

[House creates constituent email system, June 2, 1993](#) (Politico – June 2, 2011)

By Andrew Glass

On this day in 1993, the House Administration Committee announced a pilot program to establish a “constituent electronic mail system.” Rep. Charlie Rose (D-N.C.), who served 12 terms, including two as the committee’s chairman, spurred the online initiative. Although the House had created a rudimentary internal email system in the early 1980s, this marked the first time ordinary citizens could communicate directly with their members of Congress via the Internet. At the time, browsers featuring the Web were in their digital infancy. Several House members agreed to participate in the new pilot program. They included Reps. Jay Dickey (R-Ark.), Sam Gejdenson (D-Conn.), Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), Pete Stark (D-Calif.) and **Melvin Watt**

(D-N.C.). To start out, the electronic mail system required constituents to send a postcard or letter to participating representatives to express their interest in the program and to provide the lawmakers’ staff with their email address. At the time, only one email address, now extinct, existed for all House correspondence:

Congress@HR.House.gov

. Incoming mail would be forwarded internally to the intended congressional recipient. By September 1993, the pilot program had received more than 3,000 emails. Still uncertain about the new technology, some of the pilot program’s members chose to reply to their constituents’ electronic correspondence via postal mail. By the mid-1990s, the email system had begun to spread, slowly at first, to all but a handful of congressional offices. Nowadays, most congressional offices receive near equal amounts of postal and electronic mail. Many lawmakers’ websites, however, only accept email from people who also provide a verifiable physical address within their district. Several sites, including

www.congress.org

and

www.webslingerz.com

, offer free click-through links to each of the 635 lawmakers, broken down by state and party affiliation.