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House approves second, stricter anti-spyware bill

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The House of Representatives passed on Wednesday legislation that would impose new requirements on software companies and advertisers to protect computer users from spyware.

House lawmakers approved an anti-spyware bill that would require software distributors to clearly notify and obtain consent from consumers before programs can be loaded onto a computer. The bill passed on a vote of 368 to 48.

The legislation is opposed by the software industry, which argues that new regulatory requirements could hurt innovation and technology investment.

The industry favors an alternative bill, passed by the House last month, that would impose specific penalties for the fraudulent use of spyware but would not adopt new regulations.

Lawmakers in the Senate have yet to take up the issue.

Spyware has emerged as a major headache for computer users. It can end up on users' computers through a virus or through downloaded games or other free programs off the Internet.

Spyware can sap computing power, crash machines and bury users under a blizzard of unwanted ads. Scam artists can also use spyware to capture passwords, account numbers and other sensitive personal data.

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