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## ICANN to Stay American For Now

By [Roy Mark](#)  
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WASHINGTON -- The United States will continue its oversight of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) after the current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) expires next week.

For how long, though, remains in doubt.

"We are working with ICANN to negotiate the next phase of our continued partnership," Acting Assistant Secretary of Commerce John Kneuer told a U.S. Senate panel this week.

ICANN controls the naming system for Web addresses and the root servers that are at the core of the Internet. ICANN is a Department of Commerce subcontractor located in California.

Kneuer made a repeat appearance Thursday afternoon before a U.S. House subcommittee where he was pressed for the length of the renewed MOU.

"Probably somewhere between one and three years like MOUs in the past," Kneuer said.

U.S. Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.) wanted a more specific answer, but Kneuer and ICANN President and CEO Paul Twomey declined.

"You're not telling us very much here," Upton complained.

The issue of U.S. control of ICANN has prompted protests from other countries and led to a movement last year to put ICANN under the control of the United Nations.

In November, the U.N. [agreed](#) to leave the role of Internet governance in the hands of the United States.

"Allowing ICANN to continue to develop under the watchful eye of the Department of Commerce is not only the right thing to do, but the most prudent action, as well," Upton said Thursday.

"The stakes are too high."

A CDW-G advertisement. The top half is red with white text: "Give your students today's technology. (And today's best education.)" Below this is a white button that says "visit CDWG.com" with a right-pointing arrow. The bottom half shows a young girl with dark hair sitting at a desk with a laptop. The CDW-G logo is in the bottom right corner, and the tagline "CDWG.com • The Right Technology. Right Away.™" is at the bottom left.

Nevertheless, the operation of ICANN drew some sharp criticism from lawmakers, and one member of the panel called to testify.

"We cannot allow U.S interests to be put at risk by blindly ignoring ICANN's flaws, or failing to seek improvement. For fear of global dissatisfaction," Rep. John Dingell (D- Mich.) said.

"As the Department [of Commerce] negotiates an extension of the Memorandum of Understanding, further reforms must be sought. ICANN remains far from a model of effective and sustainable self-governance."

Harold Feld, the senior vice president at the Media Access Project, told the panel the question to be dealt with was not turning over ICANN to the U.S., but, instead, how well does ICANN handle Internet governance.

According to Feld, the U.S. should move ICANN out of the line of fire as an attractive target on issues that "it has business or interest in addressing."

The U.S. government, Feld said, needs to "say up front it will never fully transfer authority over the Domain Name System (DNS) to ICANN or needs to set a clear path for the transfer to take place."

He added that ICANN needs some sort of mechanism to provide all stakeholders a way of participating in setting ICANN's policies.

Feld was also critical of ICANN's position on Internet regulation. In theory, ICANN's only role is a technical one.

"ICANN needs to stop pretending it doesn't do regulation and learn to separate regulatory issues like competition policy from technical coordination," he said.

"If ICANN is going to set tariffs and price caps, which is essentially what it does for domain names, it needs to stop navigating by the seat of its pants and figure out how to come up with real numbers that make sense."

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