E-Government 2.0:
Improving Innovation, Collaboration, and Access
Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
December 11, 2007

Good morning and welcome to our hearing today. Five years ago this month, the

president signed into law the E-Government Act of 2002 - a bill I was privileged to

cosponsor with Senators Conrad Burns and Fred Thompson - to bring the federal

government into the Internet Age and better serve the public. The goal of the bill, as I

said at the time, was to "exchange what is… cumbersome, static, and often bewildering

for a dynamic, interactive, and user-friendly government."

Today we will ask how close the government has come to reaching that goal. Is it

responding and adapting to user habits and new technologies to increase public

participation, promote interagency cooperation, and make itself more transparent and

accountable? While I think we have made much progress, I think our witness would

agree that there's more the government as a whole could and should be doing.

While it has occasionally been a bumpy road, much has been achieved over the

past five years and much can be achieved in the future with adequate support for critical

provisions, including cross-cutting initiatives and government-wide requirements for

information security and privacy. That's why Senators Collins, Carper, and I introduced a

reauthorization of the E-Government Act, S.2123, to add strength to it. One month ago,

this Committee favorably reported the bill out, and I am optimistic we will be able to

move this bill through the Senate soon.

Our first witness today, Karen Evans, is the Administrator of the Office of E-

Government and Information Technology at the Office of Management and Budget – a

position created in the original E-Government Act. Her testimony will provide an overview of what we have been able to achieve since passage of the Act, what challenges have arisen, and what the future goals are e-government.

We will also examine an important issue addressed by our reauthorization bill, which is that the public frequently cannot find information and services placed on government websites specifically for their benefit. The reason is that information and services on many government sites – through practice or policy – are simply inaccessible to commercial search engines. Our bill aims to remedy this by requiring regular review, reporting, and testing across the federal government on accessibility to search capabilities. John Needham from Google and Ari Schwartz from the Center for Democracy and Technology will testify to this problem, why it exists, and what relatively simple steps can be taken to overcome it.

In this regard, I would like to think that our reauthorization bill has already had an impact: last week the Office of Personal Management announced it would make available to commercial search engines for the first time the 60,000 job vacancies in the Federal government. This will have a measurable impact on the ability of people seeking employment to find and apply for government positions.

Today, we will also examine how new collaborative technologies can strengthen interaction among government agencies and the public. Jimmy Wales – the founder of Wikipedia, the most thrilling example of what collaborative technology can produce - will walk us through the concepts behind Wikipedia and how similar technologies can be applied to government for greater information sharing, collaboration, and communication both within government and with the public.

While we are focusing today on the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch must also increase its transparency and expand its interactive relationship with the public. In this spirit, Senators McCain, Collins and I are introducing today legislation to require the Congressional Research Service to make its extremely valuable reports public. No method currently exists for the public to access them quickly and easily. As a result, many businesses collect the reports and sell them to paying customers. Our bill would allow members and Committees to easily post all CRS reports on their websites to anyone with internet access.

Similarly, the Legislative Branch can do a better job of presenting information to the public about the status of bills and resolutions. We in Congress have access to a comprehensive website run by the Library of Congress, but the public site, known as "Thomas", is far less advanced. Furthermore Senate votes, unlike House votes, are intentionally presented in a format that limits the public's ability to examine Senators' voting records. I intend to work with my colleagues and the Library of Congress to improve transparency and accountability.

These issues of accessibility, accountability, interactivity, and public collaboration are essential to the future of an effective and responsive government. Just as the private sector has harnessed new technologies to fuel its growth in an information based economy, we in government must keep pace with the skill set of the up and coming workforce to meet the expectations of the public. I look forward to a lively discussion.