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A Constructive RFID Dialogue

On March 23, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) gave a speech at the Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C., in which he called for a national dialogue on RFID. Sen. Leahy said we need to consider the benefits and potential abuses of RFID broadly and “establish guiding principles serving the twin goals of fostering useful technologies while keeping them from overtaking our civil liberties.”



He called for a “dialogue that should cut across the political spectrum” and “include the possibility of constructive, bipartisan congressional hearings.”

I wholeheartedly agree that we need a dialogue—and not just in the United States, but also in Europe, Asia and Latin America as well. It’s up to those of us in the industry who believe that RFID will not only benefit companies but also consumers to educate law makers, journalists and consumers about RFID. It’s time to demystify RFID. It’s also time to recognize that RFID is being introduced at a time when concerns about the amount of surveillance and electronic data being collected are reaching extraordinary levels.

RFID Journal has always seen RFID as a global technology and the issues need to be considered globally. But before we can harmonize policies globally, individual countries and regions need to have a dialogue and assess the issues. Sen. Leahy raised the possibilities of Congressional hearings. That’s one option, but not necessarily the best one. The formal setting of the Capitol can lead to a lot of grandstanding. I propose a national gathering of members of Congress, representatives from the military and U.S. government agencies, RFID vendors, end users and privacy and consumer advocates for two days of education and dialogue in Washington, D.C.

RFID Journal would welcome the opportunity to organize and fund the event, because I believe Sen. Leahy is right. We need to make sure that any laws or regulations enacted at the state

or national level foster the use of RFID for the good of business and consumers, while preventing abuses of the technology. The RFID industry and end users would also do well to listen to the legitimate concerns of privacy and consumer advocates. An open and intelligent dialogue might just reduce the amount of misinformation that's being disseminated.

Over the past six months, aides to a number of members of Congress have contacted me, asking for information or expressing support for my views on the privacy issue. I get the sense that there are a handful of people in Washington who understand how important RFID is, and the rest are in the dark. I'd like to shed as much light on the topic as possible, because I believe the more everyone knows about RFID, the less they will fear it. If there are members of Congress who are interested in an open, honest, hype-free dialogue, please contact me. My e-mail address is mroberti@rfidjournal.com. If such an event proves productive, we will support similar gatherings in other countries.

Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article, click on the link below.

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