**Transcription ICANN Dublin**
**GNSO session Sunday 18 October 2015**
**Interview with GNSO Chair Candidates**
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Jonathan Robinson:   Great so we're good to go with the next session. Welcome to this next session. It's an important one and it's a great opportunity to meet the two candidates for GNSO council chair. These two candidates have respectively been put forward by the two different houses of the GNSO council.

So the non-contracted party house and the contracted parties' house have each nominated as is their right and opportunity to do under the rules that govern the process. Have each put forward a candidate. We have an opportunity to hear from those candidates and to have a Q&A.

So the way we've structured this is each candidate will in turn present approximately five minutes on their candidate's statement and you give you some highlights and key points I'd like to emphasize.

And having had that we'll open it up to a Q&A; that Q&A is available to anyone here in the room. It's not just available to those counselors around the table. So please think now if there is anything you'd like to ask of the candidates and we'll take those in turn. And then we'll give each candidate the opportunity to sum up.

We're going to do this in half an hour, so let me hand over to each of the candidates in turn. James if it's okay I'll hand over - or Heather let's - Heather let me go with you first. I don't know what I said. Remind me what I said on the email to you. It's fine - let's go with you first and then we'll - give you five minutes each and then we'll go into a Q&A.

James Bladel:     I'm fine either way - I just - I didn't want to step on anything so.

Heather Forest:     (Unintelligible).

James Bladel:     If there's an advantage to going second then I'll go first.

Jonathan Robinson:     Well you're going to go - let's be clear. As I said in my mail you'll go 1, 2 and then 2, 1 so we'll sort it out.

James Bladel:     Okay, so well maybe just introductions for those that are coming to the room for the first time or first ICANN meeting, my name is James Bladel. I'm Vice President of Policy for GoDaddy, registrar hopefully that you've heard of.

This is my - I was just re-elected to my second term on council so I'll be running through on council through 2017, presumably. And been active on ICANN now almost nine years was my first ICANN meeting.

So just going back, you know, we have a candidate's statement. I know Heather had one, I had one and they're kind of, you know, as you might imagine sort of, you know, almost like cover letter style documents. So I'll just try to boil it down.

Been very keenly involved in policy development at the GNSO and on council but going back to some of my first working groups, PDPs and also non-PDP activities which include a number of review teams, drafting teams and some

other let's call it extracurricular activities like negotiating the 2013 REA and participating on Cross-Community Working Group Team.

So if it sounds like, you know, my experience is impressive, don't take it that way. I mean in some regards, like many of you I feel like I'm a mile wide and an inch deep just trying to keep up with all these topics.

And that's certainly the case for some of the things that are going on today. I think that the council is - and I realize that other slices of the community may have a different take on this - but the council is the lynchpin of the GNSO; which is the kind of the heart and soul of ICANN.

This is where the, you know, according to the bylaws we have the GNSO and the GNSO Council have the exclusive remit to create policy for gTLDs. And the gTLD space and governing that what used to be perhaps maybe a technical function but has no blossomed into this multibillion dollar industry affecting billions of people worldwide.

And I think that we should be mindful of that while we conduct our work. The council itself is an important - has an important oversight function of that work in encouraging the PDP working groups and fostering the volunteer community. Making sure that those processes are - and the integrity of those processes are upheld and making sure that the outputs are of the quality that we expect so that we can implement them.

And that all of that is done in a way that takes onboard the variety of perspectives and viewpoints and contributions from around the community. So the role of the chair I think is just to kind of facilitate all that. And to Jonathan, you know, who's - I'm going to butter him up a little bit - as a departing chair. He's done such an amazing job that I think Heather made a note in her candidate statement that the common theme and I'm getting it too is congratulations and condolences.

You know, it's like one of those things where, you know, I hope you don't lose but I might feel more sorry for you if you actually win. So and I think Jonathan's - watching him work over the past two years has certainly been one of the most intimidating reasons why someone might not through their hat in the ring for this position.

It's - just watching him take on all the work and seemingly being all these places at once. But, you know, it is ultimately it is important. Someone has to step up and I think that, you know, I think that both the candidates are strong have a good background. And I think we bring just different things to the table. And I'm looking forward to some of your questions. So.

