As mentioned above in connection with the Digital Identification Initiative, which was an early version of the Smart Initiatives Initiative, I was allowed to testify briefly before the "Speaker's Commission on the California Initiative Process" on January 22, 2001. My testimony was preceded by a presentation from Wally Baer, of the prestigious RAND Corporation think tank, who gave a reasonably fair and balanced account of using the Internet in the initiative process, and then concluded that doing so would be impossible and wrong.

My remarks were followed by a rant from Dr. David Jefferson of the prestigious Compaq Computer Corporation and the "expert" guiding force behind California Secretary of State Bill Jones' rejection of Internet voting. Dr. Jefferson warned the Commission members that allowing the use of the Internet for initiative petition signing, as proposed by the Smart Initiatives Initiative, would mean that "Saddam Hussein would control the politics of California." A man ahead of his time, I guess.

Testifying Before the
"Speaker's Commission on the California Initiative Process"

To hear my testimony before the Speaker's Commission on the California Initiative Process, click here:

http://sfm.lpbn.org:8080/ramgen/smartinitiativesinsacramento012201.rm?usehostname

*An outline, and the complete text, of the remarks I prepared for the Speaker's Commission on the California Initiative Process, along with an extended defense of the concept and an expose of the politics involved, are included, along with two additional texts regarding Smart Initiatives and two more related pieces, in **The Smart Initiatives Reader**, below.*

The Smart Initiatives Reader

by

Marc Strassman
President
Etopia

Documents Prepared for the Speaker's Commission
on the California Initiative Process

&

Smart Initiatives the Key to E-Government
Smart Initiatives the Key to Reducing the Digital Divide
Towards a New Kind of Political Machine
Freedom of the Press Belongs to Those Who Own One

May 21, 2001

The Smart Initiatives Reader

Chapter 1

**Documents Prepared for the Speaker's Commission
on the California Initiative Process**

Written by

**Marc Strassman
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project**

**January 22, 2001
Sacramento, California**

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**Outline of Remarks to the Speaker's Commission
on the California Initiative Process**

By Marc Strassman
etopia@pacificnet.net
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project
http://www.smartinitiatives.org

January 16, 2001

To be delivered: January 22, 2001

1.   **I'm Marc Strassman**, founder and executive director of the Smart Initiatives Project. I want to thank you for giving me a chance to talk to you today about Smart Initiatives.

2.   **Smart Initiatives,** as Wally Baer has explained, involves the universal distribution of digital certificates to the citizenry and giving them the right to use these certificates to identify and authenticate themselves in the online signing of initiative and other official petitions.

3.   **I started this project because I wanted to eliminate the need to have or raise a million dollars to put an initiative on the ballot.** Of course, I needed to operate under the old system to create the new one. I haven't been able to raise a million dollars. Smart Initiatives as an initiative campaign will not succeed. It's up to this Commission, through its recommendations to Speaker Hertzberg, to bring the benefits of Smart Initiatives to the government and people of California.

4.   **Wally has done a good job of explaining how Smart Initiatives work**. I want to address four objections to SI, two political, two technical.

5.   **The political objections fall into two categories**: too much signing and not enough signing. We can hope that none of SI's critics are guilty of making both complaints.

6.   **Too much signing.** This objection holds that with initiative petitioning made so easy by Smart Initiatives, we'll be flooded with meretricious and frivolous ballot measures. Leaving aside the issue of whether such measures make it to the ballot already under the present system, I want to say that this fear is unrealistic. People don't sign initiative petitions because they're there. They sign them because they feel something needs to be done, or undone, and that the legislature isn't doing it, or undoing it.

I believe that we are likely to get the same quantity of qualified initiatives under Smart Initiatives as we do under the current system. The difference will be that the playing field for the collection of signatures will be much more level, allowing people and groups with good ideas and very little money the same chance to get their petition form in front of people as is now the case for people with good or bad ideas and a lot of money. You can put an initiative petition in front of people, but you can't make them sign, not unless they want to. Putting initiatives on the Internet will not increase the need or desire of people to petition their government. It will just make it easier for citizens and less expensive for proponents to participate in the initiative process.

7. **Too little signing.** The Digital Divide is the second most common objection to Internet voting (after security) and it is the second most common objection to Smart Initiatives. Leaving aside its validity as an obstacle in voting, it is not a very strong complaint in terms of initiatives. First, under Smart Initiatives, any proponent who wants to circulate paper petitions can continue to do so. Any citizen who wants to sign one can. None of that is changed or eliminated under Smart Initiatives. Secondly, we don't really have now the kind of equitable access to petition signing that Smart Initiatives is supposed to eliminate or interfere with. Some neighborhoods are targeted for signature gathering, while others aren't. Citizens living in untargeted areas are already denied equal access to the initiative process. Under Smart Initiatives, initiative petition signing opportunities would be as close as their computer screens.

And if they don't have a computer screen? Smart Initiatives provides that every California adult would receive a smart card containing their digital certificate. People without computers could use publicly-available and publicly-financed computers at schools, libraries, mall kiosks, post offices and so on. Ironically, letting people use their smart cards to sign petitions through kiosks at malls and post offices would allow them to do something they very often can't under the existing arrangements, since many mall owners and the USPS as a whole have banned paper-and-ink petition gatherers from their premises. It is, in fact, the exclusion of petition gatherers from these and most other public spaces under private ownership that makes it essential for the future viability of the initiative process itself that it be allowed to function in cyberspace, having been increasingly excluded from physical space.

