Copyright Office suggests AI copyright debate was settled in 1965

The US Copyright Office issued AI guidance this week that declared no laws need to be clarified when it comes to protecting authorship rights of humans producing AI-assisted works.

“Questions of copyrightability and AI can be resolved pursuant to existing law, without the need for legislative change,” the Copyright Office said.

More than 10,000 commenters weighed in on the guidance, with some hoping to convince the Copyright Office to guarantee more protections for artists as AI technologies advance and the line between human- and AI-created works seems to increasingly blur.

But the Copyright Office insisted that the AI copyright debate was settled in 1965 after commercial computer technology started advancing quickly and “difficult questions of authorship” were first raised. That was the first time officials had to ponder how much involvement human creators had in works created using computers.

Back then, the Register of Copyrights, Abraham Kaminstein—who was also instrumental in codifying fair use—suggested that “there is no one-size-fits-all answer” to copyright questions about computer-assisted human authorship. And the Copyright Office agrees that’s still the case today.

“Very few bright-line rules are possible,” the Copyright

Office said, with one obvious exception. Because of “insufficient human control over the expressive elements” of resulting works, “if content is entirely generated by AI, it cannot be protected by copyright.”

The office further clarified that doesn’t mean that works assisted by AI can never be copyrighted.

“Where AI merely assists an author in the creative process, its use does not change the copyrightability of the output,” the Copyright Office said.

Following Kaminstein’s advice, officials plan to continue reviewing AI disclosures and weighing, on a case-by-case basis, what parts of each work are AI-authored and which parts are human-authored. Any human-authored expressive element can be copyrighted, the office said, but any aspect of the work deemed to have been generated purely by AI cannot.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/01/copyright-office-suggests-ai-copyright-debate-was-settled-in-1965/

OpenAI teases “new era” of AI in US, deepens ties with government

On Thursday, OpenAI announced that it is deepening its ties with the US government through a partnership with the National Laboratories and expects to use AI to “supercharge” research across a wide range of fields to better serve the public.

“This is the beginning of a new era, where AI will advance science, strengthen national security, and support US government initiatives,” OpenAI said.

The deal ensures that “approximately 15,000 scientists working across a wide range of disciplines to advance our understanding of nature and the universe” will have access to OpenAI’s latest reasoning models, the announcement said.

For researchers from Los Alamos, Lawrence Livermore, and Sandia National Labs, access to “o1 or another o-series model” will be available on Venado—an Nvidia supercomputer at Los Alamos that will become a “shared resource.” Microsoft will help deploy the model, OpenAI noted.

OpenAI suggested this access could propel major “breakthroughs in materials science, renewable energy, astrophysics,” and other areas that Venado was “specifically designed” to advance.

Key areas of focus for Venado’s deployment of OpenAI’s model include accelerating US global tech leadership, finding ways to treat and prevent disease, strengthening cybersecurity, protecting the US power grid, detecting natural and man-made threats “before they emerge,” and ” deepening our understanding of the forces that govern the universe,” OpenAI said.

Perhaps among OpenAI’s flashiest promises for the partnership, though, is helping the US achieve a “a new era of US energy leadership by unlocking the full potential of natural resources and revolutionizing the nation’s energy infrastructure.” That is urgently needed, as officials have warned that America’s aging energy infrastructure is becoming increasingly unstable, threatening the country’s health and welfare, and without efforts to stabilize it, the US economy could tank.

But possibly the most “highly consequential” government use

case for OpenAI’s models will be supercharging research safeguarding national security, OpenAI indicated.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/01/openai-partners-with-national-labs-to-supercharge-scientific-breakthroughs/

Democrat teams up with movie industry to propose website-blocking law

US Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.) today proposed a law that would let copyright owners obtain court orders requiring Internet service providers to block access to foreign piracy websites. The bill would also force DNS providers to block sites.

Lofgren said in a press release that she “work[ed] for over a year with the tech, film, and television industries” on “a proposal that has a remedy for copyright infringers located overseas that does not disrupt the free Internet except for the infringers.” Lofgren said she plans to work with Republican leaders to enact the bill.

Lofgren’s press release includes a quote from Charles Rivkin, chairman and CEO of the Motion Picture Association (MPA). As we’ve previously written, the MPA has been urging Congress to pass a site-blocking law.

“More than 55 nations around the world, including democracies such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, have put in place tools similar to those proposed by Rep. Lofgren, and

they have successfully reduced piracy's harms while protecting consumer access to legal content," Rivkin was quoted as saying in Lofgren's press release today.

