



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20580

Division of Privacy and Identity Protection
Bureau of Consumer Protection
Joel Winston
Associate Director

Direct Dial: (202) 326-3153

November 17, 2008

Carl Malamud
President & CEO
Public.Resource.Org
1005 Gravenstein Highway North
Sebastopol, CA 95472

Dear Mr. Malamud:

Thank you for your letter concerning the public availability of certain military officers' Social Security numbers (SSNs). As you note, these numbers were printed in the Congressional Record and eventually posted online as part of the advice and consent stage of the officers' promotions in rank.

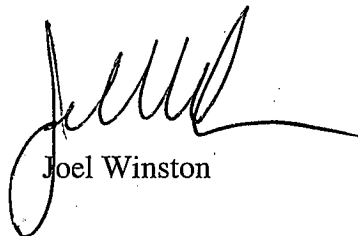
The Federal Trade Commission shares your concern about the public availability of SSNs. Through our work with the President's Identity Theft Task Force we have undertaken to educate both businesses and consumers about how to reduce the unnecessary use and display of SSNs, and how best to safeguard them when they are used. Moreover, the Task Force recommendations have led the Federal government to reduce the use and display of the SSN in many of its functions and many federal agencies, including the Department of Defense, have developed policies to reduce their use of SSNs. Eliminating the unnecessary uses of SSNs is a critical component in combating identity theft.

As you point out, however, SSNs remain accessible to the public in many different places. This is often because they were collected and disseminated prior to the heightened awareness that exists today with respect to how SSNs can be used to commit identity theft. Locating all places where SSNs remain in the public domain and restricting access to them is a challenging but ongoing process.

As you know, Thompson Reuters recently took the records you identified offline and is working with Congress and the Government Printing Office to find a solution for dealing with back issues of the publication that contain SSNs. We are hopeful that a permanent solution can be found in the near future.

We will continue our efforts to eliminate SSNs from the public domain and we appreciate your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joel Winston', with a large, stylized initial 'J' and a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joel Winston