8. **Technical objection #1: Malicious code.** The objection has been raised against Smart Initiatives that politically-oriented or just mischievous computer crackers will move in on Smart Initiatives, creating and distributing malicious software code that will penetrate millions of PCs and lie in wait to subvert the integrity of the initiative process by falsely signing petitions without the knowledge or consent of the machine owners, and also block the signing of petitions, again without letting the rightful owners of the digital certificates know.

If such a capability exists, its creator could make a lot more profit packaging it as a utility program to allow computer users to manage spam. If such a capability exists, its creator could make a lot more money using it to fraudulently violate people's bank and stock account trading programs. If it does exist, and it was used to

falsely send and fraudulently block properly-sent digitally signed petition forms, it could easily be overcome by having the operators of the servers being used to collect signatures **send out a monthly, or weekly, or daily, report to everyone, thanking them for using the system and listing the petitions they'd signed, or telling them they hadn't signed any.**

Every user would thus have an easy way to detect if their computer had been compromised with malicious code and steps could immediately be taken to correct the fraudulent submissions or blockings and to hunt down and remove the malicious code and possibly the law-breaking crackers as well.

This approach involves an active defense by citizens and system operators against the unlawful violation of Smart Initiatives systems, a possibility not recognized by critics in their attacks on the idea of Smart Initiatives. Just as Smart Initiatives' proponents can actively defend it against its critics, so could the Smart Initiatives software and procedures organize to protect its operations from malicious code.

9. **Technical objection #2: The uselessness of digital certificates.** Critics of Smart Initiatives argue that it is not a viable proposition because the digital certificates needed to sustain it are too susceptible to compromise to offer sufficient protection to the process. This is odd, given that the Secretary of State is on the public record lauding this technology as the wave of the future for the establishment of strong and secure transactions between citizens and the state. Are digital certificates very useful in general, and only lose their power when used for initiative petition signing? Are they good for banking, signing contracts, checking out fighter planes in the Air Force, and many other uses, but suddenly lose their value when applied to signing petitions online? Or is a massive fraud being committed by certificate providers, governments, insurance companies, HMOs, and lawyers, all of whom stand to benefit by the use of digital certificates, but which has now finally been exposed at the moment the technology tried to overreach by applying itself to something with direct political impact? These questions are rhetorical, but they need to be addressed.

10. On a more practical level, I want to mention **one possible scenario for the establishment of a California Digital Authentication Authority (CDAA).** There are several functions involved in creating a universal and ubiquitous Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) for California. One intriguing way to divide these functions up would be to have the Department of Motor Vehicles serve as the Certification Authority, in charge of checking the identities and issuing the digital certificates, the Office of the Secretary of State serve as the Authentication Authority, in charge of checking submitted forms to determine the validity of the claims made for the identity of their originators, and have the Department of Information Technology serve as the Directory Services Authority, to manage the computer operations necessary for the functioning of the system. This would provide plenty of work for all these agencies and spread the responsibility around in a way that would make the overall system maximally secure.

11.   Having, I hope, refuted the principal objections to Smart Initiatives, I want to briefly recount its **benefits**, beyond lowering costs to proponents, increasing convenience to signers, and lowering costs to the state and the counties for validating the signatures. These include: the opening of vast new opportunities for taking government functions online, for expanding the use of e-government; expanding opportunities for e-commerce of all types; providing better security for distance learning, telecommuting, and telemedicine applications; letting parents access their children's homework assignments; and opportunities and functionalities of types not yet conceivable, but real nevertheless.

12.   Last week, the first **prototype Smart Initiative System** went online, became operational. We've already given a few hundred people access to try out the system, using PC-based certificates. We'd now like to offer every Commissioner the same opportunity, including the option of getting and using a smart card to sign some simulated initiatives from the comfort of your own home or office. If you'd like to do that, please give my associate or me your name and e-mail address and we'll make the arrangements for you to participate.

13. The State should appoint a **Smart Initiatives Task Force** as suggested by Mr. Baer to determine how to implement Smart Initiatives, with an emphasis on determining how much money would be saved through the creation of a universal system of digital identification for California and its ensuing use to enable e-government transactions at all levels. Also to be studied is how much increased economic growth would result within the state from the implementation of this digital infrastructure.

If desired, a more detailed study can also be made to corroborate the $200 million estimate now on the table for the start-up of Smart Initiatives.

Finally, I propose that the **State of California issue sufficient general-obligation bonds to pay for the implementation of Smart Initiatives** and then pay them off with the money that will saved by state agencies in transacting official business, by providing secure access to value-added online information, and by charging holders of state-issued digital certificates for authentication services involved in e-commerce transactions. Once the Smart Initiative Bonds have been retired, these income streams can either go into the General Fund or be eliminated and these services be put on a pay-as-you go basis, with no more being charged for them than it costs to operate them.

However the current energy crisis is resolved, it should be apparent that, in the future, we'll need to use less energy and work more efficiently. Providing an infrastructure that enables us to do business, get educated, and govern ourselves without traveling so much has to be a priority in a post-crisis future. Smart Initiatives and its underlying system of universal PKI would be a good start towards the energy frugality that we all now realize has to be part of our future.

14.   We all believe in **the rule of law**. We all believe in a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Accordingly, we need to strengthen and perfect the initiative process that allows, from time to time, for these people to pass the laws that rule us.

