Calendar No. 500

111TH CONGRESS 2D SESSION

S. 3386

[Report No. 111-240]

To protect consumers from certain aggressive sales tactics on the Internet.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

May 19, 2010

Mr. Rockefeller (for himself, Mr. Pryor, Mr. Nelson of Florida, Ms. Klobuchar, Mrs. McCaskill, and Mr. LeMieux) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

August 2, 2010

Reported by Mr. Rockefeller, with an amendment [Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the part printed in italic]

A BILL

To protect consumers from certain aggressive sales tactics on the Internet.

- 1 Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
- 2 tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
- 3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**
- 4 This Act may be cited as the "Restore Online Shop-
- 5 pers' Confidence Act".

1 SEC. 2. FINDINGS: DECLARATION OF POLICY.

The Congress finds the following:

- 3 (1) The Internet has become an important
 4 channel of commerce in the United States, account5 ing for billions of dollars in retail sales every year.
 6 Over half of all American adults have now either
 7 made an online purchase or an online travel reserva8 tion.
 - (2) Consumer confidence is essential to the growth of online commerce. To continue its development as a marketplace, the Internet must provide consumers with clear, accurate information and give sellers an opportunity to fairly compete with one another for consumers' business.
 - (3) An investigation by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation found abundant evidence that the aggressive sales tactics many companies use against their online customers have undermined consumer confidence in the Internet and thereby harmed the American economy.
 - (4) The Committee showed that, in exchange for "bounties" and other payments, hundreds of reputable online retailers and websites shared their customers' billing information, including credit card and debit card numbers, with third party sellers through a process known as "data pass". These third party

- sellers in turn used aggressive, misleading sales tacties to charge millions of American consumers for membership clubs the consumers did not want.
 - (5) Third party sellers offered membership elubs to consumers as they were in the process of completing their initial transactions on hundreds of websites. These third party "post-transaction" offers were designed to make consumers think the offers were part of the initial purchase, rather than a new transaction with a new seller.
 - (6) Third party sellers charged millions of consumers for membership clubs without ever obtaining consumers' billing information, including their credit or debit card information, directly from the consumers. Because third party sellers acquired consumers' billing information from the initial merchant through "data pass", millions of consumers were unaware they had been enrolled in membership clubs.
 - (7) The use of a "data pass" process defied consumers' expectations that they could only be charged for a good or a service if they submitted their billing information, including their complete credit or debit card numbers.
 - (8) Third party sellers used a free trial period to enroll members, after which they periodically

1	charged consumers until consumers affirmatively
2	canceled the memberships. This use of "free-to-pay
3	conversion" and "negative option" sales took advan-
4	tage of consumers' expectations that they would
5	have an opportunity to accept or reject the member-
6	ship club offer at the end of the trial period.
7	SEC. 3. PROHIBITIONS AGAINST CERTAIN UNFAIR AND DE-
8	CEPTIVE INTERNET SALES PRACTICES.
9	(a) Requirements for Certain Internet-Based
10	SALES.—It shall be unlawful for any post-transaction
11	third party seller to charge or attempt to charge any con-
12	sumer's credit card, debit card, bank account, or other fi-
13	nancial account for any good or service sold in a trans-
14	action effected on the Internet, unless—
15	(1) before obtaining the purchaser's billing in-
16	formation, the post-transaction third party seller has
17	elearly and conspicuously disclosed to the purchaser
18	all material terms of the transaction, including—
19	(A) a description of the goods or services
20	being offered;
21	(B) the fact that the post-transaction third
22	party seller is not affiliated with the initial mer-
23	chant, which may include disclosure of the
24	name of the post-transaction third party in a
25	manner that clearly differentiates the post-

1	transaction third party seller from the initial
2	merchant; and
3	(C) the cost of such goods or services; and
4	(2) the post-transaction third party seller has
5	received the express informed consent for the charge
6	from the consumer whose credit card, debit card,
7	bank account, or other financial account will be
8	charged by—
9	(A) obtaining from the consumer—
10	(i) the full account number of the ac-
11	count to be charged; and
12	(ii) the consumer's name and address
13	and a means to contact the consumer; and
14	(B) an additional affirmative action from
15	the consumer, such as clicking on a confirma-
16	tion button or checking a box that indicates the
17	consumer's consent to be charged the amount
18	disclosed.
19	(b) Prohibition on Data-Pass Used To Facili-
20	TATE CERTAIN DECEPTIVE INTERNET SALES TRANS-
21	ACTIONS.—It shall be unlawful for an initial merchant to
22	disclose a credit card, debit card, bank account, or other
23	financial account number, or to disclose other billing infor-
24	mation that is used to charge a customer of the initial
25	merchant, to any post-transaction third party seller for

