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Barrow Leads Effort to Protect Consumer Privacy, Online Safety

Members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee Request a Thorough Review of Google's Public Disclosure of Personal Information

Washington, D.C. – Congressman John Barrow (GA-12) sent a letter last week to Federal Trade Commission Chairman Jon Leibowitz calling for the protection of consumer privacy rights and a thorough review of Google's public disclosure of consumer personal information. Congressman Barrow was joined in this letter by a bipartisan group of members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, including Representatives Joe Barton (TX), Frank Pallone (NJ), Mike Rogers (MI), Jan Schakowsky (IL), Tim Murphy (PA), Bruce Braley (IA), Mike Burgess (TX), G.K. Butterfield (NC), Steve Scalise (LA), and Donna Christensen (V.I.).

The letter to Chairman Leibowitz highlights the need for companies to include consumer privacy protections and online safety measures as they develop new innovations online and gain access to an increasing amount of consumer information. Congressman Barrow and the other members of the Energy and Commerce committee asked several important questions to assist in the evaluation of online privacy practices to ensure that consumer data is protected.

“We are writing to express our concern over claims that Google's ‘Google Buzz’ social networking tool breaches online consumer privacy and trust. Due to the high number of individuals whose online privacy is affected by tools like this – either directly or indirectly – we feel that these claims warrant the Commission's review of Google's public disclosure of personal information of consumers through Google Buzz,” said Congressman Barrow.

The letter follows an avalanche of consumer complaints concerning Google Buzz, including cases where consumers' private information was publicly disclosed without their notice or consent and where private email addresses were publicly disclosed to build contact lists on the Google Buzz service without users' consent. The Electronic Privacy Information Center (“EPIC”) has filed a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission claiming that Google Buzz engaged in unfair and deceptive practices that violated Google's privacy policy, user expectations of privacy, and federal wiretap laws.

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