15.   **I want to close with a more general comment.** The Internet has become a powerful tool for the distribution of information and, now, for marketing and sales. It could also become a powerful tool for democratic self-governance, but only if citizens can unambiguously and authoritatively identify themselves with binding legal authority online. I believe that digital certificate technology, properly applied, can give them, can give us, that ability. Smart Initiatives is a first, maybe primitive, step towards creating such a system for online democracy. But we all know the saying about long journeys and first steps.

Most of the progress made so far in building this brave new digital world has taken place in California. For this Commission to recommend that we move forward as soon as possible to implement Smart Initiatives and the universal system of digital authentication that underlies it would be a powerful signal from the Western edge that we here intend to continue that evolution, even to accelerate it, and to see that these advances in technology are, even more than they have been previously, translated into substantial and enduring benefits for all our people.

Thank you.

Remarks to the Speaker's Commission
on the California Initiative Process

By Marc Strassman
etopia@pacificnet.net
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project
http://www.smartinitiatives.org

January 11, 2001

Prepared: January 11, 2001
To be delivered: January 22, 2001

Members of the Commission:

When I wrote the Smart Initiatives Initiative last year, my primary goal was to bring about a little bit of campaign finance reform by eliminating the need to raise or have one million dollars to qualify an initiative for the ballot in California. Of course, I had to qualify the Smart Initiatives Initiative under the old, legacy rules, and raise that million dollars myself. Unfortunately, I couldn't, and the Smart Initiatives Initiative must now rely on you if it's to become law.

Before I list some of the reasons outside of the initiative process why the provisions of Smart Initiatives are good ideas, I want to address what is probably the most prominent criticism made of this proposal, namely, that letting people sign initiative petitions over the Internet will unleash of terrible flood of new initiatives that will swamp the process of representative democracy.

While it's encouraging in some ways to hear this criticism, since it implies that there is a tremendous, pent-up desire on the part of Californians to sign initiatives, a desire that is being actively thwarted by busy schedules, restrictive mall owners, and a recalcitrant United States Postal Service. Under this view of the situation, passing Smart Initiatives would lead to hundreds and hundreds of new initiatives on every possible subject, as certificate-mad citizens wildly sign every initiative that comes down the Information super-highway.

I think this is an unrealistic view. Most of the time, the State Legislature reflects the will of the people and enacts it into law. Sometimes, they don't. On the issues where the legislature is unwilling or unable to lead, citizens need to be able to legislate on their own behalf. This is what initiatives are for.

The problem now is that with the decline of volunteerism and the rise of for-pay initiative circulation, regular citizens aren't able to exercise their constitutional rights to legislate on their own in those situations where that is appropriate, unless they a lot of money.

Viewed in classical economic terms, I believe that there is a more-or-less finite amount of demand for initiative petition signing opportunities among Californians. By instituting Smart Initiatives, the supply of these opportunities will be drastically increased. I believe that this change in "market conditions" will NOT lead to a drastic increase in the number of signings. What it will do is lower the price of the transaction.

What we will have, in short, is the same amount of signing, but at a lower cost, to the signers and to the county registrar of voters, who will be able to validate their signatures much more quickly, accurately and completely, and much less expensively.

Other objections to Smart Initiatives come from those who worry it will allow for a Big Brotheresque invasion of our personal and business privacy. Given the vast amount of information about our most intimate behavior already stored and accessible in commercial and private databases, and the general acquiescence is this situation, I really don't understand how anyone can find fault in the creation of a system that, to the contrary, gives the individual citizen and each business unprecedented control over their own identities.

I believe, in fact, that creating a system of universal digital identification using digital certificates and smart cards would do more than anything else possible to prevent the insidious and growing threat of identify theft for which policy-makers everywhere are eagerly seeking a solution. If digital identification by means of digital certificates and smart smarts were to become routine for all important personal and commercial transactions, then maintaining the secrecy of one's private key and carefully using it to authenticate oneself in these transactions would prevent the kind of "identify impersonation" that is causing so much suffering and inconvenience for so many these days.

Having now debunked the threat of too many initiatives from the Smart Initiative process, and argued that this system could in fact drastically reduce the incidence of identity theft, I'd now like to mention some reasons, beyond the obvious, why Smart Initiatives will improve the accessibility of the initiative signing process. As with the enclosure of the commons in England in the 18th century, private property owners of public spaces, like mall operators and the US Postal Service, have now effectively banned petition circulators from their locations. This forces proponents to, ironically, use the US Postal Service to distribute petitions by mail, burning up more trees, oil, ink, and time.

If petition circulation is going to vanish from public view, let's at least use the latest technology to carry it out. Otherwise, as initiative petition signature gathering becomes another form of junk mail, the advantage will remain with those individuals and

groups who have or can raise the large sums of money required to spray the state with short form petitions and postage-paid return envelopes. With Smart Initiatives, citizens visit a site and sign a petition at their own pace, and mail deliverers are spared the inconvenience of lugging around more wasted paper.

Further, to the extent that proponents decide to persevere in physical space and ask people face-to-face to sign petitions, Smart Initiatives can provide equitable access to all potential signers, even if they live in areas where petition proponents choose, for whatever reason, not to collect signatures, or in those zip codes where their research has told them not many singers reside and where they consequently won't even bother to saturate with bulk mail.