Jonathan Robinson:   Thanks very much James and indeed it is hard work. And very much appreciate your positive comments. But, you know, as you know I'm committed to working with either candidate, whoever is successful and working with you to do a decent handover and make sure that - I mean the primary purpose is to ensure that the council and the GNSO policy function continues to work well.

And I'm quite convinced that with either candidate we'll make that happen. So let me hand over to you Heather to make your introductions.

Heather Forest:   Thanks Jonathan. This is Heather Forest and how strategic is this that I get to say I agree with everything that James has said?

So I suppose just as a - by way of introduction and again I think it's more valuable that we spend our time on the Q&A than necessarily rehashing our candidate statements. I am a member of the IPC, I suspect James and I probably joined the ICANN environment at about the same time. Although in some respects, you know, there are times that you're reminded that we're all newcomers at some point or on some issue.

It's impossible as a council member, as much as I've tried to be across everything to the level of depth that you would absolutely love to do but I've certainly tried to do that. I am not a - I suppose maybe if I say I'm not a plus one person. I'm probably not the most outspoken member of council. And that's by choice really.

I put great stock in listening and I'm, you know, on any list that I participate to I'm certainly not the most frequent contributor to a list or to a discussion. But I believe that few comments and few impactful comments are perhaps more valuable than simply echoing what others have said or saying something before I've had an opportunity to digest it. So perhaps that explains some of my participation on council in the last 12 months.

I recognize the task that's ahead and frankly as James has alluded I'll be happy to say it, it's fairly terrifying what lies ahead. But it's a task that I would take on very willingly. I always cringe when in the ICANN environment I'll hear, you know, Heather can do it she has time.

That maybe implies one thing but what I would say is as an academic I don't have billable hour requirements. And I specifically left private practice 10 years ago to unhinge myself from billable hour requirements; which really didn't allow me to undertake things particularly in the ICANN environment to the level of detail and attention that I wanted to. And that really explains my career path I suppose.

I don't take anything on if I don't have the capacity to do it at a level that exceeds expectations. You can call that workaholism or whatever you like but that's just me; and some insight to me.

One point that I would emphasize from my candidate statement is I think in light of and timely after (Thomas)'s presentation and our discussion with (Fadi) and the centralization of everything around IANA transition I do think it's important that we stick to our knitting in the GNSO.

We have an incredible workload ahead of us in 2016, 2017 and transition is only one part of that. And what we do on a day-to-day basis, our bread and butter that has to go on irrespective of IANA transition. And I think that's going to be very difficult to manage for either James or myself. That's going to be a challenge is keeping council on track, keeping council on its mission under the bylaws.

So I think that's something that we as a council regardless of which seat I sit in after Thursday, I think that's something that council needs to be born in mind. Given that James mentioned it as well I'll say I'm in the middle of a two-year term. I wasn't up for election this year. So I have a year left on council in my current term.

I'll turn it back to you Jonathan and thank you.

Jonathan Robinson:   Thank you Heather. Thank you both for those introductory remarks and fleshing out key points of the statements. So what we would like to do now is create the opportunity for questions to be posed ideally to both candidates so that both have the opportunity to reply. If there is a requirement to ask something specific of a specific candidate it's an option, but preferably in the interest of sort of balance of the interview, the questions would be directed to both.

So I can look for hands. I have already had one posed remotely so perhaps I'll go to that first; from Wolf-Ulrich Knoben, whom many of you know. And Wolf-Ulrich asks in the policy development area how would you describe the role of the council relative to the stakeholder group. And so maybe I'll go with that one first to you Heather.

Heather Forest:   Thanks Jonathan and thank you Wolf-Ulrich. Look I think council is a necessary beast. Council serves an administrative function. We're just here

as a means for the various stakeholder groups and constituencies within the GNSO to articulate their views and to move forward with our mandates.

So in terms of the specific role of council in that we're here because we need to be but it's largely a vehicle. Council is the means to an end rather than the end itself. Thank you.

Jonathan Robinson:   Thanks Heather. James?

James Bladel:   So in the interest of presenting a stark contrast I will emphatically agree with Heather. That is the role of council is one of an administrative view. And you could also perhaps maybe characterize it as a backstop for the process and to ensure that the PDP process was - and the integrity of the process was followed end to end. And therefore the outcome and the result was legitimate.

