

ICANN't: U.S. to Transition Oversight of ICANN

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The U.S. Commerce Department recently announced its plan to transition oversight of the non-profit Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which manages Internet domain names and addresses, to a yet-to-be-determined entity. Since 1998, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), a division of the Commerce Department, has overseen the administration of various functions pursuant to the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) contract with ICANN.

This move comes as no surprise to many after Edward Snowden's disclosures regarding U.S. Internet surveillance unleashed a cacophony of international criticism over the U.S.'s perceived "control" over the Internet. The U.S., however, always intended to transition its oversight function to the wider Internet community and this move represents the final phase of a 1997 strategy to privatize ICANN.

The million dollar question is what will replace the U.S. in its oversight of ICANN. While that remains undetermined, the U.S. has stated that it will not accept a proposal that replaces its role with a "government-led or inter-governmental organization solution." In the meantime, ICANN is encouraging private sector entities, including businesses and trademark owners, to offer ideas, comments and suggestions for transition through its website, www.icann.org. ICANN plans to take ideas and feedback on the transition through May 8th.

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