1	use in an Internet-based sale of any goods or services from
2	that post-transaction third party seller.
3	(e) Limitations on Use of Negative Option
4	FEATURE IN INTERNET-BASED SALES TRANSACTIONS.—
5	It shall be unlawful for any person to charge or attempt
6	to charge any consumer for any goods or services sold in
7	a transaction effected on the Internet through a negative
8	option feature, unless—
9	(1) before obtaining the purchaser's initial
10	agreement to participate in the negative option plan,
11	the seller has clearly and conspicuously disclosed all
12	material terms of the transaction, including—
13	(A) the name of the entity offering the
14	goods or services;
15	(B) a description of the goods or services
16	being offered;
17	(C) the cost of such goods or services;
18	(D) notice of when billing will begin and at
19	what intervals the charges will occur; and
20	(E) the length of any trial period, includ-
21	ing a statement that the consumer's account
22	will be charged unless the consumer takes af-
23	firmative action and the steps the consumer
24	must take to the avoid the charge;

1	(2) the seller has obtained the express informed
2	consent described in subsection (a)(2) from the pur-
3	chaser before charging or attempting to charge the
4	purchaser's credit card, debit card, bank account, or
5	other financial account on a recurring basis;
6	(3) the seller enables the purchaser to stop re-
7	curring charges from being made to the purchaser's
8	eredit eard, debit eard, bank account, or other finan-
9	cial account through a simple process that is avail-
10	able via—
11	(A) the Internet; and
12	(B) telephone; and
13	(4) not less than 10 days prior to the initiation
14	of each charge to a purchaser's credit card, debit
15	eard, bank account, or other financial account, the
16	seller has sent the purchaser an e-mail (at an e-mail
17	account provided by the consumer) that clearly and
18	conspicuously discloses—
19	(A) that a charge will be made to the con-
20	sumer's credit card, debit card, bank account,
21	or other financial account;
22	(B) the amount of the charge and a de-
23	scription of the goods and services for which the
24	consumer will be charged; and

1	(C) instructions for stopping recurring
2	charges in accordance with the requirements of
3	paragraph (3).
4	(d) APPLICATION WITH OTHER LAW.—Nothing in
5	this Act shall be construed to supersede, modify, or other-
6	wise affect the requirements of the Electronic Funds
7	Transfer Act (15 U.S.C. 1693 et seq.) or any regulation
8	promulgated thereunder.
9	(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:
10	(1) INITIAL MERCHANT.—The term "initial
11	merchant" means a person that has obtained a con-
12	sumer's billing information directly from the con-
13	sumer through an Internet transaction initiated by
14	the consumer.
15	(2) NEGATIVE OPTION FEATURE. The term
16	"negative option feature" has the meaning given
17	that term in section 310.2(t) of the Federal Trade
18	Commission's Telemarketing Sales Rule regulations
19	(16 C.F.R. 310.2(t)).
20	(3) Post-transaction there party sell-
21	ER.—The term "post-transaction third party seller'
22	means a person that—
23	(A) sells, or offers for sale, any good or
24	service on the Internet;

1	(B) solicits the purchase of such goods or
2	services on the Internet through an initial mer-
3	chant after the consumer has initiated a trans-
4	action with the initial merchant; and
5	(C) is not a subsidiary or corporate affil-
6	iate of the initial merchant.
7	SEC. 4. ENFORCEMENT BY FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION.
8	(a) In General.—Violation of this Act or any regu-
9	lation prescribed under this Act shall be treated as a viola-
10	tion of a rule under section 18 of the Federal Trade Com-
11	mission Act (15 U.S.C. 57a) regarding unfair or deceptive
12	acts or practices. The Federal Trade Commission shall en-
13	force this Act in the same manner, by the same means,
14	and with the same jurisdiction, powers, and duties as
15	though all applicable terms and provisions of the Federal
16	Trade Commission Act (15 U.S.C. 41 et seq.) were incor-
17	porated into and made a part of this Act.
18	(b) REGULATIONS.—Notwithstanding any other pro-
19	vision of law, the Commission may promulgate such regu-
20	lations as it finds necessary or appropriate under this Act
21	under section 553 of title 5, United States Code.—
22	(c) Powers of Commission.—
23	(1) In General.—The Commission shall pre-
24	vent any person from violating this Act and any reg-
25	ulation prescribed under this Act, in the same man-

