HONORING THE UNIVERSITY OF GUAM WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF THE WESTERN PACIFIC (WERI)

HON. ROBERT A. UNDERWOOD
OF GUAM
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Thursday, June 8, 2000

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the University of Guam Water and Environmental Research Institute of the Western Pacific (WERI) on their twenty-fifth anniversary. WERI is the only regional water research institute dedicated to the needs of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM).

Formerly established in June of 1975, WERI has since sought solutions to technical problems associated with the location, production, distribution, and management of freshwater resources—an extremely essential function for the island communities it serves. One of fifty-five water research institutes authorized by Congress in the U.S. through the Water Research Act of 1964, WERI has expanded from a one-person operation in 1975 to a staff today of fifteen people conducting research, training, and information dissemination for Guam and the Western Pacific. They have continually strived to foster and promote research, training, technical assistance, outreach, awareness, information sharing and dissemination.

Partially funded by the federal government, WERI provides a wide array of services to the University of Guam and the people of the Pacific insular region for a fraction of what independent consultants would charge. Their research program covers all the costs for materials, equipment, supplies, computers, audio visual, and field trip expenses required by 17 graduate and 4 undergraduate courses at the University of Guam. In addition, WERI conducts a number of professional training workshops throughout the region each year. During the past three years, their faculty has published over 65 reviewed journal articles, abstracts, and technical reports while carrying on the $860 billion in annual retail sales currently faced in electronic commerce. Right now, only $5 billion of the $860 billion in annual retail sales currently occurs over the Internet. But that figure will continue to grow exponentially in the future. So, the question we are asking ourselves is how are we going to adjust our laws to deal with this new medium? How will we animate the New Economy with our old values—such as our cherished right to privacy?

Today, the real privacy challenge we are facing isn’t Big Brother; it’s Big Browser. When it comes to your financial records, there are very few protections against a financial services firm from disclosing every check you’ve ever written, every credit card charge you’ve ever made, the medical exam you got before you received insurance. And as you surf the Web, there are no rules in place to prevent various web sites from collecting information about what sites you are viewing and how long you are viewing them. If you buy anything over the Internet, that information can be linked up to other personal identifiers to create disturbingly detailed digital dossiers that can profile your lifestyle, your interests, your hobbies, or your habits. I have sponsored or co-sponsored separate legislation, H.R. 1057, H.R. 3320, H.R. 3321, and H.R. 4380, which are aimed at addressing these broader privacy problems.

But we also know that the Social Security number is an critically important personal identifier that many online and offline businesses wish to obtain about consumers. Consumers today risk their financial privacy by giving their Social Security numbers away, with permission or without, to link a social security number that you might have with a name, address and telephone number. Where are the data-mining firms and private detective agencies that offer these services obtaining these numbers? In all likelihood, they are accessing information from the databases of credit bureaus, financial services companies or other commercial firms.

If someone actually obtains a Social Security number from one of these sites, they have a critically important piece of information that they can use to locate you, your habits, or your identity thefts, and other frauds or crimes. Privacy today has become a critically important piece of information that they can use to locate you, your habits, or your identity thefts, and other frauds or crimes. Privacy today has become a critically important piece of information that they can use to locate you, your habits, or your identity thefts, and other frauds or crimes.

The risks and abuses associated with misuse of the Social Security number are only being magnified by the rapid growth of electronic commerce. Right now, only $5 billion of the $860 billion in annual retail sales currently occur over the Internet. But that figure will continue to grow exponentially in the future. So, the question we are asking ourselves is how are we going to adjust our laws to deal with this new medium? How will we animate the New Economy with our old values—such as our cherished right to privacy?