
LOS ANGELES – Welcome Ceremony - U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Penny Pritzker
Monday, October 13, 2014 – 08:30 to 10:00
ICANN – Los Angeles, USA

SECRETARY PENNY PRITZKER: Steve, you have no idea as I just said to you, it is such an honor to be here and to be here, frankly, with you. And the leadership that you've shown over the last 40 years is something that is, I know, awe-inspiring to me and I would suspect awe-inspiring to all of you in this room. And thank you for your leadership here at ICANN as well as your thoughtful introduction.

I also want to thank Fadi Chehade and the entire ICANN board, who I had the privilege of meeting a little bit earlier.

I want to thank you for bringing together so many leaders in the global Internet community and for taking the lead in advancing the multistakeholder process.

And I really want to acknowledge our front-and-center representative of the Department of Commerce in all things both ICANN and Internet, Assistant Secretary Larry Strickling and his entire team and our entire team at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, as you know it NTIA.

Their daily work on Internet policy issues, domain name system issues and protecting the Internet as an engine for innovation and prosperity is extremely important. And the partnership that we have with ICANN is something that we take very seriously.

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We've come together at this time, a time when Internet governance is as important as ever. The fact is that we have to do everything we can to protect and preserve this revolutionary platform that is the essential connector of people, economies, and communities across the planet.

I do not have to tell anyone in this room that more people are working, shopping, interacting, and learning online than ever before, all because of the work that so many of you have done throughout the years to build and strengthen this system.

My friend Walter Isaacson has written a wonderful new book. It is called "The Innovators." And I hope you all will read it. In it, Walter says that collaborative creativity is what drives technological advancement. Let me quote him. And I quote, "Innovation comes from teams more often than from the light bulb moments of lone genius."

I think Walter's absolutely right. Of course, we owe so much to many of you in this room and to others who created those light bulb moments. But innovators are natural collaborators. That is, no one person alone can turn a cutting-edge discovery into a world-changing product or service without a team. And history makes that clear.

It is that same collaboration that has enabled the Internet to become what is today -- what it is today.

Facilitated initially by the U.S. government's investment through DARPA, the Internet as we now know it was built off of one inventive leap on top of another.

And through the amazing genius, ranging from Vint Cerf to Bob Kahn to Steve Crocker to Tim Berners-Lee to Mark Andreessen, and so many

others, their work has given us the most dynamic communications and connective platform that the world has ever seen.

The Internet, indeed, improves quality of life for millions and enables people from all over the globe to achieve greater economic opportunity.

So without the Internet, a teenager from a remote village in southern India would not have been able to create his own business. Abin Jose Tom was 19 years old when he was given a school assignment to create a Web site. Five years later, Abin's project is now a global Web solutions and design company named Webandcrafts with more than 500 clients worldwide.

We live in an era when all an entrepreneur needs to start, build, and promote a business is a mobile device and a WiFi connection. Put simply, the Internet is a fundamental gateway to new growth for developing nations and continued prosperity for developed nations.

The Internet is also a vital platform for free expression and the exchange of ideas, and that is why I stand before you today to make this fundamental promise. The United States will protect and preserve a free, vibrant, and open Internet.

At the Department of Commerce, we are proud to call ourselves America's innovation and data agency. As someone who comes from the private sector and started five companies, I know firsthand the essential role the Internet plays in making sure businesses are able to compete globally.

I have the privilege of being President Obama's point person on entrepreneurship. I lead the presidential ambassadors for global

entrepreneurship, and I get to work with some of America's most successful CEOs to inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs, both at home and abroad.

In my 15 months as secretary, I have visited more than 20 countries and everywhere we travel, from Ghana to the Philippines, the innovators we meet make clear that the Web is a critical tool needed for success. That's why we must all work together to protect the Internet and to keep it open and free.

Our global economy and the young entrepreneurs of the world are counting on all of us.

