

POLITICO

Online piracy bills divide California congressional delegation

By Michelle Quinn

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SAN FRANCISCO — The raging debate in Congress over online piracy is causing all sorts of political schisms — including within the California congressional delegation, whose members represent the leading sectors doing battle over two controversial bills.

With a few key exceptions, the issue has exposed a north vs. south, Silicon Valley vs. Hollywood divide within the Golden State delegation. Feeding that trend, Democratic Rep. Jackie Speier, who represents a district outside of San Francisco, said Wednesday that she intends to sign on as an original co-sponsor of Republican Rep. Darrell Issa's alternative to the House Stop Online Piracy Act.

The state's Democratic senators, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, hail from northern California (though Boxer purchased a house several years ago in the southern part of the state). But the senators, who have longstanding ties to Hollywood, are co-sponsors of the Senate PROTECT IP Act, authored by Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.). California co-sponsors of SOPA include Democratic Reps. Joe Baca, Karen Bass, Howard Berman (an original co-sponsor), Judy Chu, Adam Schiff and Brad Sherman, and Republican Reps. Mary Bono Mack and Elton Gallegly. They are all from Southern California.

Opponents include Democratic Reps. Zoe Lofgren, Anna Eshoo, Doris Matsui, Mike Thompson and George Miller, all from the north.

Republicans Issa and Rep. John Campbell are notable exceptions to the rule, representing Southern California districts yet opposing SOPA.

The schism is not surprising. California's two biggest industries — technology, which is anchored in the Bay Area, and entertainment, which revolves around Los Angeles — are themselves divided over the issue of how to best stop online piracy.

“I understand the concerns of the service providers and those opposed to this legislation, however as chair of the Entertainment Industries Caucus, I am firmly committed to fighting intellectual property piracy which steals billions in American wages,” Sherman said.

Speier joins other northern Californians Lofgren, Campbell, Eshoo, Matsui and Thompson in coming up with an alternative that proponents say addresses the problem of copyright infringement without creating new burdens for Internet and technology companies.

Some key California leaders have not said definitively where they stand on the legislation. Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, who represents a San Francisco-based district, has said she is “fully supportive of the need to pass legislation in this Congress to combat intellectual piracy, specifically dealing with rogue digital theft sites. This legislation needs to be effective from the perspective of rights holders.

“It is incumbent on the parties that are concerned by the current proposal to offer changes that would effectively deal with piracy. We must work together for an effective solution,” she said.

Some California congressional leaders may be taking the same wait-and-see approach to the issue as Rep. Jerry Lewis, a Republican who hails from the southern part of the state. Lewis wants to see what happens with the House bill as it moves through committee before taking a position.

The congressman “is sympathetic to the problem of online piracy, and would support a law that

made it easier for authors and developers to protect their intellectual property. However, he is very concerned that the proposed legislation goes too far and may have many unintended consequences,” a spokesman for Lewis said.

Others who have yet to weigh in include Democratic Reps. Henry Waxman and Maxine Waters, both from Southern California, as well as House Whip Kevin McCarthy, who comes from the southern Central Valley but has a close relationship with the tech industry.