THE HONORABLE MARSHA J. PECHMAN

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON AT SEATTLE

AMAZON.COM, LLC, Plaintiff,

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v.

KENNETH R. LAY, in his official capacity as Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Revenue.

Defendant.

JANE DOE 1, JANE DOE 2, JANE DOE 3, JANE DOE 4, JANE DOE 5, JANE DOE 6, AND CECIL BOTHWELL,

Plaintiffs-Intervenors,

v.

KENNETH R. LAY, in his official capacity as Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Revenue, and AMAZON.COM, LLC, Defendants in Intervention. No. 2:10-cv-00664-MJP

MOTION TO INTERVENE

NOTE ON MOTION CALENDAR: JULY 9, 2010

Oral Argument Requested

MOTION TO INTERVENE -- No. 2:10-cv-00664-MJP

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MOTION TO INTERVENE -- 1 No. 2:10-cv-00664-MJP

Pursuant to Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 24(a), Jane Does 1-6 and Cecil Bothwell ("Movants") move for leave to intervene as of right as plaintiffs in this action in order to protect their constitutional rights to free speech and privacy. In the alternative, Movants request permission to intervene under Fed. R. Civ. P. 24(b).

Movants are individuals whose personal information and constitutional rights to privacy and freedom of expression are directly at issue in this lawsuit. Because this motion is timely, Movants' fundamental rights are at stake, disposition of this lawsuit will impair their ability to protect those rights, and Movants have unique, personal interests in the information that is the subject of this lawsuit which are different from the parties' interests, intervention is appropriate to ensure that Movants' constitutional rights will not be compromised in the ongoing tax dispute between Defendant and Amazon.¹

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

In December 2009, as part of a tax audit of Amazon, the North Carolina Department of Revenue ("DOR") sent an information document request to Amazon asking that it provide "all information for all sales to customers with a North Carolina shipping address by month in an electronic format," for all dates between August 1, 2003 and February 28, 2010. Intervenors' Compl., attached as Exh. A, ¶¶ 39-40. In response, Amazon provided DOR with detailed purchase records for the relevant time period, including Amazon's standard product code for each item, which reveals detailed information such as the name, title and brand of the item purchased. *Id.* ¶¶ 41-42. Amazon did not, however, disclose the customer name or address that corresponds to each purchase record. *Id.* ¶ 44.

DOR sought to force Amazon to provide that information. *Id.* ¶ 45. In March 2010, DOR sent Amazon an information request stating that Amazon had failed to provide "Bill to Name; Bill to Address (Street, City, State, and Zip); Ship to Name; Ship to Address (street);

 $^{^{1}}$ Amazon does not consent to this motion. Movants have contacted Defendant Lay, but he has not indicated his position on this motion.

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Product/item code or description," and that if it did not provide that information, DOR would issue a summons against Amazon, which would allow DOR to initiate a summary proceeding against Amazon to force it to turn over the information. *Id.* ¶¶ 45-46.

The information demanded by DOR implicates the fundamental rights of Amazon's customers, including Movants. If DOR were to receive this information from Amazon, DOR would be able to combine that information with the detailed product codes that it already has to learn which North Carolina customers, including Movants, purchased which specific books, movies, music, and other expressive and private items. *Id.* ¶¶ 60-61. That prospect is especially distressing to Movants, whose customer records reveal profoundly personal and private details about their intimate family problems, their religious and political beliefs, and their medical and mental health issues. *Id.* ¶¶ 68-122. For example:

- Jane Doe 1,² an engineer, has purchased numerous self-help books from Amazon in order to file for divorce and to obtain a restraining order for herself and her child against her abusive spouse. *Id.* ¶¶ 68-70. Her experience was traumatizing and life-changing for her, and she does not want the State or anyone else to know about her private family struggles. *Id.* ¶ 71.
- Jane Doe 2, General Counsel of a global firm, has purchased books with overt political leanings, like Michael Moore's "Dude, Where's My Country?" and Al Franken's "Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right." Id. ¶ 78. She does not want the State to know about her political leanings or the other private details of her life that can be pieced together from the over 200 items that she has purchased from Amazon since 2003. *Id.* ¶¶ 78-79.
- Jane Doe 3, a writer for a software company, has purchased books about atheism, as well as books on saving her marriage and on mental health conditions afflicting

² Use of the pseudonym "Jane Doe" or gender pronouns does not signify that Jane Does 1-6 are male or female.