Lofgren is the ranking member of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee and a member of the House Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual Property, Artificial Intelligence and the Internet.

Bill called "censorious site-blocking" measure

Although Lofgren said her proposed Foreign Anti-Digital Piracy Act "preserves the open Internet," consumer advocacy group Public Knowledge described the bill as a "censorious site-blocking" measure "that turns broadband providers into copyright police at Americans' expense."

"Rather than attacking the problem at its source—bringing the people running overseas piracy websites to court—Congress and its allies in the entertainment industry has decided to build out a sweeping infrastructure for censorship," Public Knowledge Senior Policy Counsel Meredith Rose said. "Site-blocking orders force any service provider, from residential broadband providers to global DNS resolvers, to disrupt traffic from targeted websites accused of copyright infringement. More importantly, applying blocking orders to global DNS resolvers results in *global blocks.* This means that one court can cut off access to a website globally, based on one individual's filing and an expedited procedure. Blocking orders are incredibly powerful weapons, ripe for abuse, and we've seen the messy consequences of them being implemented in other countries."

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/01/movie-industry-loves-bill-that-would-force-isps-to-block-piracy-websites/

Trump cribs Musk’s “fork in the road” Twitter memo to slash gov’t workforce

Despite these ongoing threats to job security that might push some to resign, the OPM repeatedly emphasized that any choice to accept a buyout and resign was “voluntary.” Additionally, OPM explained that employees could rescind resignations; however, if an agency wants to move quickly to reassign their roles, that “would likely serve as a valid reason to deny” such requests.

On Reddit, workers expressed concerns about “critical departments” that “have been understaffed for years” being hit with more cuts. A lively discussion specifically focused on government IT workers being “really hard” to recruit.

“Losing your IT support is a very efficient way to cripple an org,” one commenter wrote, prompting responses from two self-described IT workers.

“It’s me, I work in government IT,” one commenter said, calling Trump’s return-to-office mandate the “real killer” because “the very best sysadmins and server people all work remote from other states.”

“There is a decent chance they just up and ditch this dumpster fire,” the commenter said.

Losing talented workers with specific training could bog down government workflows, Redditors suggested. Another apparent

government IT worker described himself as “a little one man IT business,” claiming “if I disappeared or died, there would be exactly zero people to take my place. Between the random shit I know and the low pay, nobody is going to be able to fill my position.”

Accusing Trump of not caring “about keeping competent workers or running government services properly,” a commenter prompted another to respond, “nevermind that critical departments have been understaffed for years. He thinks he’s cutting fat, but he’s cutting indiscriminately and gonna lose a limb.”

According to another supposed federal worker, paying employees to retire has historically resulted in spikes in agency costs.

“The way this usually works is we pay public employees to retire,” the commenter wrote. “Then we pay a private company twice the rate to do the same job that public employee was doing. Sometimes it’s even the same employee doing the work. I’ve literally known people that left government jobs to do contractor work making far more for doing the same thing. But somehow this is ‘smaller government’ and more efficient.”

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/01/copying-musk-trump-admin-offers-federal-workers-buyouts-to-resign/

Trump admin rescinds controversial funding freeze after two days of protest

Broadband program still in doubt

As we've previously reported, US Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) and other Republicans want to overhaul the BEAD funding plans. Cruz accused the NTIA of "technology bias" because the agency decided that fiber networks should be prioritized over other types of technology, and Republicans objected to the Biden administration's enforcement of a requirement that low-cost plans be offered.

The US law that created BEAD requires Internet providers receiving federal funds to offer at least one "low-cost broadband service option for eligible subscribers," but also says the NTIA may not "regulate the rates charged for broadband service." Republicans allege that the NTIA has gone too far in the direction of rate regulation, and Internet providers complained about NTIA guidance that "strongly encouraged" states to set a fixed rate of $30 per month for the low-cost service option.

Cruz, who is chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, has said that Congress will do a thorough review of the program early in 2025. Levin's research note said the NTIA was likely to have paused spending even if the Trump administration hadn't tried to freeze funding.

"Even without the memo, we would not have been surprised to see NTIA informally pause spending while it awaits guidance on how the Trump Administration wishes to proceed with the program," Levin wrote. New Street Research expects to see changes similar to those proposed by Cruz.

"We expect a pause in BEAD funding, and perhaps USF [Universal Service Fund] funding as well, but further expect that, because the funding largely assists Republican areas, the pause will be relatively short," Levin wrote. "Still, we acknowledge considerable uncertainty about the timing and constraints on future BEAD spending."

