I'm writing today to express my concern over the drafting of copyright reform that could potentially destroy the careers of myself and my peers. I am a visual art student, among other things. I have been for many years now, and I have grown into an online infrastructure that allows creators and artists to collaborate and share new ideas freely. It sounds a bit like a hippie movement, yes, but it really amounts to is a renaissance for new media forms. There are entire subcultures that have emerged thanks to the existing copyright platform, and support systems for artists such as Patreon (which many artists make their living from) could not feasibly exist in any other way.

To put it bluntly, the internet is the only place where money doesn't matter. Talent and unique ideas measure one's success. If this reform passes in its current state, people who want to share ideas or support themselves financially will have their hard work stolen from them. Creators cannot feasibly register all of their work with a for-profit copyright office. Good work, even by hobbyists, spreads fast and wide on the internet. Good faith efforts to find the creator often fail. This doesn't mean the work is "orphaned." People want to share good things online, and often forget to credit the maker. It's the nature of the beast. If those uncredited works are all considered free for the picking, then almost every image seen on popular social networking websites like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Tumblr, Imgur, and others can be stolen and used by others for profit. This is outright theft of intellectual property. It's completely unacceptable.

If "finders keepers" is the letter of the law, there will be no more sharing of ideas and values online. Larger companies that can afford to steal and register content for profit won't mind. There's a massive amount of work out there just waiting to be stolen. People do it every day. If it becomes legal and profitable to do so, the burgeoning cultural sandbox that is the internet of today will die.