

# THE DIGITAL WILL OF THE PEOPLE

Pablo del Real

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Never before in the history of the world has it been possible for elected representatives to hear the voices of their constituents simultaneously and instantaneously across great distances. The Internet enables this. Today, for the first time in a modern nation, citizens can be genuinely represented in the process of legislation.

But does your federal representative consult you before she casts her vote on bills and resolutions? Does she ask your opinion on laws that will affect you and the entire nation? For most of us, the answer is “No.”

However, does your representative talk to some citizens, maybe friends of his, as well as corporate lobbyists? We know he does. He is busy talking to somebody, just not to us. So why does he consult with those few and not with me or you? The answer used to be that it was a matter of logistics—it was impossible to solicit the opinion of each

constituent in every single district. But that's not true anymore, not since the advent of the Internet.

Today, U.S. representatives can easily ask constituents for their opinions on every bill and resolution. Now they can know how their districts want them to vote on every piece of law proposed. Electronically publishing the collective wish of the populace for each House bill would result in the "digital" will of the people.

Simply put, the digital will of the people is the measurement of our sentiment—a simple Yea or Nay—regarding proposed legislation. Let us use the Internet to render the will of the people visible, and let us give ourselves a voice in our own politics. Here is how it would work.

Each congressional district would have its own web page at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov). Citizens would be invited to register for representation with their district, just as they are invited to register to vote now. When bills are scheduled for a vote in the House, citizens would receive an e-mail with a simple poll asking them to indicate their preference with a Yes or No regarding any bills being proposed.

With an automatic tally of Yeas and Nays, each representative would know what her constituents want her to do and say. Aggregating the counts of all the districts across the country would create a national figure for each bill, allowing everyone first to see the collective wish of the people. Then, later, we could compare it to the actual vote in the House. For example:

#### Poll results for H.R. 103 Universal Health Care Act

the People: Yea (68% vs. 32%)

the House: Nay (49% vs. 51%)

To be effective, the digital will of the people would have to be official—it should be a governmental tool and bear the government's

imprimatur. Government sponsorship and implementation of the tool would ensure the best possible conditions for the integration of citizens and their representatives. The same tool managed by the people themselves would be ineffective.

To be clear, We the People want a voice, not a vote. Representatives need not heed the popular will once it does become visible; they would retain what amounts to veto power over the will of the people. The digital will can improve representative democracy, not by making it direct, but by requiring direct dialogue—a direct connection between citizens and their representatives.

Of course, representative government is alive and well. However, the entities being represented are corporations and not average citizens. Corporations, through lobbyists, have our representatives' ears. Meanwhile, We the People are voiceless—what we feel, nobody hears. Corporations are not the bad guys; they are merely gaming the system as it exists.

The opportunity to involve citizens in the process of legislation has existed since the year 2000 when the Internet achieved widespread reach. That the government has not seized or acted on the opportunity in eight years should make us believe that it needs some prodding from you and me, the people—We.

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### *About the Author*

Pablo del Real is the founder of Auroras Voice, a not-for-profit organization devoted to vesting American citizens with legitimate political power. The above essay is adapted from his book *P-poll: Are You Happy Now?*