- 1 ner, by the same means, and with the same jurisdie-
- 2 tion, powers and duties as though all applicable
- 3 terms and provisions of the Federal Trade Commis-
- 4 sion Act (15 U.S.C. 41 et seq.) were incorporated
- 5 into and made a part of this Act.
- 6 (2) PENALTIES.—Any person who violates this
- 7 Act or any regulation prescribed under this Act,
- 8 shall be subject to the penalties and entitled to the
- 9 privileges and immunities provided in the Federal
- 10 Trade Commission Act as though all applicable
- terms and provisions of the Federal Trade Commis-
- sion Act were incorporated in and made part of this
- 13 Act.
- 14 (d) AUTHORITY PRESERVED.—Nothing in this sec-
- 15 tion shall be construed to limit the authority of the Com-
- 16 mission under any other provision of law.

17 SEC. 5. ENFORCEMENT BY STATE ATTORNEYS GENERAL.

- 18 (a) RIGHT OF ACTION.—Except as provided in sub-
- 19 section (e), the attorney general of a State, or other au-
- 20 thorized State officer, alleging a violation of this Act or
- 21 any regulation issued under this Act that affects or may
- 22 affect such State or its residents may bring an action on
- 23 behalf of the residents of the State in any United States
- 24 district court for the district in which the defendant is
- 25 found, resides, or transacts business, or wherever venue

1	is proper under section 1391 of title 28, United States
2	Code, to obtain appropriate injunctive relief.
3	(b) Initiation of Civil Action.—
4	(1) Notice to commission required in All
5	CASES.—A State shall provide prior written notice to
6	the Federal Trade Commission of any civil action
7	under subsection (a) together with a copy of its com-
8	plaint, except that if it is not feasible for the State
9	to provide such prior notice, the State shall provide
10	such notice immediately upon instituting such ac-
11	tion.
12	(2) FILING OF COMPLAINT.—A State may ini-
13	tiate the civil action by filing a complaint—
14	(A) at any time after the date on which
15	the 30-day period ends; or
16	(B) earlier than such date if the Commis-
17	sion consents to an earlier initiation of the civil
18	action by the State.
19	(C) FORM OF NOTICE.—The written notice
20	required by this paragraph may be provided by
21	electronic mail, facsimile machine, or any other
22	means of communication accepted by the Com-
23	mission.

1	(e) Intervention by the commission.—The Com-
2	mission may intervene in such civil action and upon inter-
3	vening—
4	(1) be heard on all matters arising in such civil
5	action; and
6	(2) file petitions for appeal of a decision in such
7	eivil action.
8	(d) Construction.—Nothing in this section shall be
9	construed
10	(1) to prevent the attorney general of a State,
11	or other authorized State officer, from exercising the
12	powers conferred on the attorney general, or other
13	authorized State officer, by the laws of such State;
14	Θ P
15	(2) to prohibit the attorney general of a State,
16	or other authorized State officer, from proceeding in
17	State or Federal court on the basis of an alleged vio-
18	lation of any civil or criminal statute of that State.
19	(e) LIMITATION.—No separate suit shall be brought
20	under this section if, at the time the suit is brought, the
21	same alleged violation is the subject of a pending action
22	by the Federal Trade Commission or the United States
23	under this Act.

1 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

- This Act may be cited as the "Restore Online Shoppers' Confidence Act".
- 4 SEC. 2. FINDINGS: DECLARATION OF POLICY.
- 5 The Congress finds the following:
- 6 (1) The Internet has become an important chan7 nel of commerce in the United States, accounting for
 8 billions of dollars in retail sales every year. Over half
 9 of all American adults have now either made an on10 line purchase or an online travel reservation.
 - (2) Consumer confidence is essential to the growth of online commerce. To continue its development as a marketplace, the Internet must provide consumers with clear, accurate information and give sellers an opportunity to fairly compete with one another for consumers' business.
 - (3) An investigation by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation found abundant evidence that the aggressive sales tactics many companies use against their online customers have undermined consumer confidence in the Internet and thereby harmed the American economy.
 - (4) The Committee showed that, in exchange for "bounties" and other payments, hundreds of reputable online retailers and websites shared their customers' billing information, including credit card and debit

- card numbers, with third party sellers through a process known as "data pass". These third party sellers in turn used aggressive, misleading sales tactics to charge millions of American consumers for membership clubs the consumers did not want.
 - (5) Third party sellers offered membership clubs to consumers as they were in the process of completing their initial transactions on hundreds of websites. These third party "post-transaction" offers were designed to make consumers think the offers were part of the initial purchase, rather than a new transaction with a new seller.
 - (6) Third party sellers charged millions of consumers for membership clubs without ever obtaining consumers' billing information, including their credit or debit card information, directly from the consumers. Because third party sellers acquired consumers' billing information from the initial merchant through "data pass", millions of consumers were unaware they had been enrolled in membership clubs.
 - (7) The use of a "data pass" process defied consumers' expectations that they could only be charged for a good or a service if they submitted their billing information, including their complete credit or debit card numbers.

