Robert C. Tapella
Public Printer of the United States

Public Printer's Letter to President Obama Regarding Transparency in Government

March 9, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Your initiative for transparency and open Government is important to me and the men and women of the U.S. Government Printing Office. We fully support your initiative and would like to help you implement it.

On February 4, 2009, GPO launched the Federal Digital System (FDsys, at www.fdsys.gov), a world-class information management system developed to authenticate, preserve, version, and provide permanent public access to Government information. We now have a flexible and extensible digital system that can put into action your call for transparency and open Government. More than 154,000 documents are currently accessible with additional documents coming daily. The Office of the Federal Register's (OFR) new publication, Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents, was specifically engineered for FDsys and replaces the printed Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents.

GPO is in a unique position to assist you in carrying out your transparency initiatives. Through GPO's Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) and the online capability supporting the public access intent of that program (as established in Public Law 103-40, the GPO Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act of 1993), we are the official repository for authentic Government publications and play an integral role in the process of producing these publications to support Government transparency. Providing transparency has been GPO's role since it was established in 1861. Indeed, it has been the intent of Congress since 1813 when the statutory antecedent of the FDLP was enacted.

I am attaching for your review five goals and accompanying actions that GPO is prepared to undertake to help implement your initiative for transparency and open Government. We look forward to working with the appropriate staff in your Administration to help you carry it out.

Sincerely,

ROBERT C. TAPELLA
Public Printer

President Barack Obama
March 9, 2009
Re: GPO and Open Government
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Enclosure

Cc: The Honorable Peter Orszag
        Director
        Office of Management and Budget

        The Honorable Robert A. Brady
        Chairman
        Joint Committee on Printing

GPO's Roles in Open Government

1. **Goal:** Position GPO's Federal Digital System (FDsys, at www.fdsys.gov) as the official repository for Federal Government publications.

   GPO, with FDsys, is best prepared to provide trusted information in whatever form required. Currently, GPO is offering PDF, text, and html versions of content. We also provide complete XML files containing descriptive and preservation metadata.

   Because FDsys is a flexible and extensible information management system, we can offer XML-structured content as rendered output. We have plans to offer XML content through API's (Application Programming Interfaces), allowing other systems to access information from FDsys to meet specialized needs. Having XML-structured content in FDsys allows GPO to make this easily available.

   GPO plans to move an API-access capability forward by supporting pilots with a few groups (such as the FreeGovInfo group). GPO would offer them the opportunity to define an API that will meet their needs. This activity will allow us to evaluate the performance of this advanced access method. Content delivered through this approach can be used by external users in mash-ups or other hybrid/synthetic publications.

   Action: Develop pilot concepts with the Administration's Open Government office.

2. **Goal:** Enable and support Web 2.0 functionality through FDsys to support public comments on pending legislation.

   The Administration's transparency and open Government initiative calls for a comment period on legislation before bills are signed into law. GPO's FDsys is ideal for supporting public comments on bills as they move through the legislative process. This collaborative approach with the public would be an excellent example of Web 2.0 functionality in support of open, transparent, and collaborative Government.

   There are several alternatives that could be evaluated to achieve this result. One would be to link directly to the White House Web site. Visitors to www.whitehouse.gov wishing to find information on bills to be signed by the President would be directed to FDsys and a listing of the all versions of the bill or directly to the specific version of a bill. A link could be added to the FDsys page directing the user to a comment collection application. Useful third party tools are emerging that could provide this function with very little additional development required on the Government's part, following the finalization of additional requirements (such as

the record implications of these comments, who is the custodian for the comments, etc.). Attached is a brief on some workflow possibilities for this initiative. We could also explore how this collaborative comment process could be extended to Regulations.gov.

Action: Develop a pilot with the Open Government office to evaluate the process to collect comments on selected bills.

3. **Goal:** Establish a demonstration project to apply Web 2.0 features to rulemaking documents.

    The Office of the Federal Register, of the National Archives and Records Administration, in collaboration with GPO and select agencies, has submitted a demonstration project proposal to the Administration to build on the availability of the online Federal Register by creating unique demand-driven products and collaborative opportunities. This project will apply Web 2.0 features to rulemaking documents published in the Federal Register to learn what additional features and collaborative online capabilities and communities users seek.

    Action: Applying lessons learned, extend the demonstration project to the entire Federal Register on FDsys in a systematic way.

