1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Jeffrey A. LeVee (State Bar No. 125863) John S. Sasaki (State Bar No. 202161) Sean W. Jaquez (State Bar No. 223132) JONES DAY 555 West Fifth Street, Suite 4600 Los Angeles, CA 90013-1025 Telephone: (213) 489-3939 Facsimile: (213) 243-2539 Attorneys for Defendant INTERNET CORPORATION FOR ASSIGN NAMES AND NUMBERS SUPERIOR COURT OF	NED THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA	
9	COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES		
10	SNAPNAMES.COM INCORPORATED,	CASE NO. BC 324782	
11	an Oregon corporation, Plaintiff,	Assigned for all purposes to Judge Emilie H. Elias	
12 13	v.	Complaint Filed: November 18, 2004	
14	INTERNET CORPORATION FOR ASSIGNED NAMES AND NUMBERS, a	NOTICE OF HEARING ON DEMURRER	
15	California corporation; Defendant.	AND DEMURRER BY DEFENDANT INTERNET CORPORATION FOR	
16		ASSIGNED NAMES AND NUMBERS; MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES	
17 18		[Filed concurrently with ICANN's Notice Of	
		Request And Request For Judicial Notice]	
19 20		[C.C.P. § 430.10]	
21		Date: February 10, 2005 Time: 8:45 a.m.	
22		Dept.: 3	
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		ND DEMURRER BY DEFENDANT OR ASSIGNED NAMES AND NUMBERS	

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NOTICE OF HEARING ON DEMURRER

TO ALL PARTIES AND THEIR ATTORNEYS OF RECORD:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on February 10, 2005, at 8:45 a.m., or as soon thereafter as counsel may be heard, in Department 3 of the above-entitled Court located at the Stanley Mosk Courthouse, 111 North Hill Street, Los Angeles, California 90012, defendant Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers ("ICANN") will and hereby does demur to the Complaint filed herein by plaintiff SnapNames.com Inc.

The demurrer is made pursuant to California Code of Civil Procedure section 430.10, and is based upon this Notice of Hearing; the Demurrer by Defendant Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers and Memorandum of Points and Authorities filed herewith; the concurrently-filed Request for Judicial Notice; the pleadings, documents, and records on file in this action; and all other matters that may appropriately be presented to the Court before or at the hearing on the demurrer.

DATED: January 7, 2005

JONES DAY

By: Jeffrey A. Je

Attorneys for Defendant INTERNET CORPORATION FOR ASSIGNED NAMES AND NUMBERS

LAI-2169189v1

<u>DEMURRER</u>

ICANN demurs to the Complaint on the following grounds:

- 1. The Complaint fails to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action for tortious interference with an existing contract for two separate and independent reasons:
 - (a) The allegations of the Complaint admit that the subject matter of the purported contract cannot be implemented without approval from the United States Department of Commerce. Unless and until such approval is obtained, the purported contract is not of sufficient force and effect to support a claim for tortious interference.
 - (b) The allegations of the Complaint establish that ICANN and plaintiff had separate contracts with the same third party. ICANN was entitled to resort to any legitimate means to protect its own contractual interests, even if the necessary result was to cause a breach of plaintiff's contract.

DATED: January 7, 2005

JONES DAY

Attorneys for Defendant

INTERNET CORPORATION FOR

ASSIGNED NAMES AND NUMBERS

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MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

INTRODUCTION

ICANN is a not-for-profit, public benefit corporation dedicated to preserving the operational stability of, and managing the domain name system for, the Internet. ICANN sells no goods or services, and it has no trade or business. (Indeed, its bylaws prohibit it from selling domain names, for example.) Thus, while ICANN's decisions and actions may have an impact on companies that offer services to users of the Internet, ICANN is not in competition with any of those companies. ICANN operates pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding that it originally signed with the United States Department of Commerce, which has ultimate authority with respect to any changes to the domain name system. The purpose of the Memorandum of Understanding was to facilitate a transition of the responsibilities related to the management of the domain name system from the Department of Commerce to the private sector.²