I think that the council in that regard the substance and material decisions are made before they arrive at council.

Jonathan Robinson:   Thanks both. Just to remind you, anyone in the room, if you have particular questions or issues you'd like to raise with the candidates by all means come up to the microphone. And I see that Ken has so Ken go ahead.

Ken Stubbs:   Yes, thank you Jonathan. My name is Ken Stubbs and I was chair of the council many years ago in a place far away. But the question I have for you two is this; aside from all of the transition issues what do you feel that the biggest challenges are going to be for the next let's say 12 to 18 months for the council. Thank you.

Jonathan Robinson:   Thanks Ken. I'll offer that to James first.

James Bladel:   Thanks. So and I imagine this list is probably going to be similar to the things we've been talking about this week. But the top three I think would be the work to reform and re-engineer who is the new gTLD auction proceeds and

that cross-community effort and the GNSO's role in that. I mean obviously we have to take the lead because we are the origin of those auction proceeds resulting from GNSO policy.

And I think just what is the role going to be post-transition, if the GNSO becomes a more structured member of the post-transition ICANN. But, you know, I think especially those first two they could be, you know, characterized as almost the same size and scope of some of the bigger projects we've taken on in the past like the new gTLD program itself.

And so they have the; if you think of policy development as the pipeline, you know, those two alone - any one of those projects could clog that pipeline. So the management of those projects is going to be critical.

Jonathan Robinson:   Thanks James. Heather?

Heather Forest:   I'm sorry we're going to do this back and forth. But I'd have to agree on the substance. In terms of the process I think some of the comments that came out today that were perhaps sort of germinating yesterday around effectiveness and how do we deal with, for example, the fact that we have so many parallel efforts on various things including who is - how do we make council and our policy development stewardship more effective is going to be an issue.

So it's not just the what in my view, it's the how. And to that extent to the - if we're able to let's say lean on the SCI to help us; we have a PDP on PDPs. These sort of methodology questions I think will come to the fore as well. And it's unfortunate perhaps that we have to spend some time on how we do business, but I think it's a necessary thing.

Jonathan Robinson:   So I'm mindful, thank you for those answers. I'm mindful of the time and a queue, quite substantial queue has built up. So let's go to that queue. But we may need to pick up this further on in our Tuesday session if necessary. But

let's see how far we can go; if I could ask everyone to be as brief as possible. Perhaps I'll close the queue now. I see (Stephanie)'s joined, I've got (Arthur) at the microphone and let's close the queue at that point.

We've got a representative set of questions. I'll go to Paul McGrady in the queue first. Paul go ahead.

Paul McGrady: Paul McGrady for the record. And I apologize for asking a loaded question. But there - I've only been at this ICANN thing for eight years so I'm new compared to you. But there is a perception that the contracted parties usually end up with this job.

So I'll ask the question of both candidates, how will your being elected to this role either address that perception or in the alternative how will you make sure that everybody ends up - that in your role you'll be sure that everybody ends up with an equal voice so that that perception ceases to be a concern. Thank you.

Jonathan Robinson: Thanks Paul, that speaks to the question of neutrality to some extent which is a key concern. Go ahead Heather.

Heather Forest: Thanks Jonathan, thanks Paul. Look I'll perhaps maybe start by repeating what I said to the contracted parties in my interview or discussion with them; which is in my view it shouldn't matter but it does because it is one of perception. If it were beyond perception then it would certainly matter.

I think, look if I put myself in the shoes of the contracted parties this is an opportunity to dispel that sort of concern, rumor whatever it is that you trust someone from the non-contracted side of the house to sit in that chair. And that's unfair to James but it is what it is, let's say there's, you know, years of history behind it.

I can only say that I, you know, I think we've all had great support for Jonathan and what he has done and I think ultimately maybe after a certain point in time you forget the house that the chair comes from. I think it's only an issue around election time. And beyond then the chair demonstrates in a way that they need to of course, their neutrality.

And it's something I suppose that stymied me - how do I prove neutrality before I get into that chair. And I can't. It's a bit like, you know, how do you know how to go through a divorce? You don't know until you've gone through one. So, you know, trust me. In the great words of Donald Trump, trust me.

