

The eGovernment Revolution

- 1 [Text on screen] How have advances in information technology transformed government?
- 2 For a very long period of time, starting in the 1960s and then into the 1970s, computers were seen as a way—information technology in general was seen as a way of making government bureaucracy more efficient and effective.
- 3 So the drive was always on productivity, efficiency—doing more with less.
- 4 Maybe in the 1990s or so, we had another dimension coming to this picture, and that is to be more consumer friendly, or citizen friendly, in the services that the government provides.
- 5 But these are just two various, specific ways of looking at how government interact with society, because it looks at the citizens as consumers, as transactional partners with the government.
- 6 You go for efficiency to lower the cost, or you go for consumer friendliness or transactional-partner friendliness in order to provide some service quality.
- 7 I believe that electronic government, or information-technology government must go much further than that.
- 8 We as a society have a right to know better what the government is doing, to engage with the government, and to have a government in place that is willing and able to use the technological tools available to engage us citizens.
- 9 That's currently not happening, or not happening at a sufficiently high level.
- 10 We are still in this old-fashioned mode of thinking about transactions, efficiency, and user friendliness.
- 11 [Text on screen] Is the U.S. government lagging in information technology?
- 12 The U.S. government lags behind in electronic government quite a bit, largely because whenever you need to create an electronic-government transaction software, you need to involve a number of different government stakeholders.
- 13 And they despise each other usually.
- 14 And they hate when the other side has access to their information and data.
- 15 Data silos and information silos in government are one way of defining power and influence.
- 16 And so obliterating those silos really reduces the power of individual departments and agencies.
- 17 And that's why they are not keen on doing that.
- 18 And let me give you a—what I thought a wonderful example, if I may.
- 19 It was a website on moving, called Moving, and it helped people who were moving house to do the change-of-address form, to move the electricity and the gas and the utilities over the telephone, to also hire perhaps a moving van, and so forth.
- 20 It was a one-stop shop for all of this.
- 21 And it was a public private partnership that had made all this possible.
- 22 And it was a huge success.
- 23 People really loved this website.
- 24 Government agencies realized that.
- 25 And they thought, "Gosh! This means there's real traffic to be generated."
- 26 And immediately what they did was to leave that umbrella, that one-stop shop, and to create their own little shops in order to drive traffic to their own little shops.
- 27 Of course, the sum was really more—the sum was more than just the parts put together, and once you take these parts apart, and everybody has their little shop, the consumers are really frustrated again, and don't want to go to fifteen or sixteen different websites in order to change their addresses.
- 28 The problem, therefore, is that when you break down the silos, you create value; when you resurrect the silos, you destroy value.
- 29 That's something that government agencies theoretically understand but have practical difficulties realizing and putting in place.
- 30 But I am really more interested in another aspect.
- 31 I am interested in the way by which government in the United States has now decided to make public a lot of the information that it collects.
- 32 My colleague and friend Beth Noveck and others have really pushed this very hard in the Obama administration.
- 33 And I think that's exactly right.
- 34 What we need is more information that the government collects—not personal information but general information—to be shared with the public at large, with NGOs, with the society at

large, so that they can then look at that data and really see what is happening in our society.

- 35 We now have the software tools to do that.
- 36 We now have the interest in the public to do that.
- 37 That's why we need to move ahead and make more and more of that government information freely available.
- 38 [Text on screen] Does the Obama administration approach information technology differently than its predecessors?
- 39 There's a huge difference.
- 40 If you look at the website that the Obama administration set up to be able to trace the money of the stimulus package going into the economy—
- 41 And you can see to which communities, which colonies, to what companies and institutions and organizations the money goes, how much has been spent, what was the impact on employment, and so forth.
- 42 This data is fabulously well designed and presented through a geographic interface, and it's—
- 43 It is simply superb—very very different from the previous administration.
- 44 In fact, the outgoing Clinton-Gore administration put in place, for example, a website with the Environmental Protection Agency, where the Environmental Protection Agency made accessible a self-reporting inventory of toxic waste, and linked it to a geographic information system, so that people could actually look at the neighborhood and see whether there were any toxic waste repositories in their neighborhood.
- 45 When that went on line, a lot of people started pressuring the companies in their neighborhood that had toxic waste to clean up and to get their act together, because land value would adjust.
- 46 And so there was almost a wonderful market force as well as a democratic force behind it.
- 47 Of course, the George W. Bush administration after 9/11 took the website down, ostensibly because of the security risk.
- 48 A terrorist could access the toxic-waste inventory and find out where the toxic waste was in this country.
- 49 I am not so sure the security risk really was that high.
- 50 I think a lot of people in the—I suspect a lot of people in the Bush administration connected to some of the toxic wasters were quite happy to put that database off line.

- 51 [Text on screen] How might the eGovernment revolution affect international intelligence?
- 52 Well, first of all, if we permit people to have access to government information, we don't necessarily become more vulnerable.
- 53 The cybersecurity task is mostly one focused on keeping the infrastructure up and running.
- 54 And we are very vulnerable there.
- 55 We are very vulnerable not just on the internet information infrastructure but on the energy and electricity infrastructure as well.
- 56 And we're vulnerable because for many years, even decades, we have increased the efficiency of the infrastructure but limited the investment in redundancy and robustness of the infrastructure.
- 57 And that makes all these infrastructures prime targets of—for hackers and terrorists around the world, whether they're organized by a nation state or whether they are noncombatant terrorists of al-Qaeda's ..., or anything else.
- 58 I think we need to spend more money on that.
- 58 I think we need to spend more money on securing the infrastructure, on knowing what the other side is doing.
- 59 The federal government does not have their act together on cybersecurity.
- 60 That's still a big problem.
- 61 It will require all the major stakeholders to come together.
- 62 It will require some legislative change as well.
- 63 And it will require a different mindset of the people.
- 64 The missiles of tomorrow are not going to come through the sky.
- 65 They are coming through the fiber optic networks.