1	(8) Third party sellers used a free trial period
2	to enroll members, after which they periodically
3	charged consumers until consumers affirmatively can-
4	celed the memberships. This use of "free-to-pay con-
5	version" and "negative option" sales took advantage
6	of consumers' expectations that they would have an
7	opportunity to accept or reject the membership club
8	offer at the end of the trial period.
9	SEC. 3. PROHIBITIONS AGAINST CERTAIN UNFAIR AND DE-
10	CEPTIVE INTERNET SALES PRACTICES.
11	(a) Requirements for Certain Internet-Based
12	Sales.—It shall be unlawful for any post-transaction third
13	party seller to charge or attempt to charge any consumer's
14	credit card, debit card, bank account, or other financial ac-
15	count for any good or service sold in a transaction effected
16	on the Internet, unless—
17	(1) before obtaining the purchaser's billing infor-
18	mation, the post-transaction third party seller has
19	clearly and conspicuously disclosed to the purchaser
20	all material terms of the transaction, including—
21	(A) a description of the goods or services
22	being offered;
23	(B) the fact that the post-transaction third
24	party seller is not affiliated with the initial mer-
25	chant, which may include disclosure of the name

1	of the post-transaction third party in a manner
2	that clearly differentiates the post-transaction
3	third party seller from the initial merchant; and
4	(C) the cost of such goods or services; and
5	(2) the post-transaction third party seller has re-
6	ceived the express informed consent for the charge
7	from the consumer whose credit card, debit card, bank
8	account, or other financial account will be charged
9	by—
10	(A) obtaining from the consumer—
11	(i) the full account number of the ac-
12	count to be charged; and
13	(ii) the consumer's name and address
14	and a means to contact the consumer; and
15	(B) requiring the consumer to perform an
16	additional affirmative action, such as clicking
17	on a confirmation button or checking a box that
18	indicates the consumer's consent to be charged
19	the amount disclosed.
20	(b) Prohibition on Data-Pass Used To Facili-
21	TATE CERTAIN DECEPTIVE INTERNET SALES TRANS-
22	ACTIONS.—It shall be unlawful for an initial merchant to
23	disclose a credit card, debit card, bank account, or other
24	financial account number, or to disclose other billing infor-
25	mation that is used to charge a customer of the initial mer-

1	chant, to any post-transaction third party seller for use in
2	an Internet-based sale of any goods or services from that
3	post-transaction third party seller.
4	(c) Limitations on Use of Negative Option Fea-
5	Ture in Internet-Based Sales Transactions.—It shall
6	be unlawful for any person to charge or attempt to charge
7	any consumer for any goods or services sold in a trans-
8	action effected on the Internet through a negative option
9	feature, unless—
10	(1) before obtaining the purchaser's initial agree-
11	ment to participate in the negative option plan, the
12	seller has clearly and conspicuously disclosed all ma-
13	terial terms of the transaction, including—
14	(A) the name of the entity offering the goods
15	or services;
16	(B) a description of the goods or services
17	being offered;
18	(C) the cost of such goods or services;
19	(D) notice of when billing will begin and at
20	what intervals the charges will occur;
21	(E) the length of any trial period, including
22	a statement that the consumer's account will be
23	charged unless the consumer takes affirmative
24	action and the steps the consumer must take to
25	the avoid the charge; and

1	(F) instructions for stopping the recurring
2	charges in accordance with the requirements of
3	paragraph (3);
4	(2) the seller has obtained the express informed
5	consent described in subsection (a)(2) from the pur-
6	chaser before charging or attempting to charge the
7	purchaser's credit card, debit card, bank account, or
8	other financial account on a recurring basis; and
9	(3) the seller enables the purchaser to stop recur-
10	ring charges from being made to the purchaser's cred-
11	it card, debit card, bank account, or other financial
12	account through a simple process that is available
13	via—
14	(A) the Internet; or
15	(B) e -mail.
16	(d) Application with Other Law.—Nothing in this
17	Act shall be construed to supersede, modify, or otherwise
18	affect the requirements of the Electronic Funds Transfer Act
19	(15 U.S.C. 1693 et seq.) or any regulation promulgated
20	thereunder.
21	(e) Definitions.—In this section:
22	(1) Initial merchant.—The term "initial mer-
23	chant" means a person that has obtained a con-
24	sumer's billing information directly from the con-

