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SCHAKOWSKY WELCOMES PASSAGE OF BIPARTISAN BILL TO PROTECT ONLINE CONSUMERS FROM SPYWARE

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) welcomed the approval of H.R. 29, the 'Securely Protect Yourself Against Cyber Trespass Act' or the 'SPY ACT', a bill to protect online consumers from "the growing menace of spyware."

Schakowsky, the ranking member on the Subcommittee, said, "Spyware is the misuse of software to track or monitor a person's web usage, collect personal information from one's computer without their knowledge or consent, and to basically invade a person's computer privacy. The Spy Act helps to put the control of computers and privacy back in the hands of consumers."

The bill, passed today by the Subcommittee, would safeguard the privacy of online consumers and protect against the theft of personal and financial records stored on individuals' computers.

Below are Schakowsky's remarks as prepared for delivery before the Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection Subcommittee:

Thank you Chairman Stearns. Once again, I would like to express my appreciation to you and to our colleagues, Chairman Barton, Ranking Member Dingell, and Representatives Towns and Bono, for the bipartisan effort behind the bill before us today, H.R. 29, the Securely Protecting Yourself Against Cyber Trespass. The process was open, everyone's concerns were heard and addressed when possible, and the work was focused on creating a strong consumer protection bill.

The Spy Act contends with the growing menace of spyware. Spyware, as we

have learned through this process and from our personal experience, is the misuse of software to track or monitor a person's web usage, collect personal information from one's computer without their knowledge or consent, and to basically invade a person's computer privacy.

Many times, the evidence of spyware on one's computer seems merely irritating - a continual barrage of pop-up ads, sluggish processing times, changed homepages. Many accept those annoyances as the price of working on-line. However, that is because many are still unaware that something truly dangerous may be behind that which may appear to be relatively harmless. More and more frequently, it is surreptitiously installed spyware that is causing computer problems for consumers and the true damage it can cause has not yet surfaced.

Spyware can crash computers, steal bank codes and passwords, and is a serious threat to consumer privacy. With its ability to track every keystroke logged and website visited, spyware is a potentially powerful tool for identity theft, the fastest growing financial crime.

As more and more American consumers rely on the internet, as we rely more heavily on our computers to handle our personal and business affairs, we need to update our consumer protection laws to match the new vulnerabilities that arise with our new and growing uses of technology.

The Spy Act does just that. It helps ensure that consumers can enjoy the ease and benefits of online computing while being protected from bad actors. The Spy Act prohibits indefensible uses of the software, like taking "snapshots" of one's computer screen and keystroke logging. Additionally, it gives consumers the choice to opt-in to the installation or activation of information collection software - the technology behind spyware - but only when they know exactly what information will be collected and how it will be used. Again, H.R. 29 does not outlaw the technology - which has some pro-consumer uses, like personalizing online shopping experiences - but it puts an end to the indefensible uses of the software. The Spy Act helps to put the control of computers and privacy back in the hands of consumers.

Again, I look forward to working with you, Chairman Stearns, as we finalize this pro-consumer, pro-privacy bill for the full committee and for floor consideration. Thank you.