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Blast censorship out of cyberspace, Libertarian Party urges Supreme Court

Defenders of Internet have their own 4-letter word

WASHINGTON, DC — The Libertarian Party challenged the Supreme Court today to “leave censorship behind as America blasts into cyberspace” by rejecting the Communications Decency Act — an attempt by politicians to control speech into the next millennium.

“The so-called Communications Decency Act is a case of politicians using 19th-century censorship laws to control 21st-century technology,” said party Chairman Steve Dasbach as he urged the justices to overturn it. “But free speech is free speech — whether distributed via an 18th-century printing press or a 20th-century modem — and restricting it is a clear violation of the First Amendment.”

The court will hear oral arguments Wednesday on the constitutionality of the law, which Democrats and Republicans passed in February 1996. Under the CDA, Americans can be jailed for two years and fined \$250,000 for transmitting “indecent” material to minors.

On June 12, 1996, the Third U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals denounced the CDA as a “profoundly repugnant” violation of free speech and struck it down.

“What could be more repugnant in a free society than jailing Americans for committing First Amendment crimes with their computer keyboards?” Dasbach asked.

But instead of abiding by the lower court’s ruling, President Clinton ordered the Justice Department to appeal it to the Supreme Court, citing the desire to “help parents prevent children from being exposed to objectionable material.”

“Clinton’s excuse for censoring the Internet displays a stunning ignorance of current technology,” Dasbach said. “Parents *have* the power to protect their children now, and they didn’t get it from politicians. The marketplace offers many computer software programs that can block out objectionable Internet sites, making the CDA unnecessary.”

Dasbach implored the court, “Don’t let Democrats and Republicans get away with revoking free speech on the Internet. Don’t let politicians restrict what adults can view on their computer screens; don’t let them usurp the role of parents in deciding what America’s children will see.

“By declaring the Communications Decency Act unconstitutional, the court can tell politicians that the next time they have the impulse to censor, they should stop and think about a four-letter word: *Don’t*.”

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