These points about how Smart Initiatives increase access to the signing process

should not be seen as contradicting my earlier points about not overwhelming the

system with too many initiatives. Under the model I've suggested, making it easier

for everyone, and especially the petition-signing-challenged, to sign petitions online,

will, I think, unleash unrealized desires to sign a certain number of petitions, but will

not, as some fear, result in a flood of frivolous initiatives being qualified.

Having addressed some worries and some possibilities involved with Smart Initiatives in terms of the initiative process itself, let me now turn to some areas outside of this process where I think the policies embodied in this proposal to provide every Californian with a digital certificate and a smart card will provide even more value.

A system of universal digital identification and authentication, as established through the means set out in the Smart Initiatives Initiative, will:

1. Enable e-government
2. Enable a higher level of e-commerce
3. Allow for secure daily or weekly polling by Assemblymembers and Senators that can be limited to their own constituents
4. Allow online signing of campaign finance statements

As broadband and wireless (and broadband wireless) technologies become generally installed, these capabilities will be greatly enhanced by the ability of all Californians to legally and bindingly represent themselves over the Net using digital certificates and signatures and smart cards.

Let me finally turn to a more concrete aspect of this whole process. With the support of several companies, including Gemplus, Baltimore Technologies, and others,

the Smart Initiatives Project has built a prototype model of the Smart Initiatives System. We have already tested it with some members of our mailing list.

Now, we would like to show you, the Members of the Speaker's Commission on the California Initiative Process, how easily and well Smart Initiatives works. If you will provide us with your name and e-mail address, we will send you what you need to get a free digital certificate and directions to our mock initiative petition signing website, where you can quickly and easily sign and submit this initiative to us for processing. We will authenticate your signature, check your name on our mock list of "registered voters," aggregate the number of signatures, have our auditors audit the results, and report it to each of you who participate and to the media.

If this test works, we want to repeat it for the members of the Assembly and the Senate. The results there will, I hope, help convince them, along with your report to the Speaker, of the benefits that will accrue to all of us if we implement this system statewide.

I'd be glad to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you.

In Defense of Smart Initiatives

By Marc Strassman
etopia@pacificnet.net
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project
http://www.smartinitiatives.org

January 13, 2001

Many of the same arguments raised against Internet voting have been used to argue against Smart Initiatives, the use of digital certificates to digitally sign official petitions over the Internet.

Here's what Secretary of State Bill Jones' Internet Voting Task Force had to say about Smart Initiatives in January, 2000 (all excerpts from the Internet Task Force Report are *italicized*):

Internet Petition Signing

Internet petition signing refers to any system in which voters "sign" official petitions, e.g. initiative, referendum or recall petitions, entirely electronically, with the "signature" and associated information transmitted by Internet to the proper agency, either directly or combined with other signatures. Only registered voters are permitted in California to sign petitions.

The Internet Voting Task Force did not consider Internet petition signing at any great length. Hence, in this report we will confine ourselves to comparing it in principle to Internet voting.

First, we should note that many of the security considerations in the design of Internet voting systems apply with little change to Internet petition signing systems as well--in particular, the fundamental distinction between systems in which the entire end-to-end voting infrastructure is controlled by the county vs. systems in which the voting platform is a home-, office-, or school PC. Systems that would allow online petition signing from a home or office PC are vulnerable to malicious code or remote control attacks on the PC that might prevent the signing of a petition, or spy on the process, or permit additional petitions to be signed that the voter did not intend to sign, all without detection. Hence, for the same reasons that we do not recommend Internet voting from machines not controlled by election officials, we cannot recommend similar systems for petition-signing until such time as there is a practical solution to the general malicious code problem and the development of a system to electronically verify identity.

While there are similarities between voting and petition signing, it is important to note that the two are not identical and they have somewhat different cost and security properties:

Petition-signing is a year-round activity, whereas voting occurs during a limited time window. Hence, servers and other infrastructure needed to support petition signing would need to be running year-round, instead of just during a time window before election day. This may dramatically increase the total cost of managing the system. While it is reasonable to expect voters, for security reasons, to submit a signed request for Internet voting authorization each time before they vote (similar to a request for an absentee ballot), it is not reasonable to expect voters to submit such request each time they wish to sign a petition. As a result, voters who wish to sign petitions electronically would likely have to be issued authorization (means of authentication) that are open-ended in time. The longer such authorizations are valid, the more likely it is that some of them will be compromised, or sold, reducing the integrity of the petition-signing system over time. Voters can sign any number of petitions in an election cycle. Hence, a compromised authorization to sign petitions would be usable for signing any number of petitions, magnifying the damage to the system's integrity.

Let's consider these warnings one by one:

First, we should note that many of the security considerations in the design of Internet voting systems apply with little change to Internet petition signing systems as well--in particular, the fundamental distinction between systems in which the entire end-to-end voting infrastructure is controlled by the county vs. systems in which the voting platform is a home-, office-, or school PC. Systems that would allow online petition signing from a home or office PC are vulnerable to malicious code or remote control attacks on the PC that might prevent the signing of a petition, or spy on the process, or permit additional petitions to be signed that the voter did not intend to sign, all without detection. Hence, for the same reasons that we do not recommend Internet voting from machines not controlled by election officials, we cannot recommend similar systems for petition-signing until such time as there is a practical solution to the general malicious code problem and the development of a system to electronically verify identity.

The overall comparison between Internet voting and Smart Initiatives:

The Jones Report argues both that that Internet Voting and Smart Initiatives are fundamentally the same (and therefore equally unworthy of existence) and that they are different (and therefore Smart Initiatives are even more unworthy of existence).

