

News Release
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Public Interest Groups make Internet an Election Issue

Three public interest groups have launched a campaign to focus the attention of political parties and candidates on issues involving the Internet and user rights. The Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (CIPPIC), Digital Copyright Canada, and the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) have asked party leaders and candidates for their views on user rights under copyright law and other technology-related issues.

CIPPIC and PIAC also issued today a highly critical response to the *Interim Report on Copyright Reform* released by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage last month. CIPPIC and PIAC state that the report ignores key evidence and submissions by public interest groups, and lacks reasoning for some key recommendations. They call for rejection of the report and for a more balanced approach to copyright reform in Canada. See www.cippic.ca/whats-new .

CIPPIC, a legal clinic based at the University of Ottawa, posed seven questions to each party and candidate – party responses are posted on its website at www.cippic.ca/election2004. The issues include music file-sharing over the Internet, the rights of educators to use copyrighted material posted on the Internet, and what we should do about spam. "These are all serious issues with significant implications for Canadians", said Philippa Lawson, Executive Director of CIPPIC. "Whoever forms the next government will have to address them, and Canadians deserve to know how they will do so."

So far, the Liberals, Greens, NDP and Bloc have provided party responses.

Digital Copyright Canada, a forum for individuals concerned about the direction that copyright law is taking, is using its website (www.digital-copyright.ca) to encourage electors to raise copyright law issues with their candidates, and to pressure the government to take a more user-friendly approach to copyright. It has drafted a petition calling on the federal government to expand user rights under the Copyright Act, and uses its website to direct people to individual candidate responses to the questions.

"Copyright is automatic when you create something. This means that all Canadians are copyright holders, including copyright holders of a grocery list", commented Russell McOrmond, host of Digital-Copyright.ca. "Given that all Canadians are rights-holders, we need to ensure that our interests are considered in copyright reform. We need to remind legislators that most works under copyright are non-commercial in nature. As a Creative Commons and Open Source creator, I also want to remind the government that collecting royalties is only a subset of the wide variety of business models used by commercial copyright holders".

PIAC, an organization representing consumer interests, has issued a report on the consumer's view of copyright advocating broader user rights under copyright law and questioning the need to legislate protection for anti-infringement technology used by copyright holders.

"Canadian consumers have told the government that they want to it preserve and enhance existing permitted uses under copyright law," said Sue Lott, author of the report. "If we go the route of the U.S. and enact legal protection for technical measures, we will destroy the critical balance in copyright between the user's ability to access copyrighted works and the protections given to holders of copyright, to the detriment of consumers." PIAC's report and submissions to Parliament are accessible from its website at www.piac.ca/copyright.htm .

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