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## Lawmakers seek delay of Web address expansion

*By Michelle Quinn*

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House lawmakers pushed the Internet naming body ICANN to delay its planned rollout of new domain names beyond the existing .com and .org at a hearing Wednesday, but an official maintained that ICANN had already considered their concerns.

At a House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing, Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.) said that ICANN — the nonprofit that oversees the Internet addressing system — “is turning into ‘I Can’t.’”

In January, the organization will begin taking applications for new domain names potentially for hundreds of words such as .hotel or .car. Eshoo said she doesn’t “think this is ready for primetime.” The new domains would go live in early 2013.

In a letter to ICANN, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and 26 other international organizations raised concerns about cybersquatting under ICANN’s planned expansion, according to Reuters.

Given these concerns, Eshoo asked ICANN Vice President Kurt Pritz if the organization could delay the expansion. Pritz did not answer her question directly but said ICANN’s process had taken into account all concerns that had been raised.

At the House hearing and at a similar hearing last week in the Senate, Pritz said ICANN's domain expansion has been part of its mission since it was founded in 1998 with the aim to promote competition in the domain name arena. The expansion, he argued, has the potential to spur innovation and create jobs. He recalled that a hearing at the House Energy and Commerce committee in 2001 in which the committee "chided" ICANN for moving too slowly in creating new domain names.

"What we are doing is taking in the needs of the next 1 billion people coming online," he said.

Eshoo's sentiments were shared by others on the committee. Rep. Doris Matsui (D-Calif.) said ICANN's process of "governance — the accountability and the transparency — is not apparent to me."

Rep. Cliff Stearns (R-Fla.) referred to the \$185,000 application fee for managing a new top-level domain and asked about salaries. Pritz's salary is close to \$400,000 and Ron Beckstrom, the chief executive of ICANN, earns more than \$800,000. Stearns called the salaries "pretty generous."

Pritz said the application fee was set based on predictions of what it will cost to operate the top-level domain program and would not go to salaries or ICANN's reserve.

The U.S. government is a member of ICANN's governmental advisory committee and in that role has participated in the creation of the new expansion. Fiona Alexander, associate administrator for the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration, said that ICANN accepted many of the recommendations to the expansion process that were suggested by the committee.

The NTIA believes ICANN improved the new top-level domain program "by incorporating a significant number of proposals" from the government committee, Alexander said. The fact that not all of the committee proposals were adopted "does not represent a failure of the process or a setback to governments; rather it reflects the reality of the multistakeholder process," she said.