A Vision of an Alternate Future for the Internet in America

I'm not sure if it was the popcorn, or if I was being influenced by the Robert Redford spy thriller I had just watched on my iPad (called "Spy Games") but as I went to bed last night I began to think deeply about alternative ways in which the Internet could be managed by the US. I was asking some hypothetical questions about both the Internet's past, and its future.

I wouldn't pretend to know anything about where things are going for the Internet, but it does seem to me that the more it becomes integrated into our daily lives the harder different interests try to take a tighter control over it. This month, there was the announcement about the creation of a Cyber Threat Intelligence Integration Center in response to recent cyber attacks on US companies. Would it be so far-fetched for the government to have started an agency ten or fifteen years ago?

I was also thinking about the decline of the US Postal Service, and it occurred to me that perhaps the USPS could have strategically been put in charge of the Internet in the United States. In the late 90's and early 2000's, we mostly used the Internet for email, so it would have made sense for the USPS to manage the delivery of our messages. As the Internet evolved, it would have taken the lead on e-commerce and social media also.

This internet-focussed branch of the USPS would have offered a myriad of services, from domain name registration, web design consultations, to general user support. It would also work with the major technology companies to compile a list of best practices and tips for users.

Most of this agency's interaction with users would be virtual or via the phone, but a partnership would allow libraries to provide a bricks-and-mortar presence. Select employees of the libraries would also serve as representatives of this federal agency.

The rest of the "Federal Cyber Services Agency" workforce would be distributed across the country. Tech support representatives, analysts, and administrators would work together inside a shared office space. Network technicians, and other service providers could work remotely.

This agency would be lead by a Webmaster General at the national level, and webmasters at the regional and state levels (I thought that it would be neat to use existing terms, while giving the role of the webmaster formal powers, and it seemed like a natural extension of the USPS).

In addition to answering questions about the Internet and technology from the public, working with companies, and directing visitors to trustworthy information, this federal agency would release different publications.

This kind of entity would help to redefine how Americans received their information. Perhaps it would help to united the different media outlets, or maybe it would stand on its own as a source for information.

Being a younger agency born during the age of the Internet, it would rely on a lot of existing tools for communication and document management. It would take advantage of the tools offered by partner companies such as Google, and Salesforce.

For a while I've been toying with the idea of creating an organization that is a simulation but could still produce actual content. Someone could become a member of the pseudo-organization, follow its directions, and respond to its messages. A lot of what they do would be role-playing, but I don't know if it matters as long as they are pursuing a passion or creating something that they can be proud of.

So, I have been developing this thinking into a social experiment. I've created pages on both Google+ and Facebook titled "National Bureau of Cyber Services" (I preferred "U.S." or "Federal," but I didn't want anybody to think I was trying to impersonate an actual agency). I also have an idea of what kinds of posts would go on these pages. In general, anything that is helpful or informative.

What kinds of services do you think that an agency like this might provide? What are some of the limits that would need to be imposed on it? How would it work with companies like Google and Apple? What are some of the other agencies, companies, and organizations that might serve as partners?