Don Gingrich
3/22 Lena Grove
Ringwood 3134

Mike Symon, MP
PO Box 232
Mitcham Vic 3132

Dear Sir:

I would like to share two comments regarding the Minister for Communications.

1. I believe that the building of a "fibre to the node" network is a good and forward thinking thing to be doing. While some may criticise it as being more connectivity than Australia need right now, these critics are missing a key point in computing -- in general, with every advance, the applications to take advantage of the improvement rapidly develop. It is, I believe, a case of "build it and they will come".

   The discussions of how better connectivity could contribute to better rural health care through the ability to share x-ray images nearly instantaneously is a clear case in point for the argument that the uses will be there.

2. Having been so forward thinking on one aspect of computer networks, I am appalled that the Senator has taken such a wrong-headed approach to the filtering issue. The proposed filter is the wrong solution for several reasons.

   a) As data traffic increases, as it will with the NBN, the performance impact of the filter will be more of a problem. (The tests were assuming a maximum data transfer rate approximately 1/8 of the base rate planned for the NBN.)

   b) The filter will only stop a small portion of the material that, in theory, should be stopped. (Do you genuinely believe that the ACMA list contains more than a very small fraction of the sites that breach its guidelines?) And with the continuing growth of the Internet, the problem will only increase. But, for the sake of the argument, if we assume that a list of all of the sites that the guidelines say should be blocked could be produced, the problem would then be the performance degradation that would result from filtering this much larger list.

   c) The primary argument that is continually put forward is that the filter will stop child pornography. This is simply not true since the people who deal in this abhorrent material seldom, if ever, use web sites to distribute it. The filter only looks at web traffic using the HTTP protocol. Most of the traffic in CP is either e-mail or chat rooms and is encrypted -- the filter won't touch this.

   A far better use of the money proposed for the filter would be more money for specialist police resources to track the images to the source and arrest the perpetrators. This would have the advantage of really doing something for the children who are being harmed in the production of the images.

   d) The research that was used to justify the whole exercise is flawed. This paper, The Exposure of Youth to Unwanted Sexual Material on the Internet, (http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Exposure_risk.pdf) is from a US peer reviewed journal. While I would agree that unwanted exposure to explicit images is not a good thing in any case, the numbers reported in this paper are significantly lower that those in the paper, Regulating Youth Access to Pornography, (https://www.tai.org.au/file.php?file=DP53.pdf) that is being used as the rationale for the filter. Either kids in the US are

significantly less curious than Aussie kids, or something is flawed with the numbers in one of these studies. Since the US paper was published in a recognised journal, I would argue that its numbers stand a better chance of being accurate.

e) The filter is "theatre". It gives the illusion of protection from "nasty" material. And, as such, it may mean that parents are less vigilant. This could lead to more rather than less exposure in real terms.

f) While the Senator assures us that it will ***never, ever***, be used to block politically sensitive material, the very presence of the filter, already installed, makes it much easier for a future government to politicise it. *If* it actually achieved its intended purpose, it *might* be possible to argue that this was an acceptable risk. But as the above arguments demonstrate, the filter does not actually block more than a fraction of the material that it is advertised as blocking. (Yes, I know that the Senator is careful to point out only that it blocked 100% of the ACMA list. But the other side of this is that there is a lot of material deserving of being blocked that is not on the list.) And it already is blocking political material. The foetuses on the anti-abortion site, are or should be, in my opinion, protected political speech. And note that I am strongly pro-choice in the matter of government regulation of abortion.

g) The blacklist **will** get out. It is as simple as that. It is not a question of if it will get out, but when. The current list has already leaked. Realistically, how long does anyone actually believe that the list will remain secret when it is distributed to hundreds of people at ISPs all over the country? As the saying goes, "Two can keep a secret, so long as one of them is dead."

The clear alternative is to proclaim a policy of increased specialist Federal police working in the area of Internet safety. This would include spending time in chat-rooms where predators "groom" their victims, in places where online bullying occurs, in the shadowy underworld where the child pornographers sell and trade their wares. All of these efforts would contribute to a safer Internet and a safer world for children. And isn't this about the children?

Sincerely,

Donald E (Don) Gingrich

Lecturer in System Administration

RMIT University

NTEU Delegate and Branch Executive member

I only provide my affiliation to demonstrate that my background gives me a firm grasp of the technical side of the areas that I have discussed in this letter. I would be happy to discuss these issues in greater detail at your convenience.