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/01/trump-admin-rescinds-controversial-funding-freeze-after-two-days-of-protest/

AI haters build tarpits to trap and trick AI scrapers that ignore robots.txt

Currently, Aaron predicts that Nepenthes might be most attractive to rights holders who want AI companies to pay to scrape their data. And many people seem enthusiastic about using it to reinforce robots.txt. But “some of the most exciting people are in the ‘let it burn’ category,” Aaron said. These people are drawn to tools like Nepenthes as an act of rebellion against AI making the Internet less useful and enjoyable for users.

Geuter told Ars that he considers Nepenthes “more of a sociopolitical statement than really a technological solution (because the problem it’s trying to address isn’t purely technical, it’s social, political, legal, and needs way bigger levers).”

To Geuter, a computer scientist who has been writing about the social, political, and structural impact of tech for two decades, AI is the “most aggressive” example of “technologies that are not done ‘for us’ but ‘to us.'”

“It feels a bit like the social contract that society and the tech sector/engineering have had (you build useful things, and

we’re OK with you being well-off) has been canceled from one side,” Geuter said. “And that side now wants to have its toy eat the world. People feel threatened and want the threats to stop.”

As AI evolves, so do attacks, with one 2021 study showing that increasingly stronger data poisoning attacks, for example, were able to break data sanitization defenses. Whether these attacks can ever do meaningful destruction or not, Geuter sees tarpits as a “powerful symbol” of the resistance that Aaron and Nagy readily joined.

“It’s a great sign to see that people are challenging the notion that we all have to do AI now,” Geuter said. “Because we don’t. It’s a choice. A choice that mostly benefits monopolists.”

Tarpit creators like Nagy will likely be watching to see if poisoning attacks continue growing in sophistication. On the Iocaine site—which, yes, is protected from scraping by Iocaine—he posted this call to action: “Let’s make AI poisoning the norm. If we all do it, they won’t have anything to crawl.”

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/01/ai-haters-build-tarpits-to-trap-and-trick-ai-scrapers-that-ignore-robots-txt/

Senator Ted Cruz is trying to block Wi-Fi hotspots for

schoolchildren

The Cruz resolution to nullify the FCC rule was co-sponsored by Sens. John Thune (R-S.D.), Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), Deb Fischer (R-Neb.), Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.), Todd Young (R-Ind.), Ted Budd (R-N.C.), Eric Schmitt (R-Mo.), John Curtis (R-Utah), Tim Sheehy (R-Mont.), Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.), and Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.).

The FCC's plan

Under the CRA, Congress can reverse recent agency actions. The exact deadline isn't always clear, but the Congressional Research Service estimated "that Biden Administration rules submitted to the House or Senate on or after August 1, 2024" are likely to be subject to the CRA during the first few months of 2025. The FCC hotspot rule was submitted to Congress in August.

The FCC rule expands E-Rate, a Universal Service Fund program that helps schools and libraries obtain affordable broadband. The hotspot order would let schools and libraries use E-Rate funding for "lending programs to loan Wi-Fi hotspots and services that can be used off-premises to the students, school staff, and library patrons with the greatest need," the FCC says.

The FCC's hotspot order said "technology has become an integral part of the modern classroom," and that "neither Congress nor the Commission has defined the term 'classroom' or placed any explicit location restrictions on schools or libraries."

"We conclude that funding Wi-Fi hotspots and services for off-

premises use will help enhance access for school classrooms and libraries to the broadband connectivity necessary to facilitate digital learning for students and school staff, as well as library services for library patrons who lack broadband access when they are away from school or library premises," the FCC order said.

Off-premises use can help "the student who has no way of accessing their homework to prepare for the next day's classroom lesson, or the school staff member who is unable to engage in parent-teacher meetings or professional trainings that take place after the school day ends, or the library patron who needs to attend a virtual job interview or perform bona fide research after their library's operating hours," the FCC said.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/01/senator-ted-cruz-is-trying-to-block-wi-fi-hotspots-for-schoolchildren/

Google goes gaga over the Gulf of Mexico

Well, that didn't take long.

Google Maps, the most popular mapping software in the world, said on Monday evening that it will begin using new names for two prominent geographical features in North America, the Gulf of Mexico and Mount Denali. As soon as "they have been updated in official government sources," Google said on the social media site X, it would change the names of these features to

the Gulf of America and Mount McKinley.

The announcement comes a little less than a week after President Donald Trump signed an executive order to, in his words, “promote the extraordinary heritage of our Nation and ensure future generations of American citizens celebrate the legacy of our American heroes.” This included renaming the Gulf and the highest mountain in North America.

