

Millions of people searched for answers somewhere other than Wikipedia Wednesday.

The website, an online encyclopedia, went dark at midnight and will remain so until midnight tonight.

It's a move to protest anti-piracy laws moving through Congress. Google also put a black rectangle across its logo with the comment, "Tell Congress: Please don't censor the web!"

And the legal team for Raleigh-based Red Hat said on the company website Wednesday that the bills "raise enormous concerns for North Carolina home-grown technology companies like Red Hat. At a time when we are working to rebuild confidence in our economy, their potential effect on jobs and innovation is a matter of serious concern."

The Stop Online Piracy Act in the House of Representatives is backed by the motion picture and recording industries.

A similar law, the Protect Intellectual Property Act, is being considered in the Senate.

The measures would allow the government to shut down websites accused of distributing stolen content.

Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia, told the AP, "The whole thing is just a poorly designed mess."

"That represents a form of censorship potentially, and the concerns about a free internet are very large for a lot of people," said Scott Stein, senior editor of cnet.com.

Two Republican Senators, freshman Marco Rubio of Florida and John Cornyn of Texas, announced Wednesday morning they would no longer support the Senate bill. Rubio had been a co-sponsor of the bill, which was reported in the Senate May 26.

Wikipedia went live Jan. 15, 2001. According to Time magazine, it had 20,000 articles, in 18 languages, by the end of the first year. The site emphasizes a "neutral" point of view, but it is basically open to anyone and thus subject to interpretation.

Two members of North Carolina's Congressional delegation had different views on the matter.

Sen. Kay Hagan told The Greensboro News & Record Wednesday, "We have about \$58 billion a year of intellectual property stolen. Primarily it's done on rogue websites over seas," Hagan said. "It is never intended to stop innovation."

Later, the paper reported, her office sent out a written statement saying she is "open-minded about how best to accomplish the goal of protecting American intellectual property without creating unintended consequences."

Rep. David Price, a Democrat who represents the 4th District, said on his website, "I am opposed to the proposed SOPA bill. I believe that intellectual property must be protected, but not at the expense of the open internet.

"At its best, government is an engaged and responsive instrument of our common purpose, so I have been greatly encouraged by the success advocates have had making their voices heard. Today's 'black-out' campaigns by Google, Wikipedia and other major websites echo the voices of the many constituents I've heard from in phone calls, emails and on social media expressing their opposition to this proposal."