

Several U.S. lawmakers and an executive with the world's largest domain-name registrar called on the U.S. government to maintain oversight of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) after a major agreement between two expires in September.

The U.S. needs to maintain oversight of ICANN to push the organization to become more transparent and accountable to registrars and Internet users, said Christine Jones, general counsel and corporate secretary for The Go Daddy Group, a huge registrar based in Scottsdale, Arizona. The nonprofit ICANN was created in 1998 to oversee the Internet's DNS (domain name system).

Mechanisms ICANN has put in place to appeal its decisions "are all ICANN reviewing ICANN," Jones said Thursday, during a hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet.

ICANN has pushed for more independence, and officials there have pushed to end the organization's [joint project agreement](#) (JPA) with the U.S. Department of Commerce when it expires Sept. 30.

Other countries have called for more international oversight of ICANN, and in May, Viviane Reding, the European commissioner for Internet-related issues, called for the creation of a group of 12 countries to oversee the organization.

ICANN has taken several steps to become more transparent and accountable to its constituencies, including the ability to take ICANN decisions to an independent arbitrator, said Paul Twomey, ICANN's president and CEO. The organization publishes transcripts of all its meetings, has an ombudsman on staff, and blogs about its actions, he said.

Even if the JPA expires, ICANN will have a continuing contract with the U.S. government to run

the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA), which is responsible for the global coordination of the DNS Root, Internet Protocol addressing, and other IP resources, Twomey noted. Most of the U.S. government's oversight of ICANN comes through that contract, he said.

The U.S. government and ICANN have long agreed that a private-sector organization is the best place to manage the DNS, Twomey added. "This is the time to have confidence to state, 'This model works,'" he said. "If the U.S. does not have confidence in a private sector-led model, we should not expect other governments to have confidence in the model. If we continue to question the private sector-led community's community to lead itself through the ICANN model, we should expect ongoing challenges and alternatives from others."

Despite long-time calls for international oversight, several members of the subcommittee pushed for the agreement between ICANN and the Department of Commerce to be extended. In addition, the end of the agreement could raise concerns about the security and stability of the DNS, said Ken Silva, CTO for VeriSign, the vendor that operators the .com and .net domain under a contract from ICANN.

Lawmakers are concerned that an unfriendly nation could gain control of the DNS without the agreement in place, said Representative Lee Terry, a Nebraska Republican. "Should a rogue nation get the chance to control the DNS, it's a definite possibility they could use it to harm the U.S. or to dismantle or interfere with our ability to communicate globally through the Internet," he said. "Quite simply put, the United States government created the Internet and needs to be in charge."

Lawmakers and witnesses raised several concerns about ICANN, including its plan to introduce dozens of new generic top-level domains, or gTLDs. Currently, 21 gTLDs exist, but new ones like .phone or .banks could be purchased under the ICANN plan.

ICANN has not yet come up with a solution to concerns from companies that they will have to register hundreds of new Web sites to protect their brand names if the gTLD plan goes through, Jones said.

Representative John Dingell, a Michigan Democrat, called the ICANN gTLD plan "clearly inadequate."

A large number of new gTLDs could cause consumer confusion over Web site ownership, he said. "I have suspicions that expanded the number of top-level domains could in fact give rise to increased instances of fraud perpetrated upon consumers and the practice of cybersquatting," Dingell added.

Dingell also called on the Department of Commerce to renew its JPA with ICANN. "ICANN remains far from a model of effective and sustainable self-governance," he said. "Particularly in a time of increased cyber attacks on the U.S. government and domestic business, I find it wholly unwise to reduce further the participation of the federal government in determining the course of the Internet's future development."

