



## WIRED MAGAZINE: 16.10

POLITICS : LAW

## Ellen Miller: Make Washington More Like the Web

By Kristina Shevory 09.22.08



Photo: Bruce Gilden

THE 2008 SMART LIST: 15 People the Next President Should Listen To

1. PARAG KHANNA: Embrace the Post-American Age
2. DAVID LAIBSON: Tweak Human Behavior to Fix the Economy
3. CAROLYN PORCO: Use Big Robots — and Big Rockets
4. LEROY HOOD: Look to the Genome to Rebuild Health Care
5. MONTGOMERY MCFATE: Use Anthropology in Military Planning
6. PETER GLEICK: Deal With the Water Crisis Now
7. JAGDISH BHAGWATI: Keep Free Trade Free
8. ELLEN MILLER: Make Washington More Like the Web
9. RAM SHRIRAM: Open Up the Airwaves
10. A.T. BALL: Wage Smarter War With Agile Army IT
11. STEVE RAYNER: Take Climate Change Seriously
12. MITCHELL JOACHIM: Redesign Cities From Scratch
13. MARK SMOLINSKI: Detect Epidemics Before They Start
14. CHARLES FERGUSON: Beware of New, Easy-to-Make Nukes
15. ROBERT DALRYMPLE: Get Ready for Extreme Weather

**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).

## Most Commented

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2. A Month With the Lumix GF1, And Why I No Longer Use The Nikon D700
3. Symbian Operating System, Now Open Source and Free
4. Hackers Steal Millions in Carbon Credits
5. Gear Ring Is Like Mechanical Catnip to Nerds
6. Behold 'The Amazon Effect': Now Murdoch's Gunning for the \$10 E-Book
7. Everywhere in a Flash: The Quantum Physics of Photosynthesis
8. Report Details Hacks Targeting Google, Others
9. Save Cash, Buy a Clunker
10. New Look at Big Bang Radiation Refines Age of Universe

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## 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.*

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