

U.S. senator pushes XXX internet domain

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON—It's rare that Christian conservatives and the pornography industry agree on anything. But a congressional proposal to create a new Internet domain has made odd bedfellows of the two groups.

Some moderate Democrats in Congress are pushing for an Internet red-light district where pornography would be isolated on a "xxx" domain. Conservatives and the adult entertainment industry are fighting the idea—but for dramatically different reasons.

Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., is crafting the legislative package that would require the Department of Commerce to create the new domain name. Pornographic Web sites would be required to abandon their "com" addresses, ideally consolidating them all in one Internet neighborhood.

The idea, supporters say, is to clean up the Web as former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani cleaned up Times Square.

It's similar to the actions a lot of communities take in zoning adult stores, Baucus said.

"Among all of the ideas I've heard of, I think it's the best," he said.

Baucus, Arkansas Sen. Mark Pryor and other moderate Democrats say they see an age in which sophisticated parental filters easily could block unseemly Web sites from children's wandering clicks. The idea is part of a larger legislative package Baucus is offering that would attempt to protect children from pornographic Web sites and give law enforcement

more resources to crack down on the worst offenders.

Pryor said Congress needs to thoroughly explore the xxx idea.

"This is not limited to (protecting) children," he said of pornography on the Internet. "There are millions and millions of adults that don't want to see it."

But the groups fighting the idea say it is unrealistic and would be difficult and costly to implement.

The Free Speech Coalition, one of the nation's largest adult entertainment trade groups, calls the idea the "get-toization" of their content and says it could be unconstitutional.

"It's a bad idea that won't work," spokesman Tom Hymes said. He said many Web sites would lose business if forced to change domain names, and the precedent would set a standard of targeting the adult industry for regulation.

The industry has proposed a "kids" domain instead, arguing that restricting children to one domain would be more realistic.

"It is far easier for parents to filter content in than it is to filter content out," said

Hymes.

That idea has gained little traction, though, as influential conservative groups have strongly lobbied on the issue and argued that the Internet should simply be scrubbed of all offensive content.

Those groups, of course, approach the issue from the opposite perspective of the industry groups. They believe a xxx domain could lead to a huge increase in pornographic content on the Internet, since it would be almost impossible to rid the .com domain of all adult Web sites.

"You don't even know if this will work," said Daniel Weiss, a senior analyst on media and sexuality for Focus on the Family.

Conservative groups like Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council have been fighting the idea for some time, and have already succeeded in blocking the domain temporarily last summer, the groups complained to the Bush administration after the Internet Corporation For Assigned Names and Numbers, or ICANN, temporarily approved a voluntary xxx domain.

Michael Gallagher, the Commerce Department official

who oversees ICANN, wrote the chairman of ICANN's board in August saying the department had received more than 6,000 letters from individuals expressing concern about the new domain. A final decision was delayed soon afterward.

In December, ICANN delayed action on the domain for the third time, saying a decision could come in the first few months of 2006.

Other administration officials seem conflicted about the idea.

At a January hearing before the Senate Commerce Committee, Deputy Assistant Attorney General Laura Parsky was hesitant after Pryor questioned her about it. "There are issues of practicality, and how it would be implemented and whether it would be effective," she said.

Baucus believes it couldn't hurt to try.

"It's a practical solution to a pernicious problem," he said.

"My sense is that it's gaining currency."

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