4. **Goal:** Participate in and lead efforts to standardize electronic publishing formats.

    GPO co-chaired the team that developed the StratML schema that will be used for agency strategic plans. This project resulted in a standard that is now being considered for an ISO standard under efforts being led by the National Institute for Standards and Technology. The StratML project was developed to help demonstrate the value, in a digital world, of having standardized formats. This structure facilitates consolidation of information across a wide range of publications (such as creating a summary of defense agency mission statements). Creating standard data structures or formats will lead to more effective open Government.

    Action: Meet with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) e-Government and Information Group to develop guidelines for extending StratML to other Federal publication types.

5. **Goal:** Link the White House Web site to FDsys for public searches of Government documents.

    There are times when the White House Web site links back to GPO for searches of Government documents. This usually occurs when there is increased public interest in a bill that has been passed or in the findings of an appointed commission. There

is no regular review of those scripts that link back to GPO nor a regular meeting with White House staff to review their requirements to link back to GPO on a routine basis.
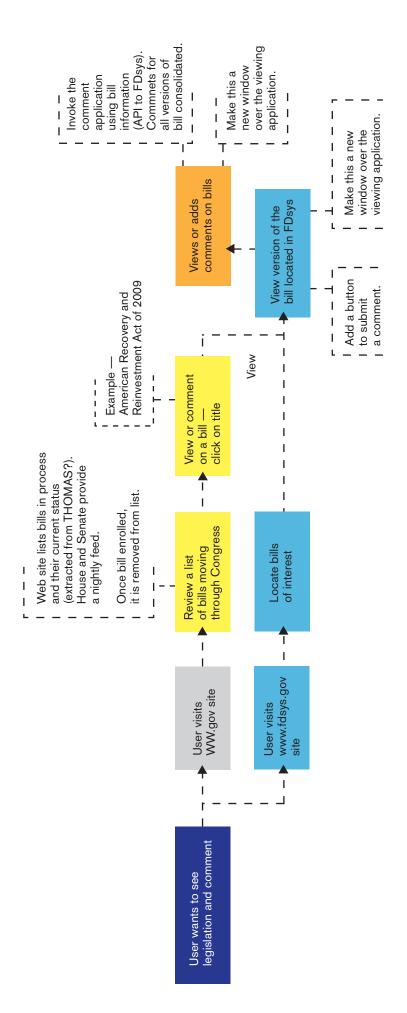
As GPO moves more document collections into FDsys, we will advise the White House on changes to scripts to point to those new collections in FDsys. GPO has done a demonstration of FDsys for the President's Transition Team, but we have not yet had outreach to their Web team.

Action: Contact and establish a working relationship between GPO's FDsys and the White House Web team. This would include creating a White House/GPO working group/Web team, providing a demonstration of FDsys for the White House Web team, and establishing a recurring meeting with the White House Web team for information exchange.

Attachment: Possible Process to Collect Comments on Bills Awaiting the President's Signature

Process to Collect Comments on Bills

Flowchart:

- User wants to see legislation and comment
  - → User visits WW.gov site
    - → Review a list of bills moving through Congress
      - *Web site lists bills in process and their current status (extracted from THOMAS?). House and Senate provide a nightly feed.*
      - *Once bill enrolled, it is removed from list.*
      - → View or comment on a bill — click on title
        - *Example — American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*
        - View → View version of the bill located in FDsys
          - *Add a button to submit a comment.*
          - *Make this a new window over the viewing application.*
          - → Views or adds comments on bills
            - *Invoke the comment application using bill information (API to FDsys). Commnets for all versions of bill consolidated.*
            - *Make this a new window over the viewing application.*
  - → User visits www.fdsys.gov site
    - → Locate bills of interest

Notes:

1. The yellow boxes would be an application that could run on the WH Web site or be a separate external application link from the WH site.
2. The blue boxes are FDsys functions. A "comment" button would need to be added for non-enrolled bills and a link through an API to the comment application. This link would designate the bill to being commented on.
3. The end of the comment period would be gated by FDsys (when the bill is in the enrolled state).
4. The orange box is the comment application.

Challenges:

1. Managing the list of bills in process and having these accurately listed as called out in the first yellow box. LC may be able to provide this directly. Maybe LC provides the function in the yellow boxes.

Questions:

1. Who coordinates the comment application? This would include collecting the comments developing a report, managing content for record submission, etc.
2. Will commenting on pre-enrolled bills be sufficient?

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