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Proposed 28th amendment to the U.S. Constitution:

- The rights of the citizens of the U.S. and, indeed the rest of the world, to have complete and unilateral access to information, without regard for type of hardware, operating system, data storage format, programming language or interface, shall be ensured by joint cooperation of all providers of data processing solutions.
- All data shall be transported using a single, common communications protocol.
- All data shall be accessible by using a single, common interface.
- All data shall be exchanged in a common format, accessible and understandable by any information systems architecture.
- Any computer program may be accessed by any other computer system, regardless of the program's source language or operating environment.
- Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Maybe it should come to this.

The next Amendment to the U.S. Constitution could guarantee the rights of people all over the world to have free and unrestricted access to information, at least by ensuring that those subject to its jurisdiction would adhere to the principles above.

This isn't a call for a repeal of privacy laws. Indeed, the increase in the availability of information has created new challenges in ensuring information is accessible only by those who should have authority.

Rather, the proposed 28th Amendment is about solving the rampant computing anarchy that we've created over the last four decades. If someone "should" have access to information, we should ensure they actually "can" obtain the information.

Ever since computing systems became a useful tool, we've been inventing the process to handle the challenges. Despite a plethora of solutions across the landscape, the essence of computing is very simple. Peel back the layers of white papers, architectures, and buzzwords and you'll find computing performs four functions:

- **Exchange information.** Moving data between electronic devices involves the need to swap information with other computer networks, both local and wide.
- **Present information.** People need some sort of presentation of the data, as everything else is in a format that only the electronics understand. This includes printed reports, data on a screen, audio, video and even Braille devices.
- **Store information.** From flat-file to hierarchical to relational and data warehousing, billions of dollars have been made and spent in the pursuit of the best way to store data.
- **Process information.** Although multi-lingual in implementation (e.g., COBOL, Java, Visual Basic, RPG), they all accomplish the same end result: manipulating, changing, combining, comparing, and deciding—processing the data.

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The first breakthrough was the common method of exchanging data. TCP/IP, the backbone of the Internet, has largely rid the world of the spaghetti of communication protocols.

Once we could swap data on a grand scale, we had to be able to actually present it in a common format, and the Web browser emerged as the universal interface for the presentation of data.

This leaves the storage and processing of the data. Too many languages and too many proprietary ideas of how to store the data have created a "Tower of Babel" when it comes to sharing across architectures. And this is not what the creators intended.

The Good News is the emergence of XML. With XML, and the implementation of Web services and Service-Oriented Architectures (SOA), all data, whether VSAM, DL/I, Oracle, or an ASCII text file, can be easily accessed without any knowledge of the original format, database, or even platform. XML and Web services also provide the ability to share programs across platforms with a blind eye to the program language and nuances of the source code.

Mainframe systems have a rapidly increasing range of choices for XML/Web services implementation. With the majority of the world's data still on mainframe systems, we should lead the way in embracing this incredible new way of serving data and program resources.

XML has the ability to solve the remaining two challenges of universal computing. Then, the true power of what we've collectively built since the beginning can be harvested. The economic benefits of sharing what we have rather than trading it for a new "Trophy System" could be awesome. And the world can share what it wants most.

All in favor, say "I"—for Information. That Sums it up. **ME**

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