

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CITIZENS GROUPS ACT TO SAVE PUBLICLY OWNED INTERNET RESOURCE

CONSUMERS, CITIES, CHARITIES, ISPS, ACADEMICS PROTEST BUSH PLAN TO GIVE AWAY UNITED STATES "CYBERADDRESS."



An unusually broad group including public interest organizations, local governments, ISPs, private companies, charities, churches and academics called on the Bush Administration not to give away the ".us" Internet top-level domain. In a letter to Commerce Secretary Don Evans, the groups ask Evans to reconsider a June 13, 2001 announcement that Commerce will give away the United State's unique country code to a private contractor at no cost. The contractor, however, will have the right to charge the public fees for use of .us.

"This is a unique public resource, created with American tax dollars," said Harold Feld, Associate Director of the Media Access Project (MAP). "If this were spectrum, we'd auction it off for hundreds of millions, if not billions of dollars. Or we'd set some aside, like public television, for public use. The Commerce Department plan does neither."

MAP and the Benton Foundation had previously submitted a plan to use revenue from managing the .us space to address the growing "digital divide" between rich and poor, and to provide a place for non-commercial speech increasingly crowded out of .com. That proposal, and a request by over 25 consumer groups, education groups, municipal groups, public interest groups and academics to use .us for the benefit of all Americans, was rejected by the National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA), the Commerce Agency that oversees domain names.

[In addition to the familiar "generic" top level domains -- .com, .org, and .net -- every country has a unique two-letter "country code" top level domain (called a "ccTLD"). Some countries have sold their ccTLDs to contractors for substantial sums, while other countries have used their ccTLD for public purposes.]

For now, ".us" is primarily the home of state and local governments, and public organizations such as libraries and K-12 schools. The Commerce plan will give central control to a private federal contractor, bypassing the states and localities entirely.

"We are very concerned about how Commerce's proposal could effect cities and their e-government initiatives," said Juan Otero, Principle Legislative Counsel for the National League of Cities. "We hope Commerce will reconsider."

The letter asks Commerce to wait until the Administration's appointee to NTIA, Nancy Victory, is confirmed and can review NTIA's decision to give away .us.

"So far, this decision has been made primarily by career staffers and acting officials," said Feld. "It would be tragic if the United States' own piece of cyberspace were given away without a good, hard look by someone accountable to the American people."

A copy of the letter is available on the MAP website: <http://www.mediaaccess.org>

Contact: Harold Feld, Associate Director, (202) 454-5684.

July 12, 2001

30—30—30