1	sumer through an Internet transaction initiated by					
2	$the\ consumer.$					
3	3 (2) Negative option feature.—The ter					
4	"negative option feature" has the meaning given th					
5	term in section 310.2(t) of the Federal Trade Co					
6	6 mission's Telemarketing Sales Rule regulations (
7	$C.F.R. \ 310.2(t)).$					
8	(3) Post-transaction third party seller.—					
9	The term "post-transaction third party seller" means					
10	a person that—					
11	(A) sells, or offers for sale, any good or serv-					
12	ice on the Internet;					
13	(B) solicits the purchase of such goods of					
14	services on the Internet through an initial men					
15	chant after the consumer has initiated a trans					
16	action with the initial merchant; and					
17	(C) is not a subsidiary or corporate affiliat					
18	of the initial merchant.					
19	SEC. 4. ENFORCEMENT BY FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION.					
20	(a) In General.—Violation of this Act or any regula-					
21	tion prescribed under this Act shall be treated as a violation					
22	of a rule under section 18 of the Federal Trade Commission					
23	Act (15 U.S.C. 57a) regarding unfair or deceptive acts or					
24	practices. The Federal Trade Commission shall enforce this					
25	Act in the same manner, by the same means, and with the					

- 1 same jurisdiction, powers, and duties as though all applica-
- 2 ble terms and provisions of the Federal Trade Commission
- 3 Act (15 U.S.C. 41 et seq.) were incorporated into and made
- 4 a part of this Act.
- 5 (b) REGULATIONS.—Notwithstanding any other provi-
- 6 sion of law, the Commission may promulgate such regula-
- 7 tions as it finds necessary or appropriate under this Act
- 8 under section 553 of title 5, United States Code.
- 9 (c) Penalties.—Any person who violates this Act or
- 10 any regulation prescribed under this Act shall be subject
- 11 to the penalties and entitled to the privileges and immuni-
- 12 ties provided in the Federal Trade Commission Act as
- 13 though all applicable terms and provisions of the Federal
- 14 Trade Commission Act were incorporated in and made part
- 15 of this Act.
- 16 (d) Authority Preserved.—Nothing in this section
- 17 shall be construed to limit the authority of the Commission
- 18 under any other provision of law.
- 19 SEC. 5. ENFORCEMENT BY STATE ATTORNEYS GENERAL.
- 20 (a) RIGHT OF ACTION.—Except as provided in sub-
- 21 section (e), the attorney general of a State, or other author-
- 22 ized State officer, alleging a violation of this Act or any
- 23 regulation issued under this Act that affects or may affect
- 24 such State or its residents may bring an action on behalf
- 25 of the residents of the State in any United States district

court for the district in which the defendant is found, resides, or transacts business, or wherever venue is proper under section 1391 of title 28, United States Code, to obtain appropriate injunctive relief. 5 (b) Notice to Commission Required.—A State shall provide prior written notice to the Federal Trade Commission of any civil action under subsection (a) to-8 gether with a copy of its complaint, except that if it is not feasible for the State to provide such prior notice, the State shall provide such notice immediately upon instituting such 11 action. 12 (c) Intervention by the commission.—The Commission may intervene in such civil action and upon inter-14 vening— 15 (1) be heard on all matters arising in such civil 16 action; and 17 (2) file petitions for appeal of a decision in such 18 civil action. 19 (d) Construction.—Nothing in this section shall be 20 construed— 21 (1) to prevent the attorney general of a State, or other authorized State officer, from exercising the 22

powers conferred on the attorney general, or other au-

thorized State officer, by the laws of such State; or

23

1	(2) to prohibit the attorney general of a State,					
2	or other authorized State officer, from proceeding in					
3	State or Federal court on the basis of an alleged view					
4	lation of any civil or criminal statute of that State.					
5	(e) Limitation.—No separate suit shall be brought					
6	under this section if, at the time the suit is brought, the					
7	same alleged violation is the subject of a pending action					
8	by the Federal Trade Commission or the United States					
9	under this Act.					

Calendar No. 500

111 TH CONGRESS **S. 3386**2D SESSION **S. 311-240**]

A BILL

To protect consumers from certain aggressive sales tactics on the Internet.

August 2, 2010

Reported with an amendment