Plaintiff SnapNames.com Inc. alleges in this action that ICANN intentionally and tortiously interfered with a contract plaintiff entered into with VeriSign, Inc. Plaintiff alleges that the subject contract provided for the use of plaintiff's technology in VeriSign's proposed implementation of a new Internet service known as the "Wait Listing Service" ("WLS"), and that ICANN has blocked VeriSign's (and, thus, plaintiff's) efforts to introduce that service. Plaintiff

See http://www.icann.org/faq/#WhatisICANN.

¹ Background regarding ICANN may be found at its Internet web site, located at http://www.icann.org/. Its "frequently asked questions" page contains the following about ICANN:

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is responsible for managing and coordinating the Domain Name System (DNS) to ensure that every address is unique and that all users of the Internet can find all valid addresses. It does this by overseeing the distribution of unique IP addresses and domain names. It also ensures that each domain name maps to the correct IP address. ICANN is also responsible for accrediting the domain name registrars. "Accredit" means to identify and set minimum standards for the performance of registration functions, to recognize persons or entities meeting those standards, and to enter into an accreditation agreement that sets forth the rules and procedures applicable to the provision of Registrar Services.

² A copy of the original Memorandum of Understanding, and its most recent amendment, is attached as Exhibits A and B to ICANN's concurrent request for judicial notice.

alleges that ICANN has engaged in this conduct as part of a purported "conspiracy" with certain competitors of plaintiff and VeriSign.

As a factual matter, plaintiff's story is utterly implausible. Indeed, several of the alleged "co-conspirators" have sued ICANN *twice* for injunctive relief and breach of contract, claiming that ICANN wrongfully has *facilitated* the introduction of WLS.³

More importantly for purposes of this demurrer, plaintiff's allegations fail to state any cause of action against ICANN as a matter of law. Initially, the Complaint fails to state a valid claim for interference with any *existing* contract because the allegations establish that plaintiff's alleged contract with VeriSign will not have any effect until WLS is approved by the Department of Commerce. Moreover, ICANN's alleged conduct in "resisting" the implementation of WLS was privileged because the allegations establish ICANN was acting to protect its interests under its own separate contract with VeriSign; plaintiff cannot possibly maintain a claim that is based on ICANN's alleged refusal to amend a contract with a third-party (VeriSign, Inc.). Indeed, virtually all of the main charging allegations of the Complaint allege that ICANN refused to negotiate with VeriSign or made misrepresentations to the Department of Commerce. Even if these allegations were correct -- which they are not -- they do not form the basis of a claim that plaintiff could assert against ICANN.

APPLICABLE LEGAL STANDARD

California Code of Civil Procedure section 430.10(e) provides that a defendant may object by demurrer to a complaint on the ground that the pleading fails to allege facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action. The absence of any allegation essential to the cause of action makes the complaint vulnerable to such a demurrer. *E.g.*, *Banerian v. O'Malley*, 42 Cal. App. 3d 604, 610-11 (1974). The demurrer also may be sustained based on any affirmative defense that appears on the face of the complaint. *E.g.*, *Casterson v. Superior Court*, 101 Cal. App. 4th 177, 183 (2002); see also Halvorsen v. Aramark Uniform Services, Inc., 65 Cal. App. 4th 1383, 1391

authorities).

Supp. 2d 1159 (C.D. Cal. 2003) (a copy of which is included in ICANN's appendix of

³ See, e.g, Dotster, Inc. v. Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, 296 F.