(Laughter)

Heather Forest: And I'll say in closing I've worked for a contracted party. I know contracted party concerns, I'm familiar with them. And that certainly would be - and that shouldn't affect my neutrality either. You know, having done that or not shouldn't impact my neutrality but there it is. Thanks.

Jonathan Robinson: And you should think this is more like a marriage to the GNSO that you're entering from. Go ahead James.

James Bladel: So yes and I also I think responded to this in discussion with contracted parties. So the question is one of neutrality. And I think for some folks it's going to be a factor in their decision of where the chair - which house or constituency or stakeholder group the chair comes from. I think that to Jonathan's point going back to the discussion in Buenos Aires it should be more about the individual.

I know certainly in Jonathan's case I have to remind myself that he's from Afilias and a contracted party. Sometimes it seems like he's just kind of fallen from the sky to lead our discussions.

But, you know, if I can be blunt I'm characteristically blunt on this question. The chair does not get extra votes when it comes to decisions. The chair does not have his votes taken away; his or her votes taken away.

So really this is a question of optics. At the end of the day it doesn't really have an impact in the decision and it really boils down to whether or not you can behave in a neutral, objective, unbiased manner. Because that is something that I think is immediately visible and transparent, you know, if a chair is not behaving in that regard. And I think that that is a much bigger, you know, much bigger issue.

So I don't necessarily see this as a sole determining factor in someone's decision of who should be in the chair, I think it is more of an individual decision and I note that Heather has participated in some contracted party activities as a consultant for applicants. I sometimes get into trouble with registrars for not behaving more like a contracted party or maybe not taking on board the concerns that other registrars might have.

So the lines get very blurry and I think that the key is for the chair to behave as though they forget their own house.

Jonathan Robinson:   Thanks James. I'll just keep things moving then and go straight to the question from Susan. In fact actually let me give (Arthur) a chance because he was standing up so go ahead at the standing mike and then I'll come to you Susan.

(Arthur):   Thanks Jonathan. I don't know if the room gets a vote in the selection of the chair. In any case I would like to weigh in with a point of end-user friendliness or end-user concerns. Now both registrars and registries have to deal with customers and have to deal with domain holders that try to understand these policies that we create as the GNSO.

And many of them are struggling we find in understanding these policies. So I've worked with James, it so happens, in the IRTPC and we ran into the challenge that we couldn't directly address; end-user friendliness; because it was not a real definition, like it was not a clear definition or a takeaway that the GNSO gave us to work with. So we could only improve the policy but we could not redraft the policy.

And the point of the criticism is that James could not always directly respond to my issues but he could give me the feeling that I was being heard in some other way. So it's both a minus and a plus but my question to both of you is do you personally support improving user-friendliness?

And I will give a definition which is still in progress which means that users succeed using our policy instead of failing to use our policy because they didn't do X or Y or Z. And do you personally support end-user friendliness and also the redrafting of policies and maybe even the scraping of unnecessary policies to both candidates and I'm very curious to hear.

Jonathan Robinson:   Thank you. I remind all of you, please state your names and let's keep things as brief as possible. James.

James Bladel:   This is James for the record. And I do agree that if you have a mechanism of creating policy you should have within the scope of the council. I mean obviously this would have to come from, you know, as part of a bottom up process; but there should be also a mechanism to review the effectiveness of a policy after a certain period of time and if it's not effective to modify it or discard it.

I think we've seen some of the more recent changes have been more ambitious in reshaping the domain-name landscape, the lifecycle and how people, end-users can use domain names. And I know that we're targeting those edge cases, the fraction of a percentage of people who are criminal or

bad actors or abusive or whatever. But the vast, vast majority of folks just end up being confused. And we hear about it I think.

You know, they don't know about ICANN. They don't know about registries, they just think that their registrar is doing this to them. So just generally thinking, I think if you're going to have a mechanism, a robust mechanism for creating policy you need to take responsibility for reviewing and modifying that policy to make sure it's continuing to be effective.

Jonathan Robinson:    Thanks James. And just to be clear, queue is firmly closed with (Brett). Over to you Heather.

