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Ellen Miller: Make Washington More Like the Web

By Kristina Shevory ✉   09.22.08

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The Web is a haven of messy democracy. (Want to see voter engagement and healthy debate? Read any Digg comment thread.) But the ideal of transparency and participation hasn't yet infiltrated another messy democracy — the US government. That insight led Ellen Miller to cofound the Sunlight Foundation in 2006. The goal was to tap some of the Net's best-known thinkers in order to make Washington as user-friendly as a Google API. Miller, who previously headed the Center for Responsive Politics, has enlisted the likes of Esther Dyson, Lawrence Lessig, and Craig Newmark to serve as advisers. "Washington politicians like the firewall they have erected," Miller says. "They will have to be dragged into the 21st century." The next president could do the pulling — if he adopts the Internet's values of openness. Miller shares some of her current projects along with grander ideas she hopes the next president will support.

Miller's Political To-Do List

Ongoing

• **Earmarkwatch.org** - When politicians makes sausage, they don't skimp on pork. More than 500 volunteers have pored through federal spending bills to create this database of kickbacks and boondoggles.

• **OpenCongress.org** - This site summarizes bills in everyday language and monitors related news and blog coverage. Users can also follow a legislator's voting record and submit comments on proposed laws.

• **Punch Clock Map** - The next best thing to putting a bell on your senator, this Google map tracks the schedules of participating members of Congress (only nine so far).

Future

• **Crowdsourced Legislation** - Why should elected officials be the only ones who get to haggle over legislation? Drafts of bills should be uploaded to wikis, where anyone could edit them before they get debated by the House or Senate.

• **One-Click Government** - Sure, you can find federal documents online, but good luck making sense of them. Build mashups that seamlessly link politicians, donors, and legislation to give a complete picture of how government works.

Constant Real-Time Video - Encourage phonecam-wielding citizens to attend government meetings and post the proceedings on YouTube.

Ellen Miller is Executive director of Sunlight Foundation.

See Also:

[Stanford Law Professor Larry Lessig Bets 'Wikipedia' Approach Will Transform Congress](#)

[Newmark, Craig](#)

[ETech: Lessig Calls for Geeks to Code Money Out of Politics](#)

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