- Jane Doe 4, a student at the University of North Carolina Law School, has received books from Jane Doe 5, her parent (and a Florida resident), which may be viewed as controversial, such as "Lies the Government Told You: Myth, Power, and Deception in American History" and "Obama Zombies: How the Liberal Machine Brainwashed My Generation." *Id.* ¶ 93. She aspires to work in a legislative or public policy capacity in the future, and she does not want the State or anyone else to judge her based on what she has been reading. *Id.* ¶ 94. Jane Doe 5, an accountant, does not want the subject of her conversations with her child or the potentially controversial books she purchased revealed to the State or to anyone else. *Id.* ¶¶ 102-103.
- Jane Doe 6, a retired lawyer, has purchased books on potentially sensitive and revealing matters, such as "The Stages of Meditation," by the Dalai Lama. *Id.* ¶ 107. She does not want the private details of her reading history revealed to the State or to anyone else. *Id.* ¶ 108.
- Cecil Bothwell, an elected member of the Asheville City Council, has purchased expressive items from Amazon and sold books he has written and published through Amazon. *Id.* ¶ 111. As a public official who knows that anything he purchases can become political fodder, he does not want the State or anyone else to learn which items he has purchased. *Id.* ¶¶ 113-116. He also does not want the State to know who purchases his books, which concern potentially controversial and sensitive subjects. *Id.* ¶ 116.

Given their purchases and the adverse effect that disclosure of those purchases could have on their personal relationships, family lives, reputations and careers, Movants are

If DOR were to obtain information about which specific items Movants have purchased or received from Amazon, it would chill Movants from purchasing items on Amazon, especially controversial, personal and sensitive items. *Id.* ¶¶ 63, 76, 80, 90, 95, 105, 109, 121. DOR has issued similar information requests to other websites and out-of-state businesses. *Id.* ¶¶ 52-53. DOR's policy and practice of issuing broad information requests that encompass private and expressive information, if permitted to be continued, would also make Movants seriously consider whether they can purchase such items over the Internet at all. *Id.* ¶ 65. Movants seek to intervene in this lawsuit to protect their rights to keep this information private and to ensure that their rights will not be compromised in the future.

ARGUMENT

I. MOVANTS ARE ENTITLED TO INTERVENE AS OF RIGHT.

Rule 24(a), governing intervention as of right, is construed "liberally in favor of potential intervenors." *Sw. Ctr. for Biological Diversity v. Berg*, 268 F.3d 810, 818 (9th Cir. 2001). The decision whether to allow intervention is "guided primarily by practical considerations, not technical distinctions." *Id.* (internal quotation marks omitted). In considering this motion to intervene, the Court must accept all well-pleaded allegations in Movants' proposed pleadings. *Id.* at 819-20.

The Ninth Circuit has adopted a four-part test to resolve applications for intervention as of right:

(1) [T]he application for intervention must be timely; (2) the applicant must have 'a significantly protectable' interest relating to the property or transaction that is the subject of the action; (3) the applicant must be situated such that the disposition of the action may, as a practical matter, impair or impede the applicant's ability to protect that interest; and (4) the applicant's interest must not be adequately

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represented by the existing parties in the lawsuit.

Id. at 817 (quoting Nw. Forest Res. Council v. Glickman, 82 F.3d 825, 836 (9th Cir. 1996)).

Movants meet each of these requirements.

A. The Motion To Intervene Is Timely.

This Motion is timely because the litigation is still in its infancy, no party will be prejudiced by intervention at this time, and Movants have deferred intervening only long enough to ascertain whether their intervention would be necessary to protect their rights. *See United States v. Alisal Water Corp.*, 370 F.3d 915, 921 (9th Cir. 2004) (weighing three factors in determining timeliness: the stage of the proceeding, the prejudice to other parties, and the reason for and length of the delay). Defendant has yet to answer the Complaint, and no substantive motions have been filed. Permitting Movants to intervene to protect their interests at this stage will, thus, neither delay adjudication of the action nor prejudice Amazon or Defendant. *See Sierra Club v. EPA*, 995 F.2d 1478, 1481 (9th Cir. 1993) (affirming district court's determination that application filed at outset of litigation is timely).³

B. Movants Have Significant First and Fourteenth Amendment Interests in Ensuring That Their Amazon Purchasing Records Are Not Disclosed.

Movants have a "significant protectable interest" at stake in this action. To satisfy this factor, "[i]t is generally enough that the interest [asserted] is protectable under some law, and that there is a relationship between the legally protected interest and the claims at issue." *Sierra Club*, 995 F.2d at 1484. The interest test is, therefore, "a threshold one, rather than the determinitive criterion for intervention." *County of Fresno v. Andrus*, 622 F.2d 436, 438 (9th Cir. 1980).

