

US lawmakers advance major antitrust package targeting Big Tech

24 June 2021, by Rob Lever, With Glenn Chapman In San Francisco



Big Tech firms likely to be affected by antitrust legislation in Washington include Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and potentially Microsoft.

US lawmakers advanced blockbuster legislation Thursday aimed at curbing the power of Big Tech firms with a sweeping reform of antitrust laws, setting the stage for a tough floor fight in Congress.

In a marathon session spanning two days, House Judiciary Committee members approved six bills which take aim at the business practices of Google, Apple, Amazon and Facebook.

The last of the bills limits the ability of tech platforms to leverage their control across multiple business lines, potentially opening the door to breaking up some of the giant firms. It won passage with a narrow 21-20 vote.

The measure called the "Ending Platform Monopolies Act" is aimed at "taking on the fundamental unfairness of conflicts of interest when a platform owns multiple lines of business that allow the [platform](#) to use its gatekeeper power to favor its own services or disadvantage rivals,"

said Representative Pramila Jayapal, a sponsor of the bill.

Republican Steve Chabot opposed the proposal, saying, "As a free market conservative, it's my belief that unless businesses are engaged in clearly defined anticompetitive behavior, we should not get in their way—we ought to let them grow and succeed or fail on their own."

More battles ahead

Republican Representative Darrell Issa noted that the committee was considering "radical" reforms worthy of weeks of hearings and added: "I believe many of these bills are going to die in the Senate if they ever get out of the House."



House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerry Nadler said a package of antitrust reform bills aims to curb the power of Big Tech 'gatekeepers'

The bills head to the full House of Representatives where a contentious debate is expected, amid fierce opposition from the tech sector and allies. Any bills would need passage of both the House and Senate and the president's signature.

The outcome of the package remained unclear, with lawmakers from both sides breaking from their party.

One of the measures would ban online platforms from favoring their own products and services—responding to complaints that dominant tech firms discriminate against and crush rivals.

In a session marked by numerous attempts to amend or water down the legislation, the committee also approved an "interoperability" requirement for platforms that would make it easier for users to switch services while keeping their data, and a separate [bill](#) banning takeovers of rivals by large tech firms.

Judiciary Committee chairman Jerry Nadler said the package of bills is aimed at "a small set of online platforms (which) have become gatekeepers for much of the digital marketplace" and argued that "in many cases, businesses and consumers no longer have meaningful alternatives online."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told reporters Thursday she spoke with Apple chief executive Tim Cook, telling him lawmakers would press forward despite lobbying from Silicon Valley.

"There has been concern on both sides of the aisle about the consolidation of power of the tech companies and this legislation is an attempt to address that," Pelosi said.



Representative David Cicilline, pictured in 2020, led an

investigation which has resulted in a package of sweeping antitrust reform legislation being debated in Congress.

The legislation would restrict how [online platforms](#) operate, and potentially set the stage for a breakup by limiting their ability to offer services on the marketplaces they run.

Republican Ken Buck, a supporter of the overhaul, said the legislation "represents a scalpel, not a chainsaw, to deal with the most important aspects of antitrust reform," in dealing with "these monopolists (who) routinely use their gatekeeper power to crush competitors, harm innovation and destroy the free market."

But Republican Jim Jordan criticized the effort, renewing his argument that Big Tech firms suppress conservative voices.

"These bills don't fix that problem— they make it worse," Jordan said. "They don't break up Big Tech. They don't stop censorship."

Pushback from industry

Tech firms and others warned of negative consequences for popular services people rely on, potentially forcing Apple to remove its messaging apps from the iPhone or Google to stop displaying results from YouTube or Maps.

Apple released a report arguing that one likely impact—opening up the iPhone to apps from outside platforms—could create security and privacy risks for users.

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