

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

**Don't Hand the Internet Over to the U.N.!**

October 19, 2005

Dear Colleague:

More than 45 years ago, the United States began funding research which led to the creation of the Internet. Today, the Internet has become a global communications network of immeasurable value. We rely on the Internet to perform critical functions in nearly every industry, from our military to the private sector, and consumers also use the Internet to obtain news and information and engage in ecommerce. It is therefore imperative that the Internet continue to thrive as the robust medium it is today.

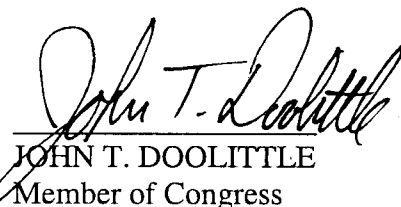
Since 1998, the United States has had a memorandum of understanding with a not-for-profit corporation called the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which has managed the day-to-day operations of the Internet's domain name and addressing system. ICANN has performed its functions well under the oversight of the Department of Commerce, and during this time approximately 260 Top Level Domains (TLD) have been created, from the traditional ".com" and ".org" to individual country codes such as ".uk" and, most recently, ".iq" for the new government of Iraq. Under the existing structures, each country's TLD is sovereign and subject to the policies and administration of its own government.

Despite the rapid growth and enormous success of the Internet, there have been recent calls by some countries, as well as the United Nations, to cede governance of the Internet to an international organization. Therefore, we have introduced a concurrent resolution which expresses the sense of Congress that the existing structures which are in place to manage the day-to-day operations of the Internet have worked effectively and fostered innovation and that the United States should maintain oversight of ICANN so that ICANN can remain responsive to all Internet stakeholders worldwide and otherwise fulfill its core technical mission.

We would like to call your attention to the article on the reverse side. In it, the author provides several compelling arguments against transferring control of the Internet to the U.N. or some other international body and the dangers that could occur if that should happen.

We urge you to join us in co-sponsoring H.CON.RES 268 to ensure that the Internet continues to function as it does today. Please contact Evan Goitein with Congressman Doolittle (5-2511), Amy Levine with Congressman Boucher (5-3861) or Branden Ritchie with Congressman Goodlatte (5-5431) to be added as a co-sponsor or with any questions.

Sincerely,

  
JOHN T. DOOLITTLE  
Member of Congress

  
RICK BOUCHER  
Member of Congress

  
BOB GOODLATTE  
Member of Congress

## e-Meddling - Wall Street Journal Editorial

October 17, 2005; Page A18

International bureaucrats and assorted countries are struggling to wrest control of "Internet governance" from that old unilateralist bogeyman, the United States. There's one big problem with this picture: Cyberspace isn't "governed" by the U.S. or anyone else, and that's the beauty of it. But if the United Nations gets its way in the coming month, the Web will end up under its control. Uh-oh is about right.

Internet governance, such as it is, currently falls under the purview of a California-based nonprofit called the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers. Better known as Ican, it was created by the U.S. Commerce Department in 1998 to administer the "root zone file," the master list of all Web addresses world-wide, which the U.S. has kept since the creation of the Internet in the 1970s. Ensuring that any given Web address, or domain name, is assigned to only one Web site is a key reason why the Internet has become such a powerful tool.

Maintaining the root zone file involves assigning -- or, more commonly, accrediting other companies to assign -- domain names, such as our OpinionJournal.com. Ican also manages the top-level domains such as .com and .org. This includes the 248 country-specific ones -- from .ca for Canada to .aq for Antarctica, and everything in between. Local authorities set policy for their country-specific extensions, conferring with Ican to make sure everything works smoothly.

And that's it. Real "governance," on the other hand, could bring oversight of content and even transactions by a new international body -- two jobs that Ican explicitly doesn't perform. For an example of how the Internet is governed, look no further than the strict limits China -- one of the main proponents of "internationalizing" the root zone file -- places on Web sites that promote or even discuss democracy.

But if China and other countries already do this now, why would they be pushing for change? Good question. So far, exactly what this new intergovernmental body would look like or do remains worryingly vague. According to a report of the U.N.'s Working Group on Internet Governance, this body could be a Global Internet Council to which Ican reports; or it could keep Ican in place and simply make recommendations; or it could take over Ican's duties and relegate the private sector to "providing advice."

The working group's report says the governing body would respect freedom of expression. At the same time, it holds as one of its "key principles" the "respect for cultural and linguistic diversity as well as tradition [and] religion." On the Internet, it says, "that translates to multilingual, diverse and culturally appropriate content" (our emphasis). And who decides whether content is culturally, or otherwise, "appropriate"? Today, no one. Tomorrow, Tehran, Beijing or Brussels.

One constant -- and this is where vagueness becomes an even bigger danger -- is that a U.N.-run oversight body would address "public policy issues that currently do not have a natural home or cut across several international or intergovernmental bodies." In other words, it could do darn near anything it wanted.

It's no surprise that supporters' bureaucratic web of choice is the U.N., which cloaks its designs on Internet control in language about such niceties as bridging the "digital divide." Spreading Web access is a worthy goal, but centralizing control runs directly at odds with that aim. The phenomenal growth of email, e-commerce and e-everything else is directly attributable to the Internet's decentralized nature. One area where a U.N.-run Web might very well expand its reach is into the taxpayer's pocket. Kofi Annan and Jacques Chirac have long dreamed of a global "solidarity" tax on online financial transactions. This could be their vehicle for doing so.

By no means is Ican perfect. The main gripe is that the agency is subject to occasional political pressure from Washington. In August, Assistant Commerce Secretary Michael Gallagher objected to Ican's plans to introduce a .xxx top-level domain for pornographic Web sites. This political misstep, while hardly the norm, undermined Ican's independence and gave ammunition to the multilateral-at-all-costs crowd. The Administration can neutralize its opponents by moving ahead quickly with plans to grant Ican its full independence next year.

Without U.S. support for the U.N.'s Web "governance" campaign -- withheld so far -- the current system can't be changed. But Washington doesn't hold all the cards here. Countries could create parallel Internets. The same Web address might take users in China and the U.S. to different Web sites -- a nightmare outcome for online business as well as the vibrant marketplace of ideas that the Internet has fostered. Perhaps our friends at the European Union, who last month turned against the U.S., will realize that their sudden push for "control" over the Net carries a high price.