At the heart of this lawsuit are the customer records of Movants and other individual

Amazon customers. Movants have clear First and Fourteenth Amendment rights to prevent that

³ Movants notified Amazon and Defendant of their intent to intervene right after the lawsuit was filed. Movants have waited to file this request for intervention until now in order to attempt to negotiate a resolution with the parties that would eliminate the need for intervention. Those efforts have now proven unsuccessful.

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information from being obtained by the State.⁴ Courts have uniformly held that similar government requests for expressive information about its citizens, such as which books people are reading or which movies they are watching, implicate individuals' constitutional rights to anonymity and free expression. See, e.g., In re Grand Jury Investigation of Possible Violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1461 et seq., Misc. No. 09-118, 2009 WL 3495997 (RCL), at *5-9 (D.D.C. Oct. 26, 2009) (denying motion to compel subpoena for the identities of customers who obtained specific movies through a website); In re Grand Jury Subpoena to Amazon.com Dated August 7, 2006, 246 F.R.D. 570, 572-73 (W.D. Wis. 2007) (holding that a grand jury subpoena seeking information about the identities of book buyers raises First Amendment concerns); In re Grand Jury Subpoena to Kramerbooks & Afterwords Inc., 26 Med. L. Rptr. 1599, 1600 (D.D.C. 1998) (holding that a subpoena seeking titles of books purchased by Monica Lewinsky implicates the First Amendment);⁵ Tattered Cover, Inc. v. City of Thornton, 44 P.3d 1044, 1053 (Colo. 2002) (holding that search of bookseller's customer purchase records necessarily intrudes into areas protected by the First Amendment). Those decisions are grounded in the Supreme Court's recognition that the First Amendment protects the right of individuals to receive information and ideas. See, e.g., Virginia State Bd. of Pharmacy v. Virginia Citizens Consumer Council, Inc., 425 U.S. 748, 757 (1976) (recognizing the First Amendment right to receive information and ideas); Stanley v. Georgia, 394 U.S. 557, 564 (1969) ("[The] right to receive information and ideas, regardless of their social worth ... is fundamental to our free society.").

Movants' allegations illustrate why the First Amendment prohibits government requests for information about expressive choices. Movants' purchase records reveal intimate information about their private family struggles, political and religious beliefs, and medical and mental health issues. Intervenors' Compl. ¶¶ 69-71, 73, 78, 84-89, 93, 101, 107, 116. Movants would be chilled from making similar purchases in the future from Amazon and from other

⁴ Movants also have rights under the Video Privacy Protection Act, 18 U.S.C. § 2710, which protects against the disclosure of customer records relating to video or audiovisual materials.

⁵ A copy of this decision is attached as Exhibit B.

websites if they knew that their purchase records would be handed over to the government, and many would simply choose not to purchase those items from Amazon or from anyone. *Id.* ¶¶ 76-77, 80-81, 90-91, 95-96, 105-06, 109-110, 121-22. *See, e.g., Lamont v. Postmaster General*, 381 U.S. 301, 307 (1965) (invalidating requirement that addressees must file written request with postal service to receive "communist political propaganda" through the mail, because such a requirement is "almost certain to have a deterrent effect"); *United States v. Rumely*, 345 U.S. 41, 57 (1953) (Douglas, J., concurring) ("Once the government can demand of a publisher the names of the purchasers of his publications, the free press as we know it disappears. . . . Some will fear to read what is unpopular, what the powers-that-be dislike"). Movants, therefore, have significant protectable rights at stake, and they are entitled to intervene to defend those rights.

C. The Disposition of This Lawsuit May Irreparably Impair Movants' Ability to Protect Their Interests.

Movants are also entitled to intervene because they are individuals who would be most directly and adversely affected by the outcome of this lawsuit. *Sw. Ctr. for Biological Diversity*, 268 F.3d at 822. If the Court rules that DOR can obtain and retain this information, it is Movants' personally identifiable information regarding their reading, viewing, and other expressive and private habits that will be subject to disclosure. If that information is turned over by Amazon, Movants' constitutional rights to privacy and free expression will be irreparably injured. Movants would not just suffer harm to their constitutional rights. The disclosure of such private and intimate information would likely also gravely affect Movants' reputations, their careers, and their family and personal relationships. Because disclosure is the very harm Movants seek to prevent, Movants should be permitted to intervene now before that issue is permanently resolved.

