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On the Government's restriction of Public Service Internet access

The government should revisit the foolish decision to restrict Internet access by government ministries across the board. I was reminded, when I saw the Minister's statement in the press defending this ill-advised decision, of arriving one morning as the Public Service Minister and discovering that Internet access had been blocked to my computer. When I asked the permanent secretary about this, she informed me that the Ministry of Finance had arrogated unto itself the authority to simply restrict access on grounds similar to those espoused by the Minister in the unfortunate defence in today's press.

Needless to say, I asked for it to be reversed forthwith. I am therefore surprised that this matter is being brought up again.

The Minister argues that this makes the government more efficient but there is no empirical evidence to suggest that it does. The government has it backwards.

The experts who came to me when I was Minister for the Public Service from the Inter American Development Bank on public sector reform told me that the problem with the government's system was not abuse of the system, but the fact that the platform that they were using did not have sufficient capacity to meet the demands made by government workers and the public for access to the government's system. The answer then was for the government to invest in increasing capacity not restricting use. That is still the likely answer.

Typical of my experience with well meaning but sometimes-insensitive bureaucrats is that a decision is taken without reference to the users of the system. This is the blunt instrument of restrictions instead of investing in more capacity. Then they have Ministers trot out senseless statements about efficiency, when it has nothing at all to do with efficiency. Employees now have to go home to use the Internet. Sometimes the government's system is down for hours at a time or takes minutes to download simple material or government workers cannot access their government e-mail address.

The fact is e-government is a failure in The Bahamas and the Minister should revisit this matter because it will now make the government's work more difficult to do, as one attorney in the Attorney General's office has already indicated to the Nassau Guardian. Other public servants are complaining about this and their voices need to be heard. Instead of the government being bloody minded about this, they ought to reverse course.

In the end, the public is going to suffer.

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