

Austin voters to decide on decriminalizing small amounts of weed and banning no-knock warrants in May

BY AUDREY MCGLINCHY | KUT

(KUT NEWS) - Austin voters will be asked in May if they want to decriminalize small amounts of marijuana and do away with no-knock warrants.

The former practice is already police policy. In July 2020, the Austin Police Department said it would no longer ticket or arrest people for small amounts of marijuana.

The Austin City Council adopted a policy in 2020 to limit, but not prohibit, the use of no-knock warrants, which the police department wrote into their manual. If voters approve these measures, both would become part of the city's code, essentially making them city law.

According to APD's current manual, the department can use no-knock warrants when officer safety is an issue and with approval from both a commander and a judge. This type of warrant allows officers to enter premises without first announcing their presence; the practice become especially controversial following the deaths of Breonna Taylor and Atatiana Jefferson. The police union president told KUT last week that he believes the department used three no-knock warrants last year; APD was not able to confirm this number by deadline.

The ban, if approved by voters, would outright prohibit no-knock warrants and require officers serving warrants to knock, announce their presence and wait 15 seconds before entering.

The election, which will be held May 7, is the result of a successful petition effort from the group Ground Game Texas. The nonprofit collected more than 30,000 signatures last year, and the Austin city clerk verified the signatures last week.

Once a petition is certified, City Council has several options: It can either make the policies city law or put them on a ballot. On Tuesday, the Austin



Photo by Julia Reihns/KUT

City Council voted 7 to 3 to put these questions to voters, with Council members Greg Casar, Pio Renteria and Vanessa Fuentes vying to outright accept the changes.

"I think we could simply adopt the ordinance today. I think the community is likely to adopt it through their vote," Casar said. "I would rather save us the expense."

Neither Travis County nor the city of Austin could provide KUT with a cost estimate for the election by deadline. According to a city spokesperson, the decision on whether to decriminalize marijuana and ban no-knock warrants will be presented to voters as one question, not two separate ones.

Some Council members were adamant about putting the policies before voters so the laws would have more weight behind them.

"My motion to put this on the ballot is not an indication of me being opposed to the policies here," Council Member Ann Kitchen said, before the vote. "It's simply that I think that this is the best way to proceed with these questions."

Mike Siegel, political director with Ground Game Texas, told KUT he wonders if by outright adopting the new policies, the city could open itself up to legal interference from the state. Possession of marijuana, even small amounts, remains illegal in Texas.

"I guess a majority of the Council was concerned about legal risk," Siegel said. "There's always this dynamic in Austin with Democrats being concerned that if they take action that's perceived as progressive, (they will face) retribution from state government."

The US government wants to ban targeted ads for good

By Anthony Spadafora | techradar.pro

New bill would ban protected class information and personal data from being used in targeted ads

(TECHRADAR) - A new bill has been put forth by Democrats in the US House and Senate that could drastically change the entire online advertising industry if passed.

The bill in question, known as the Banning Surveillance Advertising Act, was introduced by Anna Eshoo and Jan Schakowsky in the House and Cory Booker in the Senate. If passed, it would severely limit the way in which Google, Facebook and tech companies serve targeted ads to users.

The Banning Surveillance Advertising Act would prohibit targeted advertising using protected class information such as race, gender and religion. However, it would also prevent online advertisers from using personal data purchased from data brokers.

Google, Facebook, Twitter and other tech platforms would still be able to serve targeted ads based



on a user's general location at the city or state level though. At the same time, "contextual advertising" based on the online content a user has interacted with would also still be allowed.

Surveillance advertising

In addition to banning targeted advertising, the bill would give the FTC and state attorneys general the power to enforce violations with fines of up to \$5,000 per incident. These fines could quickly add up for large advertising firms and tech companies which would serve as an incentive for them to no longer serve targeted ads using a user's personal information.

Data brokers have the most to lose though as their entire business revolves around collecting data on users and selling it to companies so that they can deliver targeted ads.

Democratic congresswoman from California

and the bill's lead sponsor, Anna Eshoo provided further insight on the dangers posed by the business model currently used by online advertisers in a statement, saying:

"The 'surveillance advertising' business model is premised on the unseemly collection and hoarding of personal data to enable ad targeting. This pernicious practice allows online platforms to chase user engagement at great cost to our society, and it fuels disinformation, discrimination, voter suppression, privacy abuses, and so many other harms. The surveillance advertising business model is broken."

We'll have to wait and see if the Banning Surveillance Advertising Act passes but in the meantime, you can still force data brokers to give up the data they have on you by using Surfshark's new privacy tool Incogni.

The inventor of the World Wide Web says his creation has been abused for too long

By Joel Khalili techradar.pro

(TECHRADAR) - Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, has called for a tighter focus on addressing the imbalance of power on the web.

Speaking to Fujitsu CTO Vivek Mahajan at the company's ActivateNow Summit, attended by TechRadar Pro, Berners-Lee suggested his creation has veered away from its original mission.

"The vision was that the web should be for anything and anyone. The fact that it would be independent of computer, network and language was really important. But we need to make sure users have a web that is actually useful

and constructive, and there are lots of things we need to fix," he said.

"Right now, people's data is being used for inappropriate purposes by large companies, in order to understand and manipulate them. Another problem is that all my private data is stored by online platforms and stuck in silos, so I can't really use it. We have a lack of empowerment of the individual."

Solid Pods

Berners-Lee's solution to these problems is a commitment to building what he calls Solid Pods, decentralized data stores that offer users granular control over who is given

access to their private data.

This is the objective of his company, Inrupt, which is partnering with enterprises and governments to expand access to Solid Pods and establish systems founded on mutual trust.

In an ideal world, says Berners-Lee, the individual has the power to utilize the entire data spectrum (which ranges from publicly available data one end to private information like medical results on the other) and control which data is shared, and with whom.

"When everything is set up on the basis of trust, the user will also share more powerfully;

they will share their data not only with doctors, but also with researchers working on cancer treatments, for example. It's a system based on intentional economics, driven by the intent of the person who wants to do things," he explained.

He also says it's time that smartphones, tablets and other devices are put to work for their owners, as opposed to the companies that manufacture them or develop the operating system.

"When asking a device who it works for, the answer should not be: 'a large company milking you for all the data it can get, to trap you into buying

things you wouldn't otherwise buy'. In the future, the answer should be: 'I work for you, I'm your agent,'" said Berners-Lee.

"When we go looking for things to buy on the internet, or deciding how to spend the day, the device needs to have the user's best interests in mind. Our technology needs to work for the individual."

Although the scale of the problem is sobering, Berners-Lee says he is optimistic about the maturation of the web, which he hopes will become a more collaborative space built around the interests of the individual.