

## Congress's OMG Over the P2P Leak

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Members of Congress who may enjoy sharing music on the Internet without understanding the technology behind it all are learning the hard way about the potential dangers of peer-to-peer software.

A House ethics committee staffer using a "P2P program — marketed to let users share music and other recreational data — did not know that the insecure software would allow the Web's world-at-large to share the committee's (previously) secret list of lawmakers facing ethics investigations.

The staffer, like countless others in government and the business world, ignored official policy and took sensitive data home to be compromised by the legion of electronic pickpockets out there. In the brouhaha that followed, lawmakers demanded to know how this could have happened. They should have listened to Representative Edolphus Towns, chairman of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, who has been warning for nine years about the insecurity of P2P software — for government computers and everyone else's.

As a result of P2P breaches, the location of the First Family's safe house was once disclosed, as were the schematics of the presidential helicopter's electronic system. Scores of thousands of military members have had their personal records and home addresses disclosed, and the financial filings of myriad Americans, including the Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer, have been "shared. The F.B.I. files on a Mafia hit man were disclosed while he was still on trial.

The vulnerable software is so popular that more than 20 million users are estimated to be on file-sharing networks at any given second. Suddenly, concerned colleagues are open to Mr. Towns's cogent argument for legislating a ban on recreational file-sharing that does not clearly

warn users that it makes it possible for determined filchers to download official, financial, medical and family secrets stored on a user's computer.

"The days of self-regulation should be over for the file-sharing industry, Mr. Towns resolves, hoping there is nothing like self-interest to galvanize Congress to act. In this case, the public has as much insecurity to repair as its computer-compromised lawmakers.

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