

Rep. Senators Vow to Protect RFID

A task force composed of Republican U.S. Senators announced it would work to ensure that RFID technology is not burdened with premature regulations.

By Jonathan Collins

Mar. 10, 2005—A group of Republican U.S. Senators said they will work to ensure that RFID deployments stay free of regulation, according to a new policy platform that has already won the support of RFID, technology and retail organizations while drawing concern from privacy groups.

At a press conference on Wednesday, the Senate Republican High Tech Task Force unveiled a list of 40 policy proposals, with RFID winning a special mention in the category dealing with the group's plans for protecting privacy and e-commerce.

The announcement said that the Republican Senators would "protect exciting new technologies from premature regulation or legislation in search of a problem. RFID holds tremendous promise for our economy, including military logistics and commercial inventory efficiencies, and should not be saddled prematurely with regulation."

Privacy group CASPIAN reacted to the agenda by saying it was telling that the task force decided to highlight RFID as a privacy issue and not as an issue of "eliminating barriers to innovation" or "promoting education and technology"—two other categories covered in the policy proposal. CASPIAN believes the group's agenda shows a positive bias toward RFID while ignoring problems already raised regarding its implementation and consumer privacy.

"This is a very pro-industry statement, and it does raise a little concern," says Katherine Albrecht, founder and director of CASPIAN. "If all it said was, 'RFID should not be burdened with regulations prematurely,' that would be fine, but 'exciting new technologies' is a pretty loaded term."

The 14-member task force says it acts as a conduit for the technology industry on Capitol Hill, and its platform promotes a wide array of goals, including support for efforts to improve the federal government's IT systems and a permanent end to taxes on Internet access. Republicans currently hold majorities in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, and the task force says it plans to push through Congress the agenda outlined in its platform.

"Our policy platform reflects our desire to keep America at the forefront of technological advancement, and to encourage our country's most creative entrepreneurs," said Senator John Ensign (Nev.), the task force's chairman, in the statement announcing the agenda.

The group's publication of its platform came just a day after the Federal Trade Commission released a report in which the agency stated that it will not issue guidelines for companies deploying RFID (see [FTC Asks RFID Users to Self-Regulate](#)). Instead, the FTC said it believed that a combination of existing regulations and industry-led initiatives will protect consumer privacy. The task force's platform indicated that the Republican

group will encourage market-based solutions to lead the way in protecting individual privacy.

EPCglobal, the nonprofit organization set up by GS1 and the Uniform Code Council to commercialize EPC technology, welcomed the task force's announcement. "We are very pleased. We also favor self-regulation and voluntary guidelines and are encouraged that they also recognize the tremendous benefits the technology offers," says Jack Grasso, senior director of public relations for the Uniform Code Council.

The task force's platform also drew support from the Information Technology Industry (ITI) Council, a lobbying group for the technology industry. ITI's members include companies actively developing RFID products and projects, including Accenture, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Intel, Microsoft, Sun Microsystems, Unisys Corporation and VeriSign. The Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA), a group that represents U.S. retailers and manufacturers, also praised the task force's announced plans.

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