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State officials expressed concerns about technology giants' market dominance and user-privacy practices at a meeting Tuesday hosted by U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions, with some indicating they would be open to pursuing joint investigations of companies such as Google and Facebook Inc.

One attendee, Republican Attorney General Doug Peterson of Nebraska, said officials would look at the possibility of a formal multistate investigation of major tech platforms, focusing on both consumer-protection issues such as privacy and potential antitrust concerns. "There's certainly enough interest expressed by the attorneys general who were there today, and I think [we] will continue to move forward," Mr. Peterson said in an interview. Google and Facebook declined to comment.

Tech giants have faced growing calls for oversight amid bipartisan worries about the companies' size and influence. Any moves by the states would open another regulatory battlefield. In the meeting, much of the focus from officials was on the massive amounts of personal data tech companies collect from their users, and the adequacy and transparency of their terms of use. Some officials also wanted to take a closer look at the market power of firms such as Facebook and Google, a unit of Alphabet Inc. A third issue, [potential political bias by major platforms](#), got relatively little attention in the meeting, participants said.

The Justice Department said the discussion focused on consumer protection and data privacy issues, and that many of the participants "shared the view that it is essential for federal and state law enforcement authorities to work together to ensure that these challenges are addressed responsibly and effectively." The Justice Department said it would review the information shared by the state attorneys general and "expects this dialogue will continue in the near future," although no future federal-state meetings were announced. In all, nine states' attorneys general attended the meeting in person or by phone, along with representatives of five other states.

State participants stopped short of saying a joint federal-state investigation would commence, but several state attorneys general said the issues deserve more attention. "There are growing concerns that the [tech] sector is moving in spaces that most people couldn't

advertising budget:
\$10M since June

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Op-ed: After we ax
some legislators, we
have more work to
do

have thought of or imagined,” particularly in use of personal data, Xavier Becerra, California’s Democratic attorney general, said in a meeting with reporters afterward. “I walked out of that meeting believing there’s reason to continue the conversation.”

Karl Racine, the Democratic attorney general of the District of Columbia, said the officials likely will focus on data concerns “with an increasing degree of interest.” He also predicted that the dialogue represents “the early stages of antitrust consideration.” Mr. Racine has previously supported a reopening of a closed antitrust investigation by the Federal Trade Commission into Google. Attorneys general aren’t the only ones concerned about strengthening online consumer protections. On Tuesday, the Trump administration released a framework for improving data-privacy practices of the tech giants. It called for more transparency in how firms collect and use data, and more control for users over their personal information.

On Wednesday, lawmakers on Capitol Hill will hold a high-profile hearing to examine privacy practices among big companies including Google and Twitter Inc., as well as telecommunications companies such as AT&T Inc. Google Chief Executive Sundar Pichai has agreed to meet with top GOP lawmakers on Friday, responding to new scrutiny of the company’s work with China, its market power and alleged bias against conservative voices in its search results.

Tuesday’s meeting of attorneys general had been expected to also focus on the political-bias allegations, which have been a concern among some Republican officials, including state attorneys general as well as House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R., Calif.). President Trump also has recently accused Google of skewing online search results to highlight negative news stories about him. The tech platforms deny allowing any political bias to affect their news, search or other functions. Attendees said the bias issue got less attention than expected, however. Mr. Sessions “was really the only one who was talking about political speech,” said Brian Frosh, the Democratic attorney general of Maryland. — ***Wall Street Journal***

The Trump administration is hoping Congress can come up with a new set of national rules governing how companies can use consumers’ data that finds a balance between “privacy and prosperity.” But it will be tricky to reconcile the concerns of privacy advocates who want people to have more control over the usage of their personal data — where they’ve been, what they view, who their friends are —and the powerful companies that mine it for profit.

Executives of a half-dozen U.S. internet titans are due to appear Wednesday before the Senate Commerce Committee to explain their privacy policies. Senior executives from AT&T, Amazon, Apple, Google, Twitter and Charter Communications are expected to testify at the hearing, amid increasing anxiety over safeguarding consumers’ data online and recent scandals that have stoked outrage among users and politicians.

But the approach to privacy legislation being pondered by policymakers and pushed by the internet industry leans toward a relatively light government touch. An early move in President Donald Trump’s tenure set the tone on data privacy. He signed a bill into law in April 2017 that allows internet providers to sell information about their

customers' browsing habits. The legislation scrapped Obama-era online privacy rules aimed at giving consumers more control over how broadband companies like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon share that information.

Allie Bohm, policy counsel at the consumer group Public Knowledge, says examples abound of companies not only using the data to market products but also to profile consumers and restrict who sees their offerings: African Americans not getting access to ads for housing, minorities and older people excluded from seeing job postings. The companies "aren't going to tell that story" to the Senate panel, she said. "These companies make their money off consumer data."

What is needed, privacy advocates maintain, is legislation to govern the entire "life cycle" of consumers' data: how it's collected, used, kept, shared and sold. Meanwhile, regulators elsewhere have started to act. The 28-nation European Union put in strict new rules this spring that require companies to justify why they're collecting and using personal data gleaned from phones, apps and visited websites. Companies also must give EU users the ability to access and delete data, and to object to data use under one of the claimed reasons.

A similar law in California will compel companies to tell customers upon request what personal data they've collected, why it was collected and what types of third parties have received it. Companies will be able to offer discounts to customers who allow their data to be sold and to charge those who opt out a reasonable amount, based on how much the company makes selling the information.

