Reg Levy Board Seat 13 Candidate Statement

Background

It is an honor to have been nominated to stand with this slate of distinguished candidates for the Contracted Party House seat on the ICANN Board. There's the perception that there's a road to the Board: first you serve on Council, then NomCom, then you become Council Chair, then you "achieve" the Board. I don't believe that.

I think the Board needs me, and needs me now, or I wouldn't be running.

I have been involved in the ICANN Community as a representative of a contracted party since 2011, when the application window for the most recent round of gTLDs opened. I championed and founded the new gTLD Applicant Group (NTAG), a RySG-affiliated resource group for not-yet-contracted parties, and later served as Treasurer of the RySG. When I left Minds + Machines for Tucows, I immediately became involved with the RrSG, chairing multiple subgroups over the last seven years.

I intend to serve the Community in as many aspects as I can for many years to come and don't think there's any prescribed order for it.

At Minds + Machines and at Tucows, I have had legal and compliance-related roles, writing, reviewing, and negotiating contracts for business teams and working to enforce contracts, including our respective RAs, RRAs, and RAAs. I have a strong background in both business and business-related legal issues. This is still my role and will continue to be—I'm in the day-to-day of the operation of a contracted party business and understand intimately the issues that contracted parties face.

I have served on the boards of non-profit organizations for over a decade and am comfortable with the role of a board in such an organization—to guide and give counsel to the executive staff but not to meddle in the day-to-day affairs of the organization. I'm comfortable with balance sheets and making difficult budgeting decisions, both from my experience as a board member and as an executive of a for-profit company. I'm also well-acquainted with conversations with the executives of non-profit organizations and discussing strategy in keeping with that organization's mission and bylaws.

Since becoming involved with ICANN, I have made professional and personal relationships with people across the silos of the Community. Learning what each person and group brings to the Community has been as instructive as it has been delightful. Multistakeholderism requires consensus-building, which means we each have to understand the other's perspective, motivations, and goals to reach an outcome that benefits the whole Internet community and not just the desires of those of us lucky enough to be able to participate in the ICANN Community.

I'm honored to know many people who will give their unvarnished opinion to me about any issue facing the Community—from ALAC to NCSG, from SSAC to IPC, from Contracted to Non-Contracted Party. Board Seat 13 may be selected by the Contracted Parties but the Board serves ICANN and its mission above all—and each stakeholder and constituency make up ICANN.

ICANN's Current Challenges

Speaking hard truths is never something I have shied away from and encouraging others to stand up for what they believe has also always been a talent of mine. As a member of the ICANN Board, I would advocate to do the right thing—even when it is difficult.

Community Input

Following the IANA transition, oversight of ICANN falls to the Community; the primary manner in which the Community can provide that oversight is through the Board. The oversight of ICANN Org must be more hands-on: there has been a worrying trend of the Board ignoring the Community and ignoring the role of the GNSO Council; a strong voice for the Community is a necessity on the Board.

A well-functioning ICANN is a boring ICANN—ICANN must be a neutral body in order to ensure open and global access to the names and numbers it governs; it must stand above the fray in terms of jurisdictional and inter-Community squabbles.

Unfortunately, of late, it has begun to try to weigh in on every jurisdictional concern in an attempt to please everyone—and in so doing, pleases no one. ICANN must not be afraid to take a stand for neutrality, even if it upsets some.

Inclusivity

ICANN is just over a quarter of a decade old and the Internet is a vastly different entity than it was 25 years ago—yet the Community remains voiced by many of the same people who helped found this community. ICANN events, Stakeholder Groups, and Advisory Committees, for all our attempts to foster diversity, remain places where young people and those of marginalized genders do not find themselves welcomed.

