

Q&A

With **DANIEL SEPULVEDA**, US communications ambassador

Q WHAT IS YOUR POSITION?

A My full title is deputy assistant secretary of state and US coordinator for international communications and information policy. I am the representative of the US for various multi- and bi-lateral communications negotiations with other countries and organisations in areas such as the digital economy and internet governance. The post is authorised by Congress for our secretary of state (John Kerry), and carries the legal rank of ambassador and it's a political appointment. It does carry some power but I see the same status in my counterparts, such as Roberto Viola, head of DG Connect at the European Commission, with whom we have recently had our annual US-European Union information society dialogue.

Q AND HOW DID YOU COME INTO THE ROLE?

A I have a masters in public policy and spent 12 years in our Senate conducting oversight on various issues for three senators – Barbara Boxer, Barack Obama and John Kerry. I became particularly interested in the communications needs of people and the democratisation of opportunity through access to information – the ability to challenge

power and organise others to do the same, and make the most of yourself as an economic actor. I care deeply about these issues. A particular time for me was when I visited Barbara Boxer's constituents in East Palo Alto in Silicon Valley – this is a poor immigrant

area next to a much wealthier one. I was looking at things such as how schools were using computers and how people were accessing government services, and it really clicked with me that here were two communities that were physically very close to each other, but were worlds apart. The poorer part really needed the very technology services that Silicon Valley was busy producing for the rest of the world.

Q HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOUR AGENDA?

A I divide it into two things. First are policy issues and the second are administrative issues that relate directly to the operations of the State Department as

a whole. So with policy issues, our primary mission, and our policy imperative, is connectivity, such as with our Global Connect Initiative, which aims to get 1.5 billion people online by 2020.

On the administration side, one of the things that we've tried to do at the State Department is to ensure that we are institutionalising the prioritisation of digital economy issues within the organisation. The President has recently issued an executive order to make global connectivity a primary goal for the administration, ensuring that the State Department has a coordination lead across agencies to promote connectivity in programmatic and policy work.

We are developing a curriculum and identifying people who have digital economy responsibility. I have just run our first webinar for them on how to identify communities they need to work with in multi-stakeholder settings.

Q SO CONNECTIVITY IS THE KEY POLICY ISSUE...

A Right. It's connectivity and the legal and regulatory environment that you create to encourage it. A second issue is internet governance and its international structure and ensuring that we preserve the multi-stakeholder system. A third is an array of other regulatory issues that are still being debated and for which there are no universally accepted definitions of what the right or wrong way to go is. These include privacy and cybersecurity.

Q INTERNET GOVERNANCE IS A BIG TOPIC...

A Yes. You can think about it in its minimal sense, which is the management of the internet and its core infrastructure. That is the jurisdiction of ICANN, and the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration. ICANN is the premier multi-stakeholder institution in the larger rubric of internet governance. We have defended its independence and responsibilities due to its effectiveness in this space.

The larger view is about international and domestic law and regulation that applies to access to, and the use of, communications using the internet protocol. So then you have a debate about everything from competition law, to data protection, to state on state activity. We do divide those responsibilities up within the State Department. My colleague, Chris Painter, is the advisor on 'cyber' issues to the Secretary of State,



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and takes the lead role on the UN's group of governmental experts on cybersecurity, for example, which deals with state on state behaviour on the internet. I have responsibility for all of the multi-lateral organisations that deal with economic issues, the ITU, OECD, ASEAN, EU etc. And I also take responsibility for managing and coordinating across the agencies our bi-lateral annual dialogues for specific key markets, like the one that we just concluded with the European Commission. We do those with other markets as well – Mexico, Japan and specific markets within Europe, India and others.

Q THE NUMBER OF MEETINGS AND PLAYERS IS VERY CONFUSING TO OUTSIDERS...

A It's mind boggling to those of us who are insiders. I think that there's something to be said for a mechanism to make the internet governance system, in particular, more user friendly. There's going to be a lot of meetings, because the issues are so disparate. Clearly though the 11th Internet Governance Forum (IGF), which is scheduled for Mexico in December, is the premier gathering of this year in the field. The Freedom Online Coalition event in Costa Rica this October is also important. I was of course at June's OECD ministerial meeting on the digital economy and can commend the report by Carl Bildt released there [*One Internet*] and we were happy with the Cancún Declaration's commitment to the open internet and free flow of information. I think in general our community needs to be respectful of people's resources and make clear the purposes of any meeting so a person in a ministry in a developing country or a civil society actor can decide whether to go.

Q WHO IS STANDING IN THE WAY OF AN OPEN INTERNET – AND IS IT IN DANGER OF FRAGMENTATION?

A There are authoritarian regimes that argue that their sovereign right is to control or govern their people, and that extends to the information that enters and exits their country. That is not our belief: we don't believe that is consistent with human rights, and we don't think it's actually operationally sound. We believe that the architecture of the internet as open and enabling the free flow of data is in the global public interest for innovation and wealth creation, and human rights, and we will continue to defend that proposition. As for fragmentation, it depends what is meant. Technically, the internet is on a sound footing, but we have seen an up-tick in regimes exerting

greater control on their people, which creates an experiential fragmenting that in turn raises costs and reduces utility of access to the network. At home, we are firmly behind our Open Internet Order, which has just survived a court challenge. We don't promote our specific rules to the world, but we have been successful at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+10) review in uniting with nations that also have open internet and net neutrality rules.

Q IS PROMOTING CONNECTIVITY AN ALTRUISTIC ACTIVITY?

A Not really – we see that every additional person on the network adds value for everyone else. The more people that exist on the global internet the greater access our people have to them both as consumers and global citizens to have exchanges of ideas and commerce. But yes, beyond that there is the democratising force of the internet and the human rights imperative to ensure that people around the world have access to a network that enables them to reach their full potential.

Q WHAT ARE THE MAIN DIGITAL ECONOMY BARRIERS?

A The biggest one I see is thinking of ICT as an end in itself, and where countries use law and public policy to force the development of an ICT sector, such as a localisation requirement or manufacturing mandate, or discriminatory taxation of products. I understand why people want to develop their own sectors, and we don't have a problem with that, if it's done through incentive mechanisms such as investing in the digital skills of a country. What we don't want is the cost of imposing artificial barriers to participation in markets for external actors. We are though seeing more ministers and heads of state making the broader digital economy a priority, and we closely watch initiatives such as the EU's digital single market and Digital India. This year, John Kerry hosted a World Bank meeting on Global Connect.

Q ARE COUNTRIES' FINANCES NOW A BIG OBSTACLE?

A I think that the vast majority of the challenges for providing connectivity for development around the world are neither technological nor financial – they are policy challenges. You can see it by comparing countries that are in the same part of the world that are having different outcomes. Look at Chile – it has 72% coverage, or Colombia where 90% of their towns are covered. Brazil and Mexico are both making progress, and Argentina now has this as a priority. There's a lot of investment money in the world looking for a place to land but it needs a safe home with certainty on regulation and a welcoming environment for investment. Companies are prepared to extend the networks to where it makes sense from a market perspective, and where it doesn't make sense you need to have strong universal service funds or other public-private partnership mechanisms.

Q DO YOU HAVE PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR, WHEN THE US ADMINISTRATION WILL CHANGE?

A I'm a public servant at heart but could move to the private sector. I will though want to continue working to help empower people through technology.