Heather Forest:    Thanks very much. Heather Forest. Look I think this question fundamentally goes to the idea of why are we all here. And it's a good question to ask ourselves periodically. I was involved in the leadership training program for a few days before the weekend started and the question came up a few times, you know, are we in our respective SOs and ACs are we just trying to preserve our own jobs?

Are we creating work for ourselves? And that somewhat goes to the point that you make. Are we making policies just for the sake of making policies, that we all get to keep doing this and that sort of thing? And I think that's, you know, back to the point about perception. I think that's a perception that we need to bang on the head right away. I for one don't come to council just because I have nothing better to do.

So and I would really doubt that anyone else does. So in terms of our role in remembering the end-user, we're not here for ourselves. We're here for the end-user. We're not here to keep our own companies and whatever in business. The internet is the internet, at the end of the day. And I think that's something that needs to be remembered.

Now how this manifests itself formally, perhaps this manifests itself somewhere in something like the GNSO operating procedures where we say, you know, these things need to be born in mind. Whenever we do something these things need to be in the back of our mind.

And is that a guarantee? Absolutely not, right. Does that lock us into any particular, you know, can I guarantee you? No, you know. In the spirit of election can I guarantee that we're always going to have an outcome? And that's the benefit and the burden of the multi-stakeholder process.

But I certainly for one believe it's something that needs to be born in mind and in everything that we do.

Jonathan Robinson: Thank you. Thanks for the question. Six questions, six minutes, let's go. Susan.

Susan Kawaguchi: Susan Kawaguchi for the record. With the theme of this week at least or this weekend has been, you know, the increased workload and so many new initiatives coming up next year. How will you manage the work of the chair with your vice-chairs?

Jonathan Robinson: Thank you. Good question. Go ahead Heather.

Heather Forest: That's a great question, Susan. You know, actually I wasn't so sure about that myself and I confess to you I'm still not entirely sure. But I did speak to staff. I didn't want to step let's say on current toes. I've spoken to Jonathan about it and he's been kind enough to offer some very general perspectives on the role of chair.

But I did ask some questions of staff, how is that work divided and how does it happen and this sort of thing. I'm only just getting my head around it but in my mind, you know, much in the same way that I answered the question

about the role of council; the role of the chair and the co-chairs is really just the stewards of that stewardship.

We don't have as James very rightfully pointed out and I pointed out in one of my interviews along the way or discussions along the way, that the chair's vote and the vice-chair's votes don't count for anymore let's say. We're not super-prioritized in this process. We're just the folks dumb enough to raise our hand and try and crack the, you know, keep the corral moving, keep the process going.

So I would like to see that be as collaborative as possible. And if it weren't I'd be quite worried because I don't intend - this is not a James Bladel show or the Heather Forest show. That's not what this is all about in my mind. So.

Jonathan Robinson:   Thanks Heather. James.

James Bladel:   So real quickly I think that's an excellent question and I think the answer would be that, you know, if I were ultimately elected the chair one thing would change. I'm going to pick on Jonathan a little bit because I complimented him earlier.

Look at this list. This is our agenda. And look at this column of who the leader is; two pages of Jonathan Robinson. Now in my opinion that should be more Volker, more David and more of us and more of the other counselors. And each person should have an issue, lead and be kind of the council lead on that and the chair should maybe facilitate those interactions and that hand off.

But generally speaking having the chair as the lead for every single item on our agenda I think it unfortunately not - I'm not saying the wrong approach, Jonathan can handle it. I can't handle it. Let's call it an unsustainable approach.

Jonathan Robinson:   Good, thank you. Next up one of our vice-chairs, Volker.

Volker Greimann: Thank you Jonathan. First just to something that Heather said, act like you stay in business. But that aside we've heard a lot of different comments over the last month, maybe even years about volunteer burnout and high workload that's coming towards us with a lot of efforts that are going to cause a lot of attention to be diverted from other topics.

How do you as chair - what would your top three items on the list of tackling that? What are your ideas of going about tackling this problem?

Jonathan Robinson: Thanks Volker. And just to let others in the queue know if something does come up that - it's already been answered please, you know, if a question you feel has been asked and answered please just lower your hand. James?

James Bladel: Thanks Volker. So volunteer burnout. It's something that we've talked about this time going back three years ago, five years ago, seven years ago. When I was a new volunteer they were talking about burnt out. But I didn't feel it then. I felt kind of, you know, fresh and energized.

