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give up its control over the Internet, in order to resolve questions about the National Security Agency spying on Internet traffic.

Dave McClure • Mar. 24, 2014

The Obama Administration has proposed that the U.S. Department of Commerce give up its control over the Internet, in order to resolve questions about the National Security Agency spying on Internet traffic.

It's a bad decision. Take it from someone who has watched the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) devolve over the past decade into sleaze, cronyism and horrible policies that actually harm the Internet. The decision to turn control of the Internet over to ICANN will make the Internet as every bit well run as a brothel in a third-world county. With apologies to any third-world brothels that get a contract to run the entire Internet with no oversight whatsoever.

I have to admit that I am prejudiced. I ran the national trade association for Internet Service Providers in 1998, when ICANN was formed. I fought against its structure, and testified before Congress, the US Department of Commerce and the Federal Communications Commission to oppose the powers it was given. I am sorry to say that I, and others who raised similar concerns, were shouted down and reviled.

I'm not opposed to the idea of ICANN. Somebody has to manage the domain names and numbers the Internet requires to work, and a non-profit corporation seems an ideal vehicle to do so. I knew Esther Dyson, the first chair of ICANN, and had great respect for Paul Twomey, the Australian who also served as President of the organization. My criticism of the proposed action goes to the heart of what ICANN has become, and how it is managed.

The structure of the organization is fatally flawed, for five reasons:

1. It is a closed and crony organization. Read what pass for bylaws of the

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- the point where we have literally thousands of domain categories, so that we can sell, sell, sell those names. Where is the voice of the Internet user? The companies that need domain names and numbers? See item #1, above.
3. Consider the salaries. This is a non-profit? Not for the staff. And certainly not for the board members, who meet each quarter in luxury paid for by your domain name fees. Object to the caviar and champagne? Well, see #1 above. No one at ICANN cares what you think.
4. The organization drips with sleaze. In a period when we could virtually eliminate many of the worst scams on the Internet by simply forcing owners of domain to identify themselves correctly and be visible to consumers and law enforcement... ICANN dawdles. Guess they don't want to lose the revenue. They also allow, for the same reason, the creation of new domain suffixes so that major companies have to pay...and pay...and pay to protect themselves from fake mirror sites. Why on earth would a reputable organization allow such behavior? Well, they would not. ICANN would.
5. There is no provision for oversight. Every organization needs oversight from someone. If not from the government, then by members or stakeholders or even Miss Emily's Kindergarten class. ICANN is a loose cannon that is overseen by no one.

Remember the debacle of Karl Auerbach? Here's how Wikipedia reports it: "In 2000, Auerbach was elected by a public vote to the Board of Directors of ICANN, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, as the At-Large Representative for North America...In November, 2000, shortly after Auerbach's public election to the ICANN board of directors, he asked to see the non-profit's internal financial and other corporate records, which, under California law, he was entitled to see.

"ICANN initially resisted, then subsequently consented on condition that Auerbach agree, in writing, to extensive restrictions. Auerbach refused to agree to any

restrictions, including limitations on what he could see, the right to copy

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contracts and other internal documents.”

Secretive, self-absorbed, greedy and accountable to no one. Is that who you really want running the Internet your business relies on to do business?

Me, either.

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