

Bring In the Nerds: The Importance of Technical Experts in Defeating SOPA and PIPA

by [Brian Wesolowski](#) [1]
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It's been nearly two years since the sudden demise of the Stop Online Privacy Act (SOPA) stunned Members of Congress and other power brokers across the Washington DC establishment. CDT President Leslie Harris [offered some early thoughts](#) [2] on the meaning of SOPA's resounding defeat, and now two recent books are taking a fuller look at how the battle over SOPA played out.

The books, [Hacking Politics: How Geeks, Progressives, The Tea Party, Gamers, Anarchists and Suits Teamed up to Defeat SOPA](#) [3] and [Save the Internet and The Fight for the Future: How People Defeated Hollywood and Saved the Internet--For Now](#) [4], are available online, and offer perspectives on the genuinely profound way several usually apolitical communities united to stop a dangerous piece of legislation. CDT was very much at the heart of the battles against SOPA and its companion, the Protect IP ACT (PIPA), and contributed a chapter to Hacking Politics.

In [their chapter](#) [5], CDT's Andrew McDiarmid and David Sohn recount how "bringing in the nerds" helped turn the tide against SOPA by informing the debate with true technical expertise. SOPA and PIPA carried serious technical concerns that Congress initially showed little interest in trying to understand. CDT and other Internet advocates collaborated with domain name system (DNS) experts to highlight the legislation's dangerous technical consequences for the Internet, and Congress's technical ignorance eventually became a major theme of the debate. As Representative Jason Chaffetz said [during debates about the bill](#) [6], "We're going to do surgery on the Internet ... without bringing in the doctors."

Andrew's and David's chapter - which can be [downloaded for free](#) [5] - is a great, quick read about the challenge and importance of injecting technical expertise into the legislative process. The nitty-gritty of how the Internet works is not what generally attracts the headlines, but when Congress wades into Internet matters, it needs to engage with the technical community and take its advice seriously.

As the Internet continues to face threats and challenges, including many covert ones being revealed by the Snowden documents, a look back at the battle against SOPA and PIPA is a great reminder of the power the Internet has to unite seemingly diverse and unconnected people towards a common cause.

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- [SOPA](#)
- [PIPA](#)

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