D. The Existing Parties May Not Adequately Represent Movants' Interests in This Litigation.

Intervention should also be granted because Movants have unique, personal interests that may not be adequately represented unless they are able to intervene. Movants' burden on this

requirement "should be treated as minimal," and is satisfied by showing that representation of their interests by the existing parties "may be" inadequate. *Trbovich v. United Mine Workers of America*, 404 U.S. 528, 538 n.10 (1972); *see also Conserv. Law Found. of New England, Inc. v. Mosbacher*, 966 F.2d 39, 44 (1st Cir. 1992) ("An intervenor need only show that the representation may be inadequate, not that it is inadequate"). In analyzing this factor, courts consider: (1) whether the interest of a present party is such that it will undoubtedly make all the intervenor's arguments; (2) whether the present party is capable and willing to make such arguments; and (3) whether a proposed intervenor would offer any necessary elements to the proceedings that other parties would not provide. *Sw. Ctr. for Biological Diversity*, 268 F.3d at 822.

Movants' interests in this action are sufficiently different from Amazon's interest that Movants may not be adequately represented if they are unable to intervene. Although a presumption of adequacy arises when the proposed intervenor shares the same ultimate objective in the case as a party, that presumption is rebutted where the two do not share "sufficiently congruent interests." Sw. Ctr. for Biological Diversity, 268 F.3d at 823. That is the case here. Movants are motivated solely by their personal interests in ensuring that records of their private and expressive activities are not revealed to DOR or to anyone else. As a public company, Amazon's ultimate responsibility is to its shareholders; although Amazon may also want to protect its customers' rights, that is, in part, because doing so is good for business. Like any seller and buyer, Amazon and Movants both want the same thing – to consummate the sale – but both are driven by different, and potentially conflicting, interests. See, e.g., Trbovich, 404 U.S. at 538-39 (holding that intervention was justified where the existing party had a duty to serve two distinct interests, which were related but not identical); Sw. Ctr. for Biological Diversity, 268 F.3d at 823 (finding inadequate representation where proposed intervenors were, unlike the existing party, driven by profit motive); Cal. Hosp. Ass'n v. Maxwell-Jolly, No. CV 09-3694 CAS, 2009 WL 4120725, at *3 (C.D. Cal. Nov. 23, 2009) (holding that the state cannot be expected to adequately represent proposed intervenor's economic interests).

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There are several additional differences between Amazon and Movants which make intervention appropriate. First, although Amazon can legitimately state that its customers' activities will be chilled by Defendant's actions, only Movants can personally provide that evidence and explain why their First Amendment activity would be chilled should DOR receive these records, what the impact on their and their families' lives would be, and why it is important that the Court protect their interests. Intervenors' Compl. ¶¶ 68-126. Movants' participation, and the unique, personal perspectives that they would provide, are critical to establishing why DOR should not be able to obtain their constitutionally protected information, and would otherwise be absent from this action. See, e.g., Sw. Ctr. for Biological Diversity, 268 F.3d at 822 (offering necessary elements to the proceedings that other parties cannot provide is factor favoring intervention); Sagebrush Rebellion, Inc. v. Watt, 713 F.2d 525, 528 (9th Cir. 1983) (reversing denial of intervention where the proposed intervenor offered expertise and perspective materially different from the present parties); Coal. for a Sustainable Delta v. Carlson, No. 1:08-CV-00397 OWW, 2008 WL 2237038, at *5 (E.D. Cal. May 29, 2008) (holding that interests are not adequately represented where proposed intervenors have a "unique perspective" that is distinguishable from the existing parties).

Second, because Movants have a privacy interest in their Internet purchases beyond those purchases made on Amazon, they seek to bring broader claims and request broader relief than Amazon does. Specifically, in addition to invalidating the requests to Amazon, Movants also seek to challenge DOR's policy and practice of issuing information document requests encompassing customers' private and expressive information to other websites, and to enjoin DOR from issuing such similar requests in the future. Amazon has not expressly included such a claim in its Complaint or requested such relief; its priority is the information requests issued to Amazon itself. Intervention is appropriate where, as here, the existing parties and the proposed intervenors do not represent the same scope of interests and the proposed intervenors will present additional arguments that the existing parties will not make. *See Sw. Ctr. for Biological Diversity*, 268 F.3d at 822; *Cent. Valley Chrysler-Jeep Inc. v. Witherspoon*, No. CV-F-04-6663

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REC/JLO, 2005 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 26536, at *20-21 (E.D. Cal. Oct. 20, 2005) (granting
intervention in action challenging the constitutionality of state regulations because intervenors
intended to raise different arguments than the parties); cf., e.g., Forest Conservation Council v.
U.S. Forest Service, 66 F.3d 1489, 1499 (9th Cir. 1999) ("Inadequate representation is most
likely to be found when the applicant asserts a personal interest that does not belong to the
general public." (internal quotation marks omitted)); Smuck v. Hobson, 408 F.2d 175, 181 (D.C.
Cir. 1969) (permitting intervention where "[t]he intervening appellants may have more parochial
interests" than the existing party).