The ICANN Community has not had a great track record with responding to complaints of harassment; the ICANN Ombuds has rarely if ever acted to actually protect those they are supposed to. The new Ombuds is promised to stand as a champion for marginalized people but they are still not wholly independent. Independence in an Ombuds is an absolute necessity; without it, they cannot hope to provide impartial and fair dispute resolution. As a member of the Board, I would encourage ICANN Org executive staff to make the organizational changes necessary to give the Ombuds the resources and independence they need to be an effective bulwark for those who are still made to feel unwelcome in our Community.

I started working in the ICANN Community in 2011. I was then and am still thankful for the institutional knowledge and perspective brought by ICANN's founding generation; but now, 13 years later, I can bring over a decade of experience while also ushering in a generational shift. Bringing both youthful perspective and experience to the ICANN Board is a hard needle to thread and I hope my candidacy is just the first step in legitimizing the value of new generational leadership. I believe I would be the youngest current board member, which surely puts me in the running for youngest ever board member. Yet for all that, I'm not nearly as young as the average Internet user.

Budget

Earlier this year, in an attempt to cut costs, ICANN Org went through a round of layoffs that cut the number of employees by 7%. It has also recently announced an increase to both registry and registrar fees. 97% of 501(c)(3) organizations (the type of non-profit that ICANN is organized as in the United States) operate with a budget of less than $5 million; 92% have a budget of less than $1 million. In 2024, ICANN had an

operating budget of almost $200 million. For comparison, in 2000, ICANN had an operating budget of just around $5 million.

Had ICANN's fees and spending kept in line with inflation, this year's budget would have been closer to $10 million. The twenty-fold increase in operating expenses is attributable to multiple factors. There are more registered domains now than there were 24 years ago, more registrars, and more registries. But that only explains the increase in *funding*, not the concurrent increase in spending. We—the Community—have encouraged and contributed to a spendthrift culture to support global multistakeholder policy development. The symbolic cull of ICANN Staff who support us notably did not include any type of pay freeze for senior staff. Much is said of the volunteer nature of the work of ICANN but the salaries of the executive Staff are public and, frankly, shocking. Hiding compensation above half a million dollars in "monthly stipends" and hundreds of dollars of "at-risk compensation" is disingenuous for an organization ostensibly committed to transparency.

In most companies, vendor costs are re-evaluated on an ongoing basis to avoid stagnation—and there are notable vendors that have been with ICANN for a very long time. Harder questions need to be asked of ICANN Org about how Community funds are used and how to best use them to support an open, interoperable, resilient, secure, and stable Internet. And, as leadership must come from the top, these questions must be asked by the Board. The CEO reports to the Board; it is not the Board's place to make decisions but rather to force the CEO to make difficult choices—and to tell the CEO "no" when necessary—rather than to simply rubber stamp recommendations.

Affiliations and Conflicts

My GNSO Statement of Interest is up to date and I declare that I am currently employed as Associate General Counsel – Domains by Tucows, a registrar that holds four accreditations (IANA 48, 69, 85, and 106) and a backend registry services provider with both ccTLD and gTLD customers. Tucows votes in the RrSG. I sit on the board of directors of OpenMedia, a Canadian advocacy group with a mission to keep the Internet open, affordable, and surveillance-free. I do not believe I have any conflicts.

So why me?

I have the skills and experience—and the spirit and moxy—needed to be a member of the ICANN Board and, more, to be your Board Seat 13 representative in this term.

I have experience with both primarily-registry and primarily-registrar businesses; as a registrar, I also work closely with resellers, which are important, if non-contracted, stakeholders in the ICANN ecosystem. My relationships with members across the Community also make me perfectly-situated to create coalitions.

Each of you knows me to be dedicated, tenacious, and approachable. I am here for you; I am active, I am passionate, and I am engaged. My time on the board will not see me ascending to a status where I no longer interface with those I represent.

I bring over a decade experience while also representing much-needed generational diversity on the ICANN board.

I am also the only candidate who will ensure that the current gender disparity is not further tilted.

I believe all of this makes me the ideal candidate to serve the Contracted Party House on the ICANN Board and it would be an honor to serve you.