"First, we should note that many of the security considerations in the design of Internet voting systems apply with little change to Internet petition signing systems as well…"

Voting and petition signing are both election-related activities, but they differ fundamentally in a number of ways, not the least of which is that the end result of voting is the selection of candidates for office and the approval or rejection of ballot measures, while the end result of petition signing is the placement on a subsequent ballot of a measure for the consideration of voters. Collecting a million valid signatures on an initiative does not make it law. Only the approval of voters at the next election can do that.

Another important different between the two is that everyone is encouraged to vote, as their civic duty. In California and the rest of the US, voting is not, however, legally required, as it is in many other advanced democracies, including ones in which the turnout rate is more than twice what it is in the US and ones in which there are civil penalties for not voting.

But no one, least of all the government, claims it your civic duty to sign initiative petitions. Writers like David Broder and Peter Schrag, with their considered denunciations of the initiative process and their calls to limit it, are implicitly urging people NOT to sign initiative petitions.

This important difference between voting and official petition-signing leads to further significant differences. The digital divide, or the uneven distribution of computers and Internet access across individuals and groups in society is the second most-cited argument against Internet voting (after security considerations). Presumably, according to the parallelism claimed above, it should also be the second most-cited argument against electronic petition signing.

But since not everyone needs to sign an initiative petition, but only enough to qualify it for the ballot, the existence of the digital divide need not be the issue it is with Internet voting. If the argument is then made that such a digital divide is inequitably because it disproportionately disenfranchises those without Internet access at home or office, then the answer to that complaint to note that the Smart Initiatives System, as currently proposed, also mandates the provision, at no additional charge to them, of a smart card containing a digital certificate identical to those possessed by the privileged on their computers to ALL citizens.

These smart cards are essentially computers-on-a-card. Providing them, free of extra charge, to all citizens, will allow any of us who want to to digitally-sign official petitions, using smart card readers attached to publicly-available and publicly-provided computer/Internet systems in libraries, schools, malls, and elsewhere.

But we haven't yet touched upon the most important differences between Internet voting and Smart Initiatives. While both of them involve the precise and definitive identification of the participating citizen, Internet voting involves the additional requirement that the computer/Internet system being used NOT know the content of the citizen's data input. That is, Internet voting requires what I call "anonymous authentication," a digital state of affairs in which the identity of the voter needs to be

authenticated and checked against the master list of registered voters (and crossed off that list after they vote), while at the same time the content of his or her ballot needs to be anonymized and kept secret from absolutely everyone.

This is not the case for the digital signing of an official petition. The idea of an "anonymous petition signing" is nonsensical. The essence of petition signing, be it an official state initiative petition, or an informal petition circulated by discontented students in a particularly boring class, or a majestical petition on the order of the Declaration of Independence (in which the signers mutually pledged "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor"), is that the signers are going on public record as asking for something (lower taxes, a shorter class, independence).

As such, there is no need to protect the anonymity of the signers. Now, existing state law provides that the names and addresses of official petition signers are to remain confidential. The Smart Initiatives Initiative retains this protection. But confidentiality is not the same as anonymity. Under existing procedures, and within the context of Smart Initiatives, county and state election officials are entitled to, indeed must, know who is signing these petitions. In fact, the slow, costly, laborious and somewhat inexact checking of pen-and-ink signatures against stored pen-and-ink signatures on registration cards constitutes the essence of the official part in the initiative process.

There being no need to keep the identity of petition signers away from election officials, there being, in fact, a positive requirement that these officials know who is signing the petitions, means that any number of creative means can legally and appropriately be used to make sure that none of the terrible subventions of the rule of law contemplated by those arguing against Smart Initiatives ever being allowed to take place.

This point leads us to the penultimate refutation of the anti-Smart Initiative catalog of possible electoral horrors, namely, the use of "malicious code" (aka "Trojans horse programs") to fraudulently manipulate the electronic signature-collecting process.

As envisioned by its proponents, the malicious code scenario would, at its best/worst, work like this: nefarious culprits, motivated by greed, hatred, or the thrill of causing havoc, would design and distribute a loathsome piece of software code designed to do every bad thing imaginable to the Smart Initiatives process.

In the words of the Jones Report:

Systems that would allow online petition signing from a home or office PC are vulnerable to malicious code or remote control attacks on the PC that might prevent the signing of a petition, or spy on the process, or permit additional petitions to be signed that the voter did not intend to sign, all without detection.

That is, this bad software could:

1. "prevent the signing of a petition"

2. "spy on the process"

3. "permit additional petitions to be signed that the voter did not intend to sign"

and it could do it:

"all without detection"

Taking into account what we now understand about what Smart Initiatives involves in terms of anonymity (it doesn't), privacy (it protects it), and authentication (it does it electronically, precisely, and comprehensively), let's consider each of these issues in turn.

Remember that implementing Smart Initiatives will mean that the separate counties, and probably the Secretary of State's Office, will have a very up-to-date (up-to-the-minute) interactive database with the names, e-mail addresses, and public keys of authenticated signers, as well as an equally interactive and current list of all registered voters (with tick marks next to the names of the ones who've already been authenticated as having signed the initiative).

This means that anyone who digitally signs an initiative but is worried that a malicious piece of code has prevented his or her signed copy of the initiative from being received by election officials, or from being properly authenticated with the Smart Initiatives Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) system, or from being recorded or stored, ought to be able to query the state-run databases and find out if his or her signed submission has been properly received and dealt with.