(1998) (demurrer to interference claims properly sustained where the complaint alleges facts constituting an affirmative defense). Moreover, where the facts are not in dispute and no liability exists as a matter of substantive law, the court should sustain the demurrer without leave to amend. *E.g.*, *Lawrence v. Bank of America*, 163 Cal. App. 3d 431, 536 (1985). In undertaking this analysis, the court may sustain a demurrer based on facts subject to judicial notice that contradict the allegations of the Complaint. Cal. Code Civ. Proc. §§ 430.70, 437(b); *Del E. Webb Corp. v. Structural Materials Co.*, 123 Cal. App. 3d 593, 604 (1981).

SUMMARY OF PERTINENT ALLEGATIONS⁴

The Internet is a network of interconnected computers and computer networks. Every computer connected to the Internet is assigned a unique "address" known as an Internet Protocol ("IP") number. [Complaint at ¶ 5.] Because IP numbers can be cumbersome and difficult to remember, the IP number system has been overlaid with a more "user-friendly" system of addresses known as the "domain name system." This overlay associates a unique string of alphanumeric characters -- or a domain name -- with a given IP number. [Id. at ¶ 6.]

Each domain name consists of a string of separate "domains" separated by periods. The "top-level domain," or "TLD," is identified by the characters found at the far right end of the domain name, e.g., ".com," ".gov," and ".net." [Id. at \P 7.] Lower-level domains are identified by the characters located to the left of the TLD, e.g., "uscourts" within the domain name "uscourts.gov." [Id. at \P 8.]

VeriSign, Inc. has contracted with ICANN to act as the central "registry" for domain names within the .com and .net TLDs, *i.e.*, domain names ending with the characters ".com" and ".net." [Id. at ¶ 10.] Any individual or entity who seeks to use a particular domain name within the .com or .net TLD must take steps to "register" that domain name via an ICANN-accredited "registrar." [Id. at ¶ 11.] Because each registered domain name must be unique, a given domain name can be registered to only one individual or entity at any given time. [Id. at ¶ 9.]

⁴ These allegations are taken from the Complaint and are not admitted.

In or about December 2001, VeriSign informed ICANN that it wished to make available to Internet users a new service known as "Wait Listing Service." This new service would afford prospective domain name registrants the opportunity to place a "subscription" to register a currently-registered domain name in the event the current registrant elects not to renew its registration. [Id. at ¶¶ 16-17.]

After consideration, ICANN's Board recognized that WLS might represent a beneficial option for consumers and authorized ICANN's staff to negotiate appropriate revisions to the ICANN-VeriSign registry agreements that would allow WLS to be submitted to the Department of Commerce for its review and approval. VeriSign did not initially agree to the conditions that the staff sought to impose, but the staff and VeriSign ultimately concluded negotiations for the amendment to the registry agreements, which the Board then approved. [Id. at ¶¶ 45-51.]

However, to date, ICANN and VeriSign have been unable to agree upon the actual language to the amendment to the registry agreements that would incorporate the terms necessary for the implementation of WLS. Thus, the service has not been submitted to the Department of Commerce for its review and approval. The parties' inability to reach a final resolution stems from VeriSign's insistence that any such amendment include a reservation of VeriSign's right to contend WLS is not a registry service and not governed by the registry agreements.⁵ [*Id.* at ¶¶ 53, 54, 56.] According to plaintiff, ICANN has refused to negotiate in good faith with VeriSign to amend the registry agreements to permit WLS to proceed. [*Id.* at ¶ 61(a).]

ARGUMENT

- I. THE COMPLAINT FAILS TO STATE A VALID CLAIM FOR INTERFERENCE WITH ANY EXISTING CONTRACT.
 - A. The Subject Matter Of The Alleged Contract Between Plaintiff And VeriSign Was Subject To Government Approval.

⁵ Indeed, VeriSign has filed suit in this Court against ICANN seeking a judicial declaration to the effect that WLS is *not* a registry service, and not subject to any review or approval by ICANN. (A copy of VeriSign's Complaint is attached as Exhibit C to ICANN's request for judicial notice.) The relevant allegations include paragraphs 38-45.

