

AFL-CIO * American Arts Alliance * American Association of Law Libraries *
 American Association of People with Disabilities * American Association of University Women * American Civil Liberties Union *
 American Conservative Union * American Family Association * American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees *
 American Federation of Teachers * American Jewish World Service * American Library Association * American Lung Association
 * American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO * American Rights at Work * American Rivers * Appalachian Mountain Club *
 Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law * Buzzmaker.net * C3: Colorectal Cancer Coalition * Call to Renewal *
 Campaign to Restore Jackson State Redwood Forest * Care2 * Center for a New American Dream * Center for Economic Progress *
 Children Now * Children's Campaign, Inc. * Citizen Outreach * Common Knowledge * Citizens for Missouri's Children *
 Clean Water Action * Communications Workers of America * Consumer Federation of America *
 Consumers Union * Defenders of Wildlife * Democracy for America * Democracy in Action * Donordigital * Earthworks *
 Dharma Cloud Charitable Foundation Trust * Drug Policy Alliance * Drug Reform Coordination Network * Earthjustice *
 Earthworks * EchoDitto * Electronic Arts * Electronic Frontier Foundation * Equal Rights Washington * Equality Illinois *
 Equality North Carolina * Equality Texas * Fairfax County Privacy Council * Families USA * Free Press * Free Range *
 Greenpeace USA * In Defense of Animals * Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet *
 International Federation of Professional & Technical Engineers * Internet Advocacy Center *
 Kansas Association of Realtors * Kansas City Anti-Violence Project * League of Conservation Voters * M+R Strategic Services *
 Medical Group Management Association * MoveOn.org * National Air Traffic Controllers Association *
 National Congress of Vietnamese Americans * National Council of Nonprofit Associations * National Environmental Trust *
 National Independent Advocate National Nuclear Victims for Justice * National Parks Conservation Association *
 National Taxpayers Union * National Wildlife Federation * NARAL Pro-Choice America * New Jersey Audubon Society *
 New Mexico Wilderness Alliance * New Organizing Institute * New York - New Jersey Trail Conference Oxfam America *
 NTEN * Nuclear Information and Resource Service * Oceana * OMB Watch/Focus Project * Oxfam America *
 Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters * People for the American Way * Planned Parenthood Federation of America *
 Planned Parenthood Federation of Georgia, Inc * Polly Klaas Foundation * Rad Campaign * RightMarch.com * Scenic America *
 Service Employees International Union * Sojourners * Stem Cell Political Action Coalition *
 The Center for Democracy and Technology * The Center for Food Safety * The Humane Society of the United States * The
 Wilderness Society * Triangle Foundation * TrueMajority.org/TrueMajorityACTION.org * United Cerebral Palsy *
 United Farmworkers * US Public Interest Research Group * Women's Funding Network *

June 19, 2006

Dear Representative,

We recently learned that congressional offices may be implementing new technology that will effectively block email communications from constituents to their Representatives. While you may not yet be aware of this technology, more than 100 organizations from across the political and ideological spectrum strongly urge you not to implement this new function. If your office has begun using it, we request that you disable it.

This technology, called 'Logic Puzzle,' enables congressional offices to block email from constituents. This tool would block millions of constituent messages from people who expect you—and elected you—to listen to them. We believe the use of such technology, to limit communications between the public and elected officials, is wrong and a real threat to democratic principles.

We ask instead that you agree to work in a public, open and bipartisan way with nonprofits and other organizations to improve Congress' handling of email communications for both your benefit and the benefit of your constituents. While we understand and sympathize with the growing demand on congressional staff posed by increasing volumes of email, blocking emails from your constituents that flow through organizations is not a solution, and in fact is a very significant threat to our democratic process.

If your office has implemented this technology, your constituents see the following message (or a similar variant) before they can write to you:

Unfortunately, with the advent of email communication, some organizations have begun to use automated programs to send messages to Congress on behalf of constituents -- better known as "SPAM." To prevent this practice we ask that you answer the question below. When you enter the correct response it ensures that the message is coming from a real person and helps your Representative respond to you as quickly as possible.

Advocacy and nonprofit organizations that represent public opinion and develop policy proposals—from across the entire political spectrum—increasingly use the Internet to help their members communicate with you on issues they care about. These emails are not spam. They are generated by the individuals themselves using Web-based technologies.

Congressional attempts to differentiate among constituent communications—accepting only unorganized communications but blocking communications where individuals are working together to deliver a strong message—raise dangerous questions about the infringement of constituents' First Amendment rights and are a disservice to you as their representative. They also denigrate the important role that organizations play in the political process. Individual citizens, who raise their voices together, with the support and leadership of organizations they choose to join for that purpose, are driving democracy - not peddling spam.

When constituents write to members of Congress via our Web-based technologies, and they receive a response, people's faith in the democratic process and their own ability to participate is reinforced. The Internet provides a new generation of civic-minded Americans an education in effective democracy and the ability to speak clearly and together about their most deeply held beliefs and concerns. Organizations like ours are legitimate participants in that online forum, where people come together, formulate ideas about their issues, and then communicate with you.

In this modern communication environment, people expect members of Congress to accept and respond to electronic messages, despite the administrative burden that may pose. We recognize the challenge that you face, and we would like to work with you, your staff and the congressional IT staff to improve the way Congress receives constituent messages. We want to ensure that all constituent messages get to you and work with you towards long-term solutions that will facilitate your work sorting and responding to such messages. Please contact Kathy Mitchell, with Consumers Union, (512) 477-4431, ext. 113, Allison Kozak, with Earthjustice, (510) 550-6708 or Jeff Dirksen, with the National Taxpayers Union, (703) 683-5700 for more information.

On behalf of the following organizations:

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Consumer Federation of America
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Defenders of Wildlife
Democracy for America
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Donordigital
Earthworks
Dharma Cloud Charitable Foundation Trust
Drug Policy Alliance
Drug Reform Coordination Network
Earthjustice
Earthworks
EchoDitto
Electronic Arts
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Equal Rights Washington
Equality Illinois
Equality North Carolina
Equality Texas
Fairfax County Privacy Council
Families USA
Free Press
Free Range
Greenpeace USA
In Defense of Animals
Institute for Politics, Democracy and
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League of Conservation Voters

M+R Strategic Services
Medical Group Management Association
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National Air Traffic Controllers Association
National Congress of Vietnamese Americans
National Council of Nonprofit Associations
National Environmental Trust
National Independent Advocate National
Nuclear Victims for Justice
National Parks Conservation Association
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National Wildlife Federation
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