If it has, then there's nothing more for him or her to worry about. If it's not there, they can contact what needs to be put in place to deal with such problems, a state-of-the-art Help Desk/Hotline that will work with them to resolve the issue. But it's just silly to assert that every manner of skullduggery and fraudulent interference in the process could be perpetrated with no one knowing and nothing being done about it.

As for "spying on the process," what secret data could be gleaned by such clandestine treachery? The human spymaster (or a digital bot if it takes it into its head to do so) MIGHT learn that such-and-such a person has signed this-or-that petition. So what? They could spam everyone in the world with this discovery. So what? Is the risk of having it known that you've signed a petition to lower taxes or cut off social services to some class of people reason enough to forego all the benefits of Smart Initiatives?

Additionally, while it might be hard to do, it probably would not be impossible to track down and prosecute the perpetrators of such an illegal act. If that can deter the distribution of these illegally-derived bits of information, those spying on the signing process will need to get their satisfaction by privately knowing that someone signed a

petition. Again, is avoiding this possibility reason enough to forego all the benefits associated with this system?

The elimination of the final negative scenario, permitting "additional petitions to be signed that the voter did not intend to sign," can be achieved in a manner similar to the one used to deal with its converse, the blocking of a legitimate signature. In the event that the all-powerful and all-knowing Petition Signing Trojan Virus (PSTV) infiltrates a citizen's computer, initiates a petition-signing session by ordering the now-enslaved computer to go out on the Net and visit the SignSite™ petition signing domain, finds and opens the target initiative, uses a computer-to-phone program to call the digital certificate subscriber/citizen on his or her landline or cel phone, uses voice synthesis and artificial intelligence to cajole the soon-to-be duped signer into giving up their passcode to the certificate, uses the passcode to invoke the certificate and sign the petition, implant instructions subliminally in the user to forget that his or her passcode was stolen, submit the petition and then vanish in a puff of (invisible) smoke or return to its master for a session of human-to-code gloating (or, in the case of a bot spymaster, code-to-code gloating) it would still be possible to send an e-mail to the supposed signer, asking them to confirm that they had in fact signed the initiative.

If critics raise the spectre that this omniscient and omnipotent piece of code could then reply to this e-mail (in a style culled from its perusal and analysis of all textual materials originated by the subscriber and stored on the now-compromised hard drive) and then digitally-sign this confirmation using the passcode gleaned in its earlier work, one would then be forced to admit that there could conceivably be no end to the possible disastrous scenarios put forward by opponents of this process, and probably no end to refutations of them, and exceptions taken to the refutations and on and on endlessly.

Is it possible that such things could happen? It's possible. Is it likely? Has persuasive evidence been submitted that would lead a reasonable person to conclude that these scenarios are significantly more plausible than that they wouldn't happen and that Smart Initiatives could be implemented and work fine and benefit everyone involved? You'll have to decide that for yourself.

Here's where Jones argues that Smart Initiatives are even worse than Internet Voting:

Petition-signing is a year-round activity, whereas voting occurs during a limited time window. Hence, servers and other infrastructure needed to support petition signing would need to be running year-round, instead of just during a time window before election day. This may dramatically increase the total cost of managing the system.

The cost of setting up a system for the signing of Smart Initiatives and running it year-round is not that much greater than the cost of setting it up and running it for only part of the year. It is the set-up, not the operating, costs, that constitutes the major expense of a Smart Initiatives System. Also, the digitally-signed petitions can be collected just as securely on privately-run servers as on government-run servers, and then delivered to and

validated by government servers, thereby eliminating much of the alleged costs charged here. This may dramatically decrease the total cost of managing the system.

Here's the final point:

Hence, for the same reasons that we do not recommend Internet voting from machines not controlled by election officials, we cannot recommend similar systems for petition-signing until such time as there is a practical solution to the general malicious code problem and the development of a system to electronically verify identity.

I believe that the lack of a need for anonymity in the petition-signing process means that there is "a practical solution to the general malicious code problem." That solution involves collaboration between the signers and the election officials to check and confirm that all those who want to sign a particular petition electronically will be able to and that no one who doesn't will have their name falsely attached to any circulating petition.

Frankly, I don't know what the author could have been thinking about when he says that Smart Initiatives have to wait for "the development of a system to electronically verify identity." Has he heard of PKI, digital certificates, and digital signatures? The Federal Government has. Through the E-Sign law, in effect since October 1, 2000, it has recognized electronic signatures, including those carried out with PKI, digital certificates, and digital signatures, as legally-binding and completely adequate for most commercial purposes.

The Report's case for the uselessness of digital certificates:

The longer such authorizations are valid, the more likely it is that some of them will be compromised, or sold, reducing the integrity of the petition-signing system over time. Voters can sign any number of petitions in an election cycle. Hence, a compromised authorization to sign petitions would be usable for signing any number of petitions, magnifying the damage to the system's integrity.

PKI is a powerful, widespread, and respectable method for identifying, authenticating, and establishing non-repudiation for individuals and organizations remotely over the Internet. The point of the Smart Initiatives Initiative is to create a universal and ubiquitous PKI that will not only allow individuals to sign official petitions online but to sign contracts, access their health records, check their children's homework, encrypt their e-mail and generally represent themselves remotely in a variety of settings and for a variety of purposes.