Indeed, the Internet has become a fixture of modern life, not just to the United States and the West but in big cities, rural villages, and small towns across the globe.

So consider the transformations of recent years. 20 years ago there were 16 million Internet users. Today that number is 2.5 billion. In 2008, roughly 1.5 billion devices were connected to the Internet. Today there are an estimated 7 1/2 billion. And by 2018, experts predict that figure to exceed 18 billion.

And the people largely driving this growth are living in developing countries where the number of households with Internet access has more than doubled in the past five years. All of this means that we are at a critical moment for ICANN and the important work that you do.

This means that how we govern and use the Internet is of global importance. This means that consensus decisions related to the Internet domain name system made today in Los Angeles can shape

lives and livelihoods in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere, not just today but long into the future. All of us are stakeholders in a strong and vibrant global Internet.

The Internet has thrived precisely because citizens around the world have a voice in how the Internet is governed. That is why the United States government supports multistakeholder processes. This is our bedrock principle for the Internet governance.

Let me be clear about this. The United States will not allow the global Internet to be co-opted by any person, entity, or nation seeking to substitute their parochial world view for the collective wisdom of this community, you, the community of stakeholders, represented so well here today.

As such, that is why six months ago NTIA announced a decision to transition its stewardship role over the Internet Domain Name System to the global multistakeholder communities. From the inception of ICANN in 1998, the United States government envisioned that its role with respect to the IANA functions would be temporary.

Over the years, many stakeholders took comfort in the fact that the United States provided some level of stewardship over ICANN. I have been encouraged by the way the global community and ICANN have stepped up to develop the transition proposal. We rally our allies and will continue to build international coalitions to support multistakeholder governance of the Internet. And we are strong supporters of an ICANN that is committed to the idea of individual voices coming to consensus decisions.

We must all recognize, however, that this is not inevitable and we should not take it for granted. We all know that the multistakeholder governance and institutions like ICANN are under intense and unprecedented pressure and scrutiny. Yet, we are confident that the multistakeholder model offers the greatest assurance that the Internet will continue to thrive. And we must work together to ensure that the Internet remains an engine for economic growth, innovation, and free expression.

We must continue to work hard to sustain multistakeholder governance because it has enemies who want to reduce Internet governance to a meeting of governmental technocrats promoting narrow national interests.

We must make clear this approach is the best tool to secure the openness and vibrancy of the Internet. We must ensure that ICANN can build on its efforts to strengthen the multistakeholder process and become directly accountable to the customers of the IANA functions and to the broader Internet community.

Next week at the International Telecommunications Union conference in Korea, we will see proposals to put governments in charge of Internet governance. You can rest assured that the United States will oppose these efforts at every turn.

We know that those interested in government control tend to be countries that censor content and stifle the free flow of information. We will be clear that these steps are contrary to our belief in the value of free speech, whether in the Internet, in society, in the public sphere both here at home and abroad. We will remind all players in each

instance that the multistakeholder model will preserve and protect a strong and resilient Internet.

In closing, the world is watching ICANN and some are waiting for us to fail. But we cannot and must not let that happen. We have to get this transition right.

Make no mistake. I stand by ICANN. I am all in when it comes to the global debate over Internet governance. And we will preserve and protect a free and open Internet.

From the birth of the Internet through the present day, this community has stood together on the cutting edge of the drive to extend access to and the reach of the Internet, a key path for growth and success in the 21st century.

And in every forum, the United States will remain a steadfast champion of the Internet, working to assure that it remains open, an open platform for economic opportunity, innovation, and free expression.

So moving forward, all of us need to step up. Like my friend Walter likes to say, we must collaborate to protect and expand the global Internet. We must collaborate to ensure that the Internet continues to flourish, and we must collaborate to guarantee that the Internet remains a gateway to prosperity and free expression all over the world.

So thank you for gathering together today and every day to advance our shared vision of a more open, a more free, and a more accessible Internet. Thank you.

[Applause]