

FOR IMMEDIATE USE November 28, 2000 -- No. 510

Red Hat Center's \$100K grant funds free public access to legal information at Cornell's Legal Information Institute

DURHAM, NC and ITHACA, NY -- Red Hat Center, a non-profit foundation that supports the growth of a healthy and robust information commons and public domain, announces today a gift in the amount of \$100,000 to Cornell University's Legal Information Institute (LII) to fund key improvements to LII's web site, which provides free public access to U.S. laws and court decisions. The grant enables LII to write software that will let web users read any portion of the U.S. Code as it was in effect at particular points in time.

"We are gratified at the Center's recognition of our institute's commitment to free and effective public access to legal information," said Cornell law professor Peter W. Martin, co-director of the Legal Information Institute. "Through this grant we shall be able to realize major improvements in providing free public access to the United States Code -- the compilation of federal statutes that lays down fundamental law on topics ranging from immigration to federal elections, from fair labor standards to copyright and environmental protection. Co-director Tom Bruce and I are enormously excited by the improvements this grant from the Red Hat Center will make possible. The Code is already the most heavily used legal resource at the LII site (<http://lii.law.cornell.edu>). These improvements will provide users more flexible access to its provisions and enable them to see and pursue connections between the Code's provisions and related legal documents. Our conviction is that this will demonstrate even more forcefully what open access to law can mean."

Public access to current legal information in the public domain has been limited by the high costs of older publishing methods. LII's online U.S. Code is a model of open architecture that allows free and direct public access to quality legal information organized in a searchable way. The improvements funded by Red Hat Center will allow users to extract large ranges of sections in formats suitable for use on PCs, personal digital devices, or printers, and will permit linking the Code to relevant court cases, regulations, and explanatory material.

"The Cornell law web site was one of the first sites providing ordinary citizens with online access to the real text of laws and court decisions. I'd gotten tired of reading press accounts of what the law said, and tired of digging in paper law libraries. I'm proud that Red Hat Center is helping LII improve the public's understanding of the law," said John Gilmore, Red Hat Center board member, and co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

"Cornell's LII has been a leader in making law open source from the early days of the Internet. Red Hat Center is right to support the expansion of LII's project, to better enable it to provide access to legal materials on a free and open basis," stated Lawrence Lessig, Professor of Law at Stanford University and Red Hat Center board member.

About the Legal Information Institute (LII)

Launched in 1992, the Legal Information Institute of Cornell Law School has led the movement to improve public access to law in the United States by placing key legal materials on the Internet in non-proprietary format, structured in ways that facilitate unrestricted reuse by others. LII receives more than 8 million hits a week. More than 90,000 web pages link to LII, including those of the White House and the U.S. House of Representatives, and it has been cited as a resource in more than 500 newspapers and magazines. See <http://lii.law.cornell.edu>.

About Red Hat Center

Red Hat Center is a non-profit foundation that supports the growth of a healthy and robust information commons and public domain, through grants, programs, and partnerships in the areas of law, medicine, education, media, technology, academic research, and the arts. Red Hat Center's purpose is to stimulate discussion around, and to raise awareness of, information freely available to the public within the Information Commons. Located in North Carolina's Research Triangle Park, Red Hat Center is a private foundation endowed by Bob Young and Mark Ewing, the founders of Red Hat, Inc. For more information about Red Hat Center visit www.rhcenter.org.

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