Once state and federal governments have authorized and established the means for doing so, these digital certificates will also enable citizens to conduct all manner of transactions with their own governments securely online. Thus a PKI established to implement Smart Initiatives will also make possible the widespread implementation of e-government

services at a level comprehensive enough to save jurisdictions significant percentages of their budgets and provide citizens with levels of convenience previously unimagined and impossible without a universal and ubiquitous PKI, as provided for under the Smart Initiatives system.

PKI uses complex and rigorous mathematical techniques, but it can be made easy to use by millions. Along with smart cards that can contain digital certificates as easily as can desktop and laptop computers, but which can be provided to the millions who lack computers for less than ten dollars each, PKI can take us a long way towards realizing the promise of universal access to the informational wealth that already is and will increasingly be the core component of 21st century business, society, and personal life.

The argument put forth against Smart Initiatives in the Report on the grounds that digital certificates cannot provide a level of security adequate to the task is also an argument against the viability of PKI technology for ANY purpose ANYWHERE. If this argument against Smart Initiatives on the basis of the vulnerability of PKI is right, then Microsoft, VeriSign, RSA, Baltimore Technologies, Entrust, the Federal PKI Steering Committee, several states, the National Conference of Commissioners of Uniform State Laws, the Federal Government and the Office of the Secretary of State of California, which has promulgated guidelines for the use of digital certificates and, on October 14, 1999, issued a press release headlined, "Jones Approves VeriSign, Inc. as First Certification Authority Permitted to Verify the Integrity of Digital Signatures Used in Electronic Communication with State and Local Government," are at best wasting their own and others' time and at worst involved in committing a massive fraud against millions of individuals and businesses by approving or selling products and services of extremely dubious value.

Here's the entire press release, available on the Secretary of State's official website at:

http://www.ss.ca.gov/digsig/press1014.htm

𝔇igital 𝔖ignatures

Press Release

| **California Secretary of State** | **Digital Signatures** |

| PRESS RELEASE |

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE   Contact: Alfie Charles (Jones)
Thursday, October 14, 1999   916/653-6575
                                                                    Jeff Wender (VeriSign)
                                                                    Jennifer Haas
                                                                    650/968-4033

Secretary of State Jones Brings Widespread Expansion of E-Government One Step Closer to Reality

Jones Approves VeriSign, Inc. as First Certification Authority Permitted to Verify the Integrity of
Digital Signatures Used in Electronic Communication with State and Local Government

MOUNTAIN VIEW -- With the push of a few keystrokes, California Secretary of State Bill Jones digitally signed a proclamation recognizing VeriSign, Inc. of Mountain View as the first company authorized to provide digital signature certification services to state and local government across California. The accreditation of California's first "Approved Certification Authority" will dramatically broaden the number of government functions that can be conducted over the Internet.

"This is an important step in the march toward electronic government in California," said Jones. "The availability of reliable digital signatures will go a long way toward improving the number of government transactions that can be conducted over the Internet.

"Many government agencies have been hesitant to provide complex services over the Internet until they have reliable digital signatures that they know will have the full force and effect of law. Today, we have provided those agencies with an additional level of security," said Jones.

Jones presented the digitally signed certificate to VeriSign CEO Stratton Sclavos during a ceremony at VeriSign's Mountain View, California headquarters.

"VeriSign is honored to be the first Certification Authority recognized by the State of California," said Sclavos. "We are committed to providing state and local government with the services they need to advance E-Government here in our home state."

Under the Digital Signature Act of 1995, digital signatures used in written communication with California state and local government are only valid if they meet criteria outlined in Government Code Section 16.5 and regulations adopted by Secretary Jones in 1998. Under those regulations, public entities must only rely on digital signature certificates issued by an "Approved Certification Authority". VeriSign, Inc. is the first company approved to issue certificates for public entities in California.

-- End --

For a reiteration of these points in a second press release, announcing approval of Digital Signature Trust as a second provider of digital certificates for doing business with the State of California, see the press release at:

 http://www.ss.ca.gov/digsig/press1118.htm)

Digital Signatures

Press Release

| **California Secretary of State** | **Digital Signatures** |

| PRESS RELEASE |

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE   Contact: Alfie Charles (Jones)
Thursday, November 18, 1999   Shad Balch
                                                         916/653-6575

Jones Approves Second Company to Provide Digital Signature
Services to State and Local Government in California

"Digital Signature Trust" Approved to Serve as a Certification Authority for Digital Signature Transactions in California

      SACRAMENTO -- In a move that will help California state and local government regain their leadership role in the use of technology to improve government efficiency, Secretary of State Bill Jones today announced that *Digital Signature Trust* (DST) has been added to the Approved List of Digital Signature Certification Authorities in California.

      "Digital signature technology will help many state and local government agencies transition toward a paperless government in California," said Secretary of State Bill Jones.

      "When we passed California's digital signature regulations we knew that government, technology companies and the citizens of the state would all have to work together to make eGovernment solutions a reality," noted Jones. "Today, we are one step closer to a more efficient California government."

      DST, based out of Salt Lake City, Utah, is the second company to apply and receive approval from the Secretary of State to provide digital signature Certification

Authority services to California state and local government. DST became the first licensed Certification Authority in the U.S. when it gained its license in the state of Utah in 1997.

Under the Digital Signature Act of 1995, digital signatures used in electronically written communication with public entities are only valid if they meet criteria outlined in Government Code Section 16.5 and regulations adopted by Secretary Jones in 1998. Under those regulations, public entities must only rely on digital signature certificates issued by an "Approved Certification Authority."