You know one of the challenges I think is that less of a general statement of volunteer burnout and more of just an acknowledgement that there is an uneven distribution of volunteers. And I think this is just natural in a volunteer-led organization. And if you need an example of that go down and take a peek into the CCWG room and watch how people are standing, or almost sitting on laps to get a space in that room.

Whereas other PDPs are hurting for participation and scraping together members to make sure that they're representative. So really in some regards it's a function of the issue, it's a function of the topic and where people are interested and where the lightning rods are that attracting attention.

But as a chair I think well I should first acknowledge that it's very, you know, there's a limit to how much the chair can do to do this but I think reaching out

to each of the individual counselors, making sure that we're reaching deep into our constituencies to encourage a deeper bench to borrow a sports metaphor, and making sure that we have the participants.

But also making sure that those participants see tangible outcomes form their work; nothing is more frustrating for newcomers and for volunteers to see that their work is either discarded or goes in circles or goes nowhere. And I think that is one item that needs to be recognized as a deterrent to newcomers and to future participation. Thanks.

Jonathan Robinson: Thanks.

Heather Forest: Thanks Volker. Heather Forest. I very sincerely wish I had the answer to volunteer burnout because I'd be sitting here much more confidently than I am today. Look I think we've banged around this idea of outreach for so long. And I think in the time that James, you and I have joined the ICANN community we now have much more formalized methods of reaching out and broadening our base if you like.

And I think that's a very good thing. I think one of the things that the GNSO could do better is to work more closely with ICANN staff working on some of these outreach efforts, fellowship program and NextGen and this sort of thing. ICANN learn these sorts of platforms to how do we present ourselves in a little bit more of an approachable way. How do we get the message across that the GNSO, you know, we're now in a position in the GNSO where people where multiple hats.

And it's not as clear as it was three years ago well I'm an X so I; or I work for X so you very clearly fall within this stakeholder group or this constituency. And that falls on us as the GNSO. And I'm not referring to council here I'm referring to the GNSO. That falls on us.

So I think we as the GNSO have some work to do. I think traditionally that sort of stakeholder engagement outreach thing, you know, new blood is the short answer to burnout. Right? New blood.

But how? And that outreach engagement has normally been pushed down to stakeholders and constituencies and stakeholder groups and constituency - and certainly that's the case. I'm not advocating that we kick everything up the stairs.

But we as the GNSO have some work to do to make ourselves, to make these meetings a little bit more approachable, to make PDPs a little more approachable, to make ourselves a little bit more accessible.

That it's not this strange barrier between us and the community.

Jonathan Robinson:    Okay thank you very much. So we're at 12:30 which is our hard stop for time. We've got guests for the ICG here. We have the Board Meeting at 1:00. I know there are some - some of you have had your hands up in the queue for a while. All of you are from the council and so we can accommodate those in our Tuesday's session and I encourage us to have a follow-on there. And if anyone wants to add anything there's a council Tuesday session at that time.

And you may even bring some questions from your stakeholder group discussions on Tuesday. So we've got a motion to discuss which is what the purpose of the Tuesday session is. And we can have a Part 2 of this I think to accommodate those points.

So let me give you each an opportunity to just say some closing remarks now as we said we would do and then we'll welcome our guests from the ICG and make sure we get some lunch before the Board arrive.

So Heather over to you for just a couple of closing remarks.

Heather Forest.    Jonathan I'll make it very easy. I actually don't have any closing remarks except to say that if anyone has further questions, please pull me aside in the hallway or send an email. I'm happy to answer any questions that linger.

Jonathan Robinson:    Thank you very much and over to you James.

James Bladel:    Yes, same thing. Just with regard to time and just to wrap it up and, you know, I'd be happy to answer any of your questions. I think that this has been a great conversation and I hope it's been helpful. But if it hasn't pull be aside and, you know, and ultimately since I might never see you again if Heather is the next chair I hope I can be useful to you.

Jonathan Robinson:    Well thank you both very much and that's - you've respected the key principle of being the chair and that's sticking to the time. So you've both ticked that box very admirably. Thank you very much. And so we will call that session to a close and stop the recording there please.

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