Finally, Amazon and DOR have a larger, ongoing dispute about whether Amazon is obligated to collect sales taxes on behalf of the State of North Carolina—a dispute that creates a potential conflict between Movants' privacy interests and Amazon's broader economic interests. Movants take no position in this larger tax dispute; Movants seek to intervene solely to ensure that their expressive and private information is not caught up in that dispute. Because other issues are at play in the dispute between Amazon and DOR, however, issues unrelated to the privacy interests of Movants will likely be taken into consideration by the parties as this action unfolds, which very well may conflict with Movants' interests.

Any remaining doubt that Amazon may not fully represent the interests of Movants should be dispelled by the fact that Movants' Proposed Complaint names Amazon as a defendant in their claim under the Video Privacy Protection Act. Amazon and Movants will have divergent interests with respect to that claim. As a result, it cannot be said that Amazon and Movants share sufficiently congruent interests and that Amazon would fully represent all of Movants' interests. Indeed, Amazon has indicated that it will not consent to this motion.

Like the intervenors in Southwest Center, Movants will "offer important elements to the proceedings that the existing parties would likely neglect," including "their own unique private perspectives." 268 F.3d at 823. Where, as here, the Movants "would be substantially affected in a practical sense by the determination made in an action, [they] should, as a general rule, be entitled to intervene." *Id.* at 822 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 24 advisory committee's notes).

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II. MOVANTS ARE ENTITLED TO PERMISSIVE INTERVENTION.

Even if Movants were not entitled to intervene as a matter of right, the Court should nonetheless allow them to intervene permissively pursuant to Rule 24(b). Rule 24(b) provides, in relevant part:

On timely motion, the court may permit anyone to intervene who . . . has a claim or defense that shares with the main action a common question of law or fact. In exercising its discretion, the court must consider whether the intervention will unduly delay or prejudice the adjudication of the original parties' rights. Fed. R. Civ. P. 24(b).

Movants satisfy the three conditions for permissive intervention under this rule: (1) the motion is timely; (2) Movants have their own independent ground for subject matter jurisdiction; and (3) their claims and the main action have a question of law or a question of fact in common. United States v. City of Los Angeles, 288 F.3d 391, 403 (9th Cir. 2002). First, for the reasons already set out above, see Part I(A), supra, the motion is timely. Second, there is an independent basis for subject matter jurisdiction over Movants' claims because their claims raise federal questions under the First and Fourteenth Amendments and the Video Privacy Protection Act, 18 U.S.C. § 2710. See 28 U.S.C. §1331. Third, the legal and factual issues raised by Movants' claims are similar to those in the existing action, although, as described above, see Part I(D), supra, Movants present a unique factual perspective on those questions, will make different arguments, and seek broader relief.

Movants should be permitted to intervene in this lawsuit at this stage because their personal information and their constitutional rights are most directly affected by this lawsuit. See City of Los Angeles, 288 F.3d at 405 ("[S]treamlining' the litigation . . . should not be accomplished at the risk of marginalizing those . . . who have some of the strongest interests in the outcome."); Spangler v. Pasadena City Bd. of Educ., 552 F.2d 1326, 1329 (9th Cir. 1977) (holding that "the nature and extent of the intervenors' interest" is a relevant factor for permissive intervention). As explained earlier, see Parts I(A) & (D), supra, Movants'

1	intervention would cause no delay or prejudice, and would "contribute to the full development of					
2	the underlying factual issues in the suit and to the just and equitable adjudication of the legal					
3	questions presented." Spangler, 552 F.2d at 1329; Venegas v. Skaggs, 867 F.2d 527, 530-31 (9th					
4	Cir. 1989), aff'd, 495 U.S. 82 (1990) (considering factors of undue delay, prejudice, judicial					
5	economy, and adequate representation before reversing district court's denial of permissive					
6	intervention).					
7	CONCLUSION					
8	For the foregoing reasons, Movants respectfully request that the Court grant their motion					
9	for intervention as of right pursuant to Rule 24(a) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, or, in					
10	the alternative, their motion for permissive intervention pursuant to Rule 24(b).					
11		Respectfully submitted this 23rd day of June, 2010.				
12						
13		ATTORNEYS FOR PLAINTIFFS- INTERVENORS				
14						
15		/s/ Venkat Balasubramani				
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22	NORTH CAROLINA FOUNDATION	FOUNDATION				
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