



Consumer Federation of America

News Release

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The online privacy plan unveiled today by the White House, the Commerce Department and Federal Trade Commission sets an important path forward for consumer groups, industry, and government to work together to address concerns on this critical issue, according to the national consumer organizations Consumers Union and Consumer Federation of America.

The federal government also announced that some of the nation’s largest media and marketing associations have voluntarily agreed to make it easier for consumers to opt out of targeted advertising from them by using the Do Not Track tools that are now provided in many Internet browsers. These two initiatives signal progress towards more consumer control over how data is collected and used online.

“It’s important to encourage a robust and vibrant Internet economy. However, if we want to ensure that the Internet economy continues to be strong and vital, consumers need to be able to trust that the information collected about them will not be misused. Today’s announcement sets the stage for that to begin to happen,” said Ellen Bloom, Senior Director of Federal Policy for Consumers Union, the policy and advocacy arm of *Consumer Reports*.

While still calling for comprehensive privacy legislation, the White House announced a strong set of baseline principles for protecting data online and outlined a process for bringing together consumer groups, industry and government to help develop voluntary standards for the collection and use of consumer information. By including a Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights, the government emphasized the importance of transparency, individual control, and the ability to access and correct personal information, and recognized there may be a need to for heightened protections for children and teens on the Internet.

“We are encouraged by this announcement today, but we urge the Administration to ensure that it carries out this process in a fair and transparent manner, and that consumer voices are heard and acted on,” said Susan Grant, Director of Consumer Protection at Consumer Federation of America.

The Federal Trade Commission also announced an industry agreement that will breathe new life into Do-Not-Track tools for consumers. A number of big advertisers have agreed to respect consumer privacy choices expressed through browser Do-Not-Track tools. The industry has pledged to make it easier for consumers to opt out of receiving behaviorally targeted ads using the Do-Not-Track tools that are included in many Internet browsers. This industry group has already committed to not collecting Social Security numbers, financial account numbers, medical record information, or information about children under the age of 13 without prior consent. In addition, they have said they will not collect, use, or transfer data for employment, credit, health care treatment, or insurance eligibility purposes. The consumer groups said this was a welcome step toward a single, simple, persistent tool to opt out of being tracked online.

“While we’re encouraged by today’s announcements, we won’t rest yet. We’re on the right track, but we need to stay committed to educating consumers about how their information is collected and used online, as well as respecting their privacy choices. We look forward to working with the Administration, the FTC and industry in the months ahead,” said Ellen Bloom.

Consumers Union is an expert, independent, nonprofit organization whose mission is to work for a fair, just, and safe marketplace for all consumers and to empower consumers to protect themselves. Consumers Union is the policy and advocacy arm of Consumer Reports.

The Consumer Federation of America is an association of nearly 300 nonprofit consumer organizations that was established in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, advocacy, and education.