

US adds Canada to Web piracy list

Problems with border policing blamed

By Dave McNary

Variety

April 30, 2009

The Obama administration has added Canada to a target list of a dozen countries for failing to protect U.S. producers of music, movies and other copyrighted material from piracy. The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative announced Thursday that Canada had been placed on its "priority watch list" due to problems with border policing. The office recommended that customs officers be given the power to seize suspected pirated or counterfeit goods without a court order.

"Our creative and innovative products can hit the global marketplace sometimes with just a keystroke," said U.S. trade representative Ron Kirk in a statement. "If we and our trading partners are not vigilant in protecting and enforcing intellectual property rights, they can vanish just as quickly."

China and Russia remained on the priority watch list -- released annually for the past two decades -- due to ongoing piracy of movies, music, software and other copyrighted material. Kirk said he was troubled by reports that Chinese officials are urging more lenient enforcement of intellectual property rights laws and urged that China strengthen its approach.

Algeria, Argentina, Chile, Indonesia, Israel, Pakistan, Thailand and Venezuela were also included on the list, which subjects those nations to heightened scrutiny and could lead to economic sanctions.

AFTRA president Roberta Reardon strongly endorsed the report.

"Creativity fuels productivity, and protecting AFTRA members' creative works is a critical step toward ensuring that artists continue to thrive and, in doing so, contribute to the success of the U.S. economy," she said. The report was issued three weeks after Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs committee, held a hearing in Los Angeles as a prelude to introducing legislation aimed at curbing piracy outside the U.S. Steven Soderbergh testified at the hearing as VP of the Directors Guild of America, which this week endorsed French legislation that would call for a temporary cutoff of Web service for those who upload or download content illegally.

"Our country and our trading partners depend on investments in intellectual property to drive our economies," Berman said Thursday. "But incentives and profits for engaging in copyright piracy are high, while the risks of being caught and brought to justice are low in many countries around the world. These problematic places have been identified, and now we must focus on enforcement."