

From: Vinton Cerf
Sent: Wednesday, 29 April 2020
To: Maarten Botterman

Subject: Ethos/PIR decision

Dear Maarten,

I have been following the sometimes heated debates triggered by the Ethos proposal to the Internet Society to acquire PIR. There seems to be a great deal of misinformation flying around to say nothing of deliberate disinformation. Some of the interventions are well-intended even if motivated by assumptions that may not be correct. Some seem to me self-serving in various ways.

I think the facts are clear by now and should be used by the ICANN Board to make a determination promptly. As you may know, I am favorably impressed by the Ethos offer to ISOC and by the several amendments made to assure critics that Ethos and PIR will not cause harm to the registrants in .org. Indeed, it is not in their interest to harm the registrants in any way as they might well lose them to alternative TLD registration. Without Ethos, there are no price caps; there is no independent council with binding authority on censorship; and we will pass on millions of dollars committed to nonprofit community enablement. With Ethos, PIR will now be dedicated to serving nonprofits with much larger resources and a singular focus. I think the benefits to ISOC and to the customers of PIR have been articulated repeatedly so I will not reprise them in this note except to say that under this arrangement PIR and ISOC can both invest in their purposes in ways and in quantities that the present arrangement does not permit.

The more important message I want to share is that ICANN's delayed decision, should it delay any further, will be used to do harm to ICANN's standing as a central, multi-stakeholder governing authority for the unique identifiers of the Internet. Parties with an interest in gaining control of Internet governance will use further delay to undermine ICANN's credibility in its unique role. Already efforts are underway to introduce a "new IP" concept, not into the IETF but into ETSI and the ITU. That's a wedge opportunity to move other Internet considerations in that direction.

The communication with the California AG's office is a good example of the dangers ICANN faces. Even if well intended and producing additional and beneficial provisions for protecting registrant interests, the additional delay may be used by inimical interests to argue that ICANN's processes are easily disrupted and therefore responsibility should be moved elsewhere.

All of this argues, simply, for a prompt decision now by the ICANN Board in the matter of the Ethos/PIR proposal to the Internet Society. I strongly favor approval of this proposal but that is the Board's decision to make, not mine.

Sincerely,

Vint Cerf
former Chairman of the Board of ICANN