

Hillary Clinton and Rick Lazio were rudely ushered into the Information Age, when the moderator during their second debate asked them their position on federal bill 602p, which she explained was pending legislation that would allow the U.S. Postal Service to charge five cents tax on every e-mail sent. This would make up for all the lost revenue from people who have been e-mailing to each other instead of mailing letters.

Lazio was downright emotional. "I am absolutely opposed to this," he said. "We need to keep the government's hands off the Internet." Clinton was also opposed. "Well, based on your description, I wouldn't vote for that bill," she said. "It sounds burdensome and not justifiable to me."

There was just one problem. There is no such bill. There never has been; "602p" is not even a valid name for a congressional bill. The question was sent into moderator Marcia Kramer of WCBS News from a New York voter and Internet user, who obviously had picked up word of the bill from the Internet itself. It is just one of the many false, dopey rumors that spread quickly in cyberspace and live a vibrant virtual life completely resistant to three-dimensional reality.

The incident says just about everything about where we are as a Tech Nation. Politicians and journalists are no further along on this stuff than the average Internet user.

But rather than see this as disappointing or even scary, think of it as an opportunity, a time for informed citizens to organize into a movement that Stanford Law Professor Lawrence Lessig likens to a kind of "environmentalism for information policy." Just as Rachel Carson's Silent Spring kicked off the environmental movement in 1962, we are now at the beginning of a new journey in building public awareness for the digital age.

There are some real technology issues facing New York and the nation, for some of which the candidates offer positions that are not just off-the-cuff.

PRIVACY AND SECURITY

by {ga=Iforlano}

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Amazon.com and other Internet companies have been changing their online agreements with their customers, in preparation for the sale of information they have gathered on them. These agreements are often written in cryptic legalese displayed in tiny type in a small box that prevents a customer from reading the whole document without scrolling down. Most consumers just click 'I Accept' without fully understanding the ramifications of what they are agreeing to. However, in an age when medical and financial information is increasingly stored online, consumers may be taking an unnecessary risk. According to a poll taken by the [Internet Policy Institute](#), over three quarters of New Yorkers want federal laws to restrict what kinds of personal information can be collected online about them.

In June, Clinton addressed this issue at the New York State Broadcasters Association where she announced that she is a strong supporter of individual privacy rights, including the right to know if, how, when and how much personal information is being sold. Clinton pledged to give priority to medical and financial privacy, and protection against identity theft.

Lazio has said relatively little on the issue.

DIGITAL DIVIDE

Government officials, industry leaders, academics and non-profit groups alike worry that rapid changes in information technology, including the introduction of broadband or high-speed Internet access technology, will make the gulf deeper between those who have access to such technology and those who don't. This is commonly called the digital divide. New Yorkers are very concerned about the gap in Internet use between higher and lower income Americans; well over three quarters believe that the government should subsidize Internet access for underserved populations, according to the Internet Policy Institute poll. To this end, the [New York City Economic Development Corporation](#) aims to capitalize on the growth of Silicon Alley by promoting high-tech economic development with its Digital NYC initiative, a program that offers affordable, Internet-ready office space in new high-tech districts.

Clinton has shown support for initiatives that help to bridge the digital divide such as increasing spending on new technology for public libraries, increasing economic and educational opportunities for minorities through tax credits and government guaranteed loans to new businesses in economically depressed areas, and increasing specialized technology training

programs for teachers. In April, Clinton attended the Women of Silicon Alley Summit where she introduced a new initiative to increase funding for women-owned businesses and teach women how to take their businesses online including the establishment of Women's Business Centers to provide support for these new businesses. Clinton has three proposals in this area that will finance and deploy technology in poor urban and rural areas and help small businesses upgrade their technology. Clinton also proposes increasing funding for wireless research and development for rural areas. She supports a variety of initiatives to increase the technology skills of New York's workforce including doubling federal funding for Regional Skills Alliances (RSAs), helping to foster school-business partnerships, making the Research and Experimentation Tax Credit permanent, and increasing the number of business incubators nationwide.

Lazio does not address the "digital divide" as such. Instead, his efforts in this area focus on technological economic development initiatives that will increase educational programs and employment opportunities. As congressman, Lazio supported the expansion of the term "computer professional" to include high income Internet professionals under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) so that companies are no longer required to pay overtime to these workers, thereby boosting the economy. He also introduced the Small Business Tax Fairness Act to increase the minimum wage and give tax breaks to small businesses. The Information Technology Industry Council gave Lazio a score of 100 percent for favoring policies that promote economic development and innovation. On the education front, Lazio helped secure funds for a youth computer-training program and for the Center for Emerging Technology at the engineering school of the State University at Stony Brook. He also pushed for U.S. Department of Commerce funding for a new technology incubator, established a high-technology "Working Group" for executives and served as a member of a roundtable of high-tech chief executive officers in Long Island.

E-GOVERNMENT

In the next few years, more and more government services will be available online. We will be able to pay our taxes, register for government programs and maybe even vote online. This year, Arizona became the first state to conduct electronic elections. Currently, the New York City Department of Information Technology is working on improving its e-government interactive services. Right now, New York is testing CityAccess, a kiosk that allow citizens to interact with city agencies and obtain information on job and housing opportunities, food and public assistance programs, adult and child services, health awareness bulletins, parking rules and regulations and senior citizen benefits and entitlements.

Neither candidate has addressed this issue publicly.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND COPYRIGHTS

Is it legal to 'share' digital music and movies by copying files onto your computer, or are you violating copyright laws? Recently, the Napster case, in which the music industry is suing a now hugely popular site that was started by a teenager to share music with his friends, brought this issue into the public eye. Some have argued that programs like Napster actually increase music sales, and allow some artists to circulate their music to millions of new listeners. But the music industry, afraid of losing billions of dollars, is determined to enforce their copyrights. In general, American law is biased towards the protection of intellectual property and copyright laws, but denial of rights to circulate files could be also seen as an attack on free speech. Intellectual property issues are also important because technology companies compete with one another to patent as many of their inventions as possible. Conflict often arises between companies over the legitimacy of their patents and their resulting position in the market as a result of the patents that they hold.

Neither candidate has addressed this issue publicly.

E-COMMERCE

Similar to mail-order catalogues, on-line purchases have not been subject to taxation unless the seller has offices in the state where the buyer resides. However, many people feel that Internet businesses have an unfair advantage against main street businesses in part because they can offer goods tax-free. The government also has lost substantial income due to the rise of e-commerce. Over half of New Yorkers feel that they shouldn't have to pay sales tax for purchases they make over the Internet, according to the Internet Policy Institute poll.

Neither candidate has addressed this issue publicly. However, we might infer from their comments on the fictional bill 602p that they would both be opposed to taxation of the Internet.

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Election Special-The Real Tech Issues, from Privacy to Copyright to Sales Tax

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