DOI:10.1145/1461928.1461929

Eugene H. Spafford

USACM's Policy Role

As ACM members we understand that computing technologies enable and support much of modern society. Furthermore,

we envision computing advances effecting positive transformations in government, business, and society. Those changes may conflict with traditions and policies developed in other times, however. Laws and regulations significantly impact our efforts in computing, and policymakers often do not understand the underlying technology. ACM members have a professional duty to ensure that the public comprehends and benefits from advances in computing. Thus, ACM clearly must have a role in educating policymakers and shaping policy.

The ACM U.S. Public Policy Committee (USACM) is chartered to address public policy issues in the U.S. in a non-partisan, proactive manner. In conjunction with the ACM's Washington office, USACM members track legislative and regulatory issues at the federal level (and sometimes at the state level). Membership represents a cross section of the ACM, including representatives from the SIG Board and several ACM Committees. USACM regularly produces briefs, educational materials, and Congressional testimony on key computing issues. Members also regularly engage key personnel in government agencies and advocacy organizations. Our activities are directed to ensure that policymakers understand both the capabilities and limitations of computing.

USACM's priorities for providing information will continue to be important under the new administration:

Privacy. Government is in an extraordinary position to compile information about people and organizations for legitimate reasons: law enforcement, tax collection, national security, census col-

lection, among others. The private sector is also accumulating ever-increasing amounts of personal information. Unfortunately, "leaks" and information misuse imperil privacy and enable crime, often because of insufficient attention is devoted to privacy during system design and operation.

Currently, there are two looming privacy concerns: implementation of the REAL-ID Act, a de facto national ID program using state driver's licenses; and using databases with sensitive, personal information to verify employment eligibility (E-Verify). USACM will continue to advise legislators how to mitigate the concerns with these initiatives.

Reliability and Security. Appropriate computing technology can render government activities more effective and economical. Unfortunately, technology can suffer failures—whether accidental or malicious—with impacts that are not always understood by policymakers. Given proposed reforms to health care, financial systems, and cyber security improvements, USACM will undoubtedly need to provide continued suggestions about safeguards and protections.

Accuracy. Many people do not understand computing's limitations. In response, USACM has provided guidance on issues such as biometrics and data-matching error rates. We continue to advise policymakers about how to use computing technologies so as to avoid adverse consequences.

Voting. Using computers in election systems without adequate protection against fraud and error is a long-standing concern for USACM. Several voting bills have stalled in Congress in recent

years, but the issue continues to be active at both state and federal levels. We will continue to pursue appropriate reforms and safeguards.

Intellectual Property (IP). ACM is a major publisher and the ACM trademark is an important asset. Many ACM members produce intellectual property. USACM respects the legal framework that allows property owners and creators to have some control over how their IP is used. However, we have concerns about regulations (for example, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act) and technologies that impact scholarship, fair use, reverse analysis for accessibility and security, and other reasonable uses of IP. USACM continues to champion an equitable IP regime.

Accessibility. USACM advocates for computing access that is fair and inclusive for everyone, including people with disabilities. Our recent public statement on this topic involved contributions by SIGACCESS, SIGCHI, and SIGWEB. USACM is promoting this position for both existing and future systems.

In addition to these projects, USACM also works closely with the Computing Research Association on diversity and science funding policy. K-12 education policy is addressed by our peer, the ACM Education Policy Committee.

These issues all relate to computing technology in important ways, but none can be solved with technology alone. Instead, workable solutions require people who understand the technology, and who invest the effort to understand and participate in the policy environment. USACM has addressed this challenge for 15 years, and the set of issues to address keeps growing. That's good, because it reflects the growing importance of computing and the ACM!

For more information about USACM, visit <http://www.acm.org/usacm/>.

Eugene H. Spafford is a professor of CS at Purdue University and executive director of CERT/AS. He is also chair of ACM's U.S. Public Policy Committee.