The California law doesn't take effect until 2020 and applies only to California consumers, but it could have fallout effects on other states. And it's strong enough to have rattled Big Tech, which is seeking a federal data-privacy law that would be more lenient toward the industry. "A national privacy framework should be consistent throughout all states, pre-empting state consumer-privacy and data security laws," the Internet Association said in a recent statement. The group represents about 40 big internet and tech companies, spanning Airbnb and Amazon to Zillow. "A strong national baseline creates clear rules for companies."

The Trump White House said this summer that the administration is working on it, meeting with companies and other interested parties. Thune's pronouncement and one from a White House official stress that a balance should be struck in any new legislation — between government supervision and technological advancement. The goal is a policy "that is the appropriate balance between privacy and prosperity," White House spokeswoman Lindsay Walters said. "We look forward to working with Congress on a legislative solution." — **Associated Press**

In a vote akin to a schoolyard triple-dog dare gone bad, the Republican-controlled Pennsylvania House on Tuesday again turned tail on its own bill to reduce its 203-member size and save taxpayers nearly \$16 million annually in salaries and benefits. House Bill 153 would have created a constitutional amendment letting voters decide whether to trim the House by 26 percent to 151 lawmakers.

Passage of bills creating constitutional amendments almost never happen in Harrisburg. To do it, the House and Senate must pass an identical bill in two consecutive legislative sessions. The last stage of that two-part act had been in the House since June. But on Tuesday, Republican Majority Leader Dave Reed, R-Indiana, who controls the House Rules Committee, allowed Democrats, who are in the deep minority and historically opposed to the bill, to alter the measure by inserting a provision cutting the 50-member Senate, too.

The 18-14 vote stands as one of the first times in years a substantive Democratic amendment passed the GOP-dominated Rules Committee to kill a GOP-sponsored bill. The House reduction bill was sponsored by Rep. Jerry Knowles, R-Schuylkill. The bipartisan move foreshadows the end of the constitutional amendment process, and will prevent voters from having a say in whether to cut the Legislature's \$381 million budget.

All Democrats voted for the amendment that added the Senate and they were joined by three Republican lawmakers: Rep. Bob Godshall of Montgomery County; Jack Rader of Monroe County and Judy Ward of Blair County. Rader has always opposed Knowles' bill, voting records show. But Godshall's and Ward's votes were flip-flops because they previously supported Knowles' original bill.

Godshall is retiring and had nothing to lose. Ward is not seeking re-election to the House — and running for a Senate seat that is safe from reduction efforts. By allowing those three Republicans to flip, the GOP-majority protected others in an election year. The parliamentary maneuver added another chapter to a legislative saga worthy of a Jean Shepherd skit. In this one, senators dared representatives to stick their tongues on a freezing pole — or poll — by passing their own bill to put some of them on the unemployment line. [Like Schwartz in Shepherd's "A Christmas Story" movie, the House was left stammering "stuck, stuck, stuck."](#)

Our story begins with former House Speaker Sam Smith, R-Jefferson, a moderate in an increasingly conservative Republican-controlled chamber. Before retiring in 2014, Smith had lamented how polarized his party and chamber had become, making compromise difficult. He introduced a bill cutting the House, reasoning fewer lawmakers would mean less discord. Pennsylvania has the nation's largest full-time Legislature.

Smith's bill failed when representatives added an amendment also cutting the 50-member Senate to 38. Representatives knew the Senate would reject it, and cynical voters and pundits were left scoffing at what they called a bogus attempt at government reform. Enter Knowles.

On Jan. 5, 2015, he introduced his own reduction bill, which quickly picked up 30 cosponsors, mostly Republicans, including Reed, House Speaker Mike Turzai, R-Allegheny; and Rep. Daryl Metcalfe, R-Butler, who runs the key State Government Committee that handles statewide voting issues. On May 5, 2015 — two weeks before the primary election — the House overwhelmingly approved Knowles' bill. The Senate did so, too, on Jan. 27, 2016.

Those two votes finished step one of the amendment process. Knowles reintroduced his bill on Dec. 14, 2016, writing in a memo:

“While we have started the process of reducing the size of the House of Representatives, we are only half way there.”

Poof. The bill disappeared in Metcalfe's committee for more than a year, as some House members, who previously supported it, voiced concerns about axing their own jobs. Republican and Democratic senators, embroiled in a caustic budget battle with the House, quietly snickered and secretly called representatives chickens for not voting on their own reform bill. Knowles heard the wisecracks, too, saying in a Nov. 28, 2017, Morning Call story, that the bill's passage is “the right thing to do [because] this is a monumental piece of legislation.”

In that same story, Chris Borick, Muhlenberg College political science professor and pollster, chuckled, ripped lawmakers for not having the courage of their convictions. “But when push comes to shove, this thing has gone almost nowhere,” he said. In February, the full House took up the bill again — and choked just as Borick had predicted.

After Metcalfe moved the bill out of his committee, a majority of House lawmakers amended it by adding a provision cutting the Senate, too. Not so fast, senators said. In June, the Senate voted to revert to Knowles' original bill by stripping out the Senate reduction amendment, setting up the triple-dog dare in the House. To put the question before the public, the committee only had to support the “clean” bill and then send it to the full House for one last vote. Tuesday afternoon, representatives got their tongues stuck. — **Allentown Morning Call**

