unwittingly have downloaded a program that records every keystroke entered and passes it on to a third-party who wants to steal bank account numbers and passwords. The explosion of pop-up ads may be because a program has been tracking a consumers every move on the web. Serious privacy and security issues are at stake here. Spyware could be a major contributor to the fact that identity theft is the fastest growing financial crime today. The time has come for a bill like the Spy Act.

The Spy Act ensures that consumers are protected from the truly bad acts and actors while also protecting pro-consumer functions of the software. It prohibits indefensible uses of the software - like keystroke logging, or the copying of every keystroke entered. Additionally, it gives the consumer the choice to opt-in to the installation or activation of information collection programs on their computer, but only when they know exactly what information will be collected and what will be done with it. Furthermore, the SPY Act gives the Federal Trade Commission the power it needs, on top of laws already in place, to pursue deceptive uses of the software. The Spy Act puts the control of computers and privacy back in consumers' hands, and I am very glad I was part of the process that brought this bill to the floor today.

Again, I thank my colleagues for their work on this pro-consumer, pro-privacy, and bipartisan legislation. I urge all members to support it."