Prior to placement on the Approved List, certification authorities must undergo a performance audit to ensure that their policies and practices are consistent with the requirements of the Digital Signature Act and the regulations adopted by the Secretary of State. The complete criteria for certification is available on the Secretary of State's Internet site at: www.ss.ca.gov.

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If such a massive fraud is being perpetrated, it needs to be unmasked and eradicated. If the author of this report is misrepresenting the degree to which we can rely on technologies of online identification and authentication for the transaction of government business, including the signing of initiative petitions over the Internet, the record needs to be set straight and we need to proceed expeditiously to implement a universal and ubiquitous PKI and the Smart Initiatives System it makes possible.

We can thank critics of Smart Initiatives for pointing out issues that need to be addressed in order to adequately protect and properly employ the technologies that underlie it. But in the final analysis, we need to focus on the possibilities that these methods will open up for us, rather than dwell on the unlikely and convoluted scenarios that are offered as reasons not to move ahead.

Seemingly-Contradictory Views from the Same Source

By Marc Strassman
etopia@pacificnet.net
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project
http://www.smartinitiatives.org

January 13, 2001

Here's what the Jones Report (Secretary of State Bill Jones' Internet Voting Task Force Report, January, 2000, has to say about the viability of digital certificates:

> While there are similarities between voting and petition signing, it is important to note that the two are not identical and they have somewhat different cost and security properties:
>
> Petition-signing is a year-round activity, whereas voting occurs during a limited time window. Hence, servers and other infrastructure needed to support petition signing would need to be running year-round, instead of just during a time window before election day. This may dramatically increase the total cost of managing the system. While it is reasonable to expect voters, for security reasons, to submit a signed request for Internet voting authorization each time before they vote (similar to a request for an absentee ballot), it is not reasonable to expect voters to submit such request each time they wish to sign a petition. As a result, voters who wish to sign petitions electronically would likely have to be issued authorization (means of authentication) that are open-ended in time. The longer such authorizations are valid, the more likely it is that some of them will be compromised, or sold, reducing the integrity of the petition-signing system over time. Voters can sign any number of petitions in an election cycle. Hence, a compromised authorization to sign petitions would be usable for signing any number of petitions, magnifying the damage to the system's integrity.

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http://www.ss.ca.gov/digsig/press1014.htm

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, October 14, 1999

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"This is an important step in the march toward electronic government in California," said Jones. "The availability of reliable digital signatures will go a long way toward improving the number of government transactions that can be conducted over the Internet.

"Many government agencies have been hesitant to provide complex services over the Internet until they have reliable digital signatures that they know will have the full force and effect of law. Today, we have provided those agencies with an additional level of security," said Jones.

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✍ End --.)

(For a reiteration of these points in a second press release, announced approval of Digital Signature Trust as a second provider of digital certificates for doing business with the State of California, see the press release at: http://www.ss.ca.gov/digsig/press1118.htm)

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Thursday, November 18, 1999

Jones Approves Second Company to Provide Digital Signature
Services to State and Local Government in California

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"Digital signature technology will help many state and local government agencies transition toward a paperless government in California," said Secretary of State Bill Jones.

"When we passed California's digital signature regulations we knew that government, technology companies and the citizens of the state would all have to work together to make eGovernment solutions a reality," noted Jones. "Today, we are one step closer to a more efficient California government."

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Prior to placement on the Approved List, certification authorities must undergo a performance audit to ensure that their policies and practices are consistent with the requirements of the Digital Signature Act and the regulations adopted by the Secretary of State. The complete list of criteria for certification is available on the Secretary of State's Internet site at: www.ss.ca.gov.

Let's review what Secretary of State Jones said on October 14, 1999:

"This is an important step in the march toward electronic government in California," said Jones. "The availability of reliable digital signatures will go a long way toward improving the number of government transactions that can be conducted over the Internet.

"Many government agencies have been hesitant to provide complex services over the Internet until they have reliable digital signatures that they know will have the full force and effect of law. Today, we have provided those agencies with an additional level of security," said Jones.

Then on November 18, 1999, he said:

"Digital signature technology will help many state and local government agencies transition toward a paperless government in California," said Secretary of State Bill Jones.

"When we passed California's digital signature regulations we knew that government, technology companies and the citizens of the state would all have to work together to make eGovernment solutions a reality," noted Jones. "Today, we are one step closer to a more efficient California government."

If digital signatures were such a good way of "helping many state and local government agencies transition toward a paperless government in California" in November, why were they mainly seen as something capable of "magnifying the damage to the system's integrity" in January, two months later?

When he said in January 2000, that "The longer such authorizations are valid, the more likely it is that some of them will be compromised, or sold, reducing the integrity of the petition-signing system over time," had the Secretary forgotten his statement of three months earlier that "The availability of reliable digital signatures will go a long way toward improving the number of government transactions that can be conducted over the Internet"?

He had also said in October that ""Many government agencies have been hesitant to provide complex services over the Internet until they have reliable digital signatures that they know will have the full force and effect of law. Today, we have provided those agencies with an additional level of security."

Is that "additional level of security" sufficient for other agencies but not sufficient for "government transactions that can be conducted over the Internet" by the Secretary's own agency?

In short, how is it possible that digital certificates are IN GENERAL a boon to e-government but completely inadequate for electoral purposes, including the signing of petitions online?

Is the resolution of this apparent contradiction as simple as realizing that electoral functions are not part