California law is clear that the tort of interference with contract affords protection only to "an existing, formally cemented economic relationship." See PMC, Inc. v. Saban Entertainment, Inc., 45 Cal. App. 4th 579, 601 (1996) (emphasis in original) (disapproved on other grounds by Korea Supply Co. v. Lockheed Martin Corp., 29 Cal. 4th 1134, 1159 fn.11 (2003)). Here, the Complaint alleges that plaintiff's contract with VeriSign will allow for the use of plaintiff's technology in the proposed implementation of WLS, and WLS must be approved by the United States Department of Commerce before it can be implemented. As such, the contract plainly cannot be performed unless and until WLS is finally approved by the Department of Commerce. These undisputed facts defeat plaintiff's claim for interference with an existing contract as a matter of law.

The court of appeal stated the dispositive rule in A-Mark Coin Co. v. General Mills, Inc., 148 Cal. App. 3d 312 (1983). There, the plaintiff buyer of rare coins had signed an agreement with the executrices of a Nevada estate to purchase a coin collection owned by that estate. However, that sale was subject to the approval of the probate court. Defendants subsequently offered to purchase the collection at a higher price, with full knowledge of plaintiff's agreement with the estate. The court of appeal affirmed the trial court's judgment in favor of defendants, offering the following explanation: "The concept that a contract subject to court approval or other governmental confirmation, and not yet approved or confirmed, is not sufficient to support a claim of tortious interference with contract has been recognized in several cases." Id. at 321.

Here, plaintiff entered into a contract with VeriSign pursuant to which it agreed to license certain technology necessary for the implementation of WLS. [See Complaint at ¶ 16.] However, plaintiff's own allegations (confirmed by the materials that ICANN has submitted for judicial notice) establish that VeriSign's implementation of WLS is subject to the approval of the Department of Commerce and that such approval has never been obtained. [See, e.g., id. at ¶ 49 (VeriSign delayed launch of WLS because ICANN "had not yet sought Department of Commerce approval"); ¶ 54 (VeriSign sought "submission [of WLS] to the Department of Commerce for

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review and approval"); ¶ 70 (WLS has not been implemented because WLS has not been forwarded to Department of Commerce for approval).]

Thus, plaintiff's own allegations establish that its contract with VeriSign will not have any force or effect unless and until WLS is approved by the Department of Commerce, which approval could not be assumed even once the WLS proposal is forwarded to the Department of Commerce. Thus, the relationship between plaintiff and VeriSign is not the sort of "formally cemented economic relationship" that the tort of interference was designed to protect. Because the subject matter of plaintiff's contract with VeriSign was -- and remains -- subject to government approval, plaintiff cannot state a valid claim for interference with an existing contract. See A-Mark Coin, supra, 148 Cal. App. 3d at 321; see also Bank of America v. County of Los Angeles, 270 Cal. App. 2d 165, 175 (1969) (finding no interference, tortious or otherwise, where "[t]he contract made with [plaintiff] was subject to confirmation") (disapproved on other grounds by Klopping v. City of Whittier, 8 Cal. 3d 39, 52 fn.5 (1972)).

ICANN Has Been Lawfully Protecting Its Rights Under Its Own B. Separate Agreements With VeriSign.

In paragraph 61 of the Complaint, plaintiff makes a number of allegations regarding the conduct of ICANN's "staff." For example, the staff "refus[ed] to negotiate in good faith with VeriSign," "misrepresent[ed] ICANN's plans" to the Department of Commerce," and "mispresent[ed] when and how ICANN would respond to proposals by VeriSign to amend the Registry Agreement[s]." Even if any of these allegations were correct (and they are not), none of these allegations involve duties that ICANN might have had to plaintiff; instead, any "misrepresentations" or "refusals to negotiate" might (or, most likely, might not) involve duties owed to VeriSign or to the Department of Commerce.