The order declared that, within 30 days, the Secretary of the Interior should take all appropriate actions to change the names of the prominent body of water and mountain. To do this, the database of name and location information published by the US Geological Survey, the Geographic Names Information System, should be updated accordingly. These files are revised on a bi-monthly basis.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/01/bowing-to-trump-google-maps-plans-to-quickly-rename-the-gulf-of-mexico/

FCC chair helps ISPs and landlords make deals that renters can’t escape

Lobby groups thank new FCC chair

Housing industry lobby groups praised Carr in a press release issued by the National Multifamily Housing Council (NMHC),

National Apartment Association (NAA), and Real Estate Technology and Transformation Center (RETTC). “His decision to withdraw the proposal will ensure that millions of consumers—renters, homeowners and condominium owners—will continue to reap the benefits of bulk billing,” the press release said.

The industry press release claims that bulk billing agreements negotiated between property owners and Internet service providers “typically secur[e] high-speed Internet for renters at rates up to 50 percent lower than standard retail pricing” and remove “barriers to broadband adoption like credit checks, security deposits, equipment rentals, or installation fees.”

“Bulk billing arrangements have made high-speed internet more accessible and affordable for millions of Americans, especially for low-income renters and seniors living in affordable housing,” NMHC President Sharon Wilson Géno said.

While the FCC prohibits deals in which a service provider has the exclusive right to access and serve a building, there are other ways in which competitors can be effectively shut out of buildings. In 2022, the FCC said its existing rules weren’t strong enough and added a ban on exclusive revenue-sharing agreements between landlords and ISPs in multi-tenant buildings. The revenue-sharing ban was approved 4–0, including votes from both Rosenworcel and Carr.

Comcast, Charter, Cox, and cable lobby group NCTA opposed Rosenworcel’s plan for a bulk billing ban, saying that “interfering with the ability of building owners to offer these arrangements to their tenants will result in higher broadband and video prices and other harms for consumers, with questionable and limited benefits.”

Carr issued a statement today, saying, “During the Biden-Harris Administration, FCC leadership put forward a ‘bulk billing’ proposal that could have raised the price of Internet

service for Americans living in apartments by as much as 50 percent. This regulatory overreach from Washington would have hit families right in their pocketbooks at a time when they were already hurting from the last administration's inflationary policies. That is why you saw a broad and bipartisan coalition of groups opposing the plan. After all, seniors, students, and low-income individuals would have been hit particularly hard." Carr also said that he plans more actions "to reverse the last administration's costly regulatory overreach."

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/01/fcc-chair-nixes-plan-to-boost-broadband-competition-in-apartment-buildings/

Trump's reported plans to save TikTok may violate SCOTUS-backed law

A source familiar with Perplexity AI's proposal confirmed to Ars that the reporting from CNBC and AP News is accurate.

Trump denied Oracle's involvement in talks

Over the weekend, there was also a lot of speculation about Oracle's involvement in negotiations. NPR reported that two sources with direct knowledge claimed that Trump was considering "tapping software company Oracle and a group of

outside investors to effectively take control of the app’s global operations.”

That would be a seemingly bigger grab for the US than forcing ByteDance to divest only TikTok’s US operations.

“The goal is for Oracle to effectively monitor and provide oversight with what is going on with TikTok,” one source told NPR. “ByteDance wouldn’t completely go away, but it would minimize Chinese ownership.”

Oracle apparently met with the Trump administration on Friday and has another meeting scheduled this week to discuss Oracle buying a TikTok stake “in the tens of billions,” NPR reported.

But Trump has disputed that, saying this past weekend that he “never” spoke to Oracle about buying TikTok, AP News reported.

“Numerous people are talking to me. Very substantial people,” Trump said, confirming that he would only make a deal to save TikTok “if the United States benefits.”

All sources seemed to suggest that no deal was close to being finalized yet. Other potential Big Tech buyers include Microsoft or even possibly Elon Musk (can you imagine TikTok merged with X?). On Saturday, Trump suggested that he would likely announce his decision on TikTok’s future in the next 30 days.

Meanwhile, TikTok access has become spotty in the US. Google and Apple dropped TikTok from their app stores when the divest-or-ban law kicked in, partly because of the legal limbo threatening hundreds of billions in fines if Trump changes his mind about enforcement. That means ByteDance currently can’t push updates to US users, and anyone who offloads TikTok or purchases a new device can’t download the app in popular distribution channels.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/01/trump-may-leave-ti

ktoks-algorithm-under-bytedances-control/