

Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins

**“E-Government 2.0: Improving Innovation,
Collaboration, and Access”**

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
December 11, 2007

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Offering federal services and information via the Internet gives people immensely valuable tools for their personal, business, and civic lives.

Anyone with access to a computer and the Web can visit the federal portal “usa.gov” and be only a few mouse clicks away from printable tax forms, information on home heating assistance, an e-mail link to their Senator, testimony on legislation of interest, museum collections, data on Civil War ancestors, advice for small business, recipes for low-cost nutrition, energy-saving tips, instructional videos, and thousands of other topics.

These “e-government” offerings not only provide near-instantaneous information and services to citizens, but also save the federal government and individual citizens money that would otherwise be spent on phone or mail queries or in printing and delivering physical documents.

Online resources also allow federal employees to book travel, enroll in and modify selections in their benefit programs, receive training, and perform other tasks quickly and efficiently. In addition, they are powerful “force multipliers” for government employees who need to research laws and regulations, respond to constituent inquiries, or collaborate with workers in other agencies.

Our intelligence community offers a good example of Internet technology at work. The three

classified, collaborative sites that constitute the “Intellipedia” promote intelligence sharing and collaboration on important national-security issues.

The World Wide Web – the collection of publicly accessible, hyperlinked texts and graphics that reside on servers connected to the Internet – is less than 20 years old, and is still developing. The federal commitment to the Web, formalized with the E-Government Act of 2002, is only five years old. We have not yet fully tapped the promise of the Internet as a valuable tool for the federal government and the public.

Appreciating both the value and the unfulfilled potential of e-government services, I was delighted to join Senator Lieberman as an original cosponsor of

S. 2321, the E-Government Reauthorization Act of 2007.

Apart from its reauthorization of several important programs, the bill contains an additional provision that will improve the public's ability to access federal information posted on the Internet by encouraging federal agencies to make online public information open to indexing by commercial search engines.

I understand that a large portion of federal Web pages are not configured to permit automated indexing by "crawlers" or "spiders" for search services like Google, Yahoo!, or Ask.com. If the pages are posted on the Web, I see little reason, as a general practice, for not making them accessible to search engines.

Some agencies have expressed concern about this provision because they fear a citizen might download a form without accompanying instructions or without examining other important information. That may be a valid issue, but it is not unique to the Internet, and there should be ways to mitigate it without making useful materials invisible to search engines. The searchability provision of our reauthorization bill should lead to OMB guidelines that will encourage agencies to review the architecture of their Web pages and make any necessary changes to address such concerns.

That is just one example, Mr. Chairman, of the e-government issues that the government must address. Today's witnesses from OMB, Wikipedia, Google, and the Center for Democracy and Technology are well positioned to advise us on the

state of the art and on best practices for enhancing the value of E-government to federal agencies and to the American public.

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