In their core, plaintiff's allegations boil down to the notion that ICANN should have amended its agreements with VeriSign and that ICANN's failure to do so gives rise to a claim in favor of SnapNames. But the law does not permit strangers to a contract to require the contracting parties to amend their contract.

The tort duty not to interfere with contracts was developed to protect the expectations of *contracting* parties against frustration by *strangers*, *i.e.*, "interlopers who have no legitimate interest in the scope or course of the contract's performance." *See Applied Equipment Corp. v. Litton Saudi Arabia Ltd.*, 7 Cal. 4th 503, 514 (1994). Thus, "an entity with a direct interest or involvement in that [contractual] relationship is not usually liable for harm caused by pursuit of its interests." *See Marin Tug & Barge, Inc. v. Westport Petroleum, Inc.*, 271 F.3d 825, 832 (9th Cir. 2001) (construing California law). Here, the allegations of the Complaint demonstrate that ICANN has a substantial and direct interest in plaintiff's alleged contract with VeriSign, arising out of its own separate (and pre-existing) agreements with VeriSign. ICANN's conduct in protecting its own pre-existing contractual relationships with VeriSign (and by allegedly declining to amend those contracts) was privileged as a matter of law.

It is well-established that in a proper case, interference with the contractual right of another may be justified and therefore privileged. See, e.g., Los Angeles Pie Bakers Ass'n v. Bakery Drivers Local No. 276, 122 Cal. App. 2d 237, 243 (1953); Halvorsen, supra, 65 Cal. App. 4th at 1391. One such privilege arises where two parties have separate contracts with a third, in which case "each may resort to any legitimate means at his disposal to secure performance of his contract even though the necessary result will be to cause a breach of the other contract." Imperial Ice Co. v. Rossier, 18 Cal. 2d 33, 37 (1941) (emphasis added).

In support of this proposition, the *Imperial Ice* Court cited *Knapp v. Penfield*, 256 N.Y.S. 41 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 1932), which provides further insight regarding the proper application of the rule. There, the defendant had entered into a contract with a theatrical producer, pursuant to which the former agreed to finance, and the latter agreed to produce, a musical play. When the producer hired the plaintiff actress for one of the leading roles, defendant objected and forced the producer to replace plaintiff with another actress. The New York court held that defendant could not be liable for interference with plaintiff's employment contract, stating that "[p]ersons acting"

 $^{^6}$ A copy of the Marin Tug & Barge decision is included in ICANN's appendix of authorities

⁷ A copy of the *Knapp* decision is included in ICANN's appendix of authorities .

for the protection of contract rights of their own which are of an equal or superior interest to another's contractual rights may invade the latter with impunity." See id. at 44 (emphasis added). The Court concluded that plaintiff's employment contract was "subordinate" to defendant's prior agreement to finance the production, given that plaintiff would not have had any employment but for that original agreement. See id.

The California Court of Appeal applied this same rule in *Lawless v. The Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America*, 143 Cal. App. 2d 474, 478 (1956). There, plaintiffs were creditors of a local union affiliated with the defendant parent international union (the "Brotherhood"). The Brotherhood had dissolved the local union ostensibly based on the latter's failure to comply with the constitution of the Brotherhood,⁸ and thereby rendered the local unable to pay its debts to the plaintiffs. The court rejected plaintiffs' claims for interference, stating that "[t]he Brotherhood was privileged to insist upon its contract with the local (the constitution of the Brotherhood), even though such insistence rendered the local unable to perform its obligations to its creditors." 143 Cal. App. 2d at 478.

These authorities compel the conclusion that ICANN's conduct in the present case was privileged. Plaintiff's own allegations establish that WLS cannot be implemented unless and until certain additional terms are incorporated into ICANN's pre-existing registry agreements with VeriSign. [See Complaint at ¶ 45 (ICANN's board authorized its president and general counsel to negotiate the necessary revisions to the registry agreements to allow for the offering of WLS); ¶ 54 (VeriSign offered to sign an amendment to the registry agreements that incorporated terms necessary for implementation of WLS).] ICANN plainly was not a "stranger" to the alleged contractual relationship between plaintiff and VeriSign; to the contrary, the proposed introduction of WLS directly implicated -- and indeed threatened -- ICANN's rights under the registry agreements.

ICANN required an amendment to the registry agreements before VeriSign could implement WLS; plaintiff obviously could not compel ICANN to amend those agreements and,

⁸ The Brotherhood's actions against the local had arisen out of accusations that an officer of the local was associating with "communists and subversives." See 143 Cal. App. 2d at 476-77.

1	thus, could not file suit against ICANN for "interfering" with WLS. Indeed, plaintiff	
2	acknowledges that ICANN's refusal to execute the necessary amendment to the registry	
3	agreements followed from VeriSign's own refusal to agree that WLS is a "registry service." [See	
4	id. at ¶ 54 (ICANN has failed to proceed because VeriSign will not waive its position that WLS is	
5	not a registry service); ¶ 56 (VeriSign has continued to insist on a "conditional amendment").]	
6	Thus, plaintiff's own allegations demonstrate that ICANN was acting to defend its rights under its	
7	separate and superior contracts with VeriSign, i.e., by resisting the "conditional" amendments	
8	proposed by VeriSign. As such, ICANN's conduct was privileged, and cannot support a claim	
9	for tortious interference. See Imperial Ice, supra, 18 Cal. 2d at 37; Lawless, supra, 143 Cal. App.	
10	2d at 478.	
11	Whether ICANN had an obligation to negotiate in good faith with VeriSign to amend the	
12	contracts, ICANN obviously owed plaintiff no obligation to negotiate in good faith with	
13	VeriSign. Nor did ICANN owe any other obligations to plaintiff merely because plaintiff entered	
14	into an agreement with VeriSign that post-dated ICANN's agreements with VeriSign.	
15	CONCLUSION	
16	Defendant ICANN requests that the Court sustain this demurrer and dismiss the	
17	Complaint in its entirety, with prejudice.	
18	DATED: January 7, 2005 JONES DAY	
19	DATED: January 7, 2005 JONES DAY	
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21	By: Jeffrey A Levee sur	
22	Attorneys for Defendant	
23	INTERNET CORPORATION FOR ASSIGNED NAMES AND NUMBERS	
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PROOF OF SERVICE

STATE OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES:

I am employed in the County of Los Angeles, State of California. I am over the age of 18 and not a party to the within action; my business address is 555 West Fifth Street, Suite 4600, Los Angeles, California 90013.

On January 7, 2005, I caused to be served the document described as:

NOTICE OF HEARING ON DEMURRER AND DEMURRER BY DEFENDANT INTERNET CORPORATION FOR ASSIGNED NAMES AND NUMBERS; MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES on the interested parties in this action. X BY (U.S. MAIL). I placed _____ the original X a true copy thereof enclosed in sealed envelope(s) to the addressee(s) as follows: Shaye Diveley Attorney at Law 111 Sutter Street, Suite 700 San Francisco, CA 94104 BY PERSONAL SERVICE. I placed ___ the original _X_ true copies thereof enclosed in sealed envelope(s) and caused such envelope to be hand delivered via messenger to the offices of the addressee(s) as follows: I am "readily familiar" with the firm's practice of collection and processing correspondence for mailing. Under that practice it would be deposited with the U.S. postal service on that same day with postage thereon fully prepaid at Los Angeles, California in the ordinary course of business. I am aware that on motion of the party served, service is presumed invalid if postal cancellation date or postage meter date is more than one day after date of deposit of mailing in affidavit. X (STATE) I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing is true and correct. (FEDERAL) I declare that I am employed in the office of a member of the bar of this Court at whose direction this service was made. I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed on January 7, 2005, at Los Angeles, California. Eflorerale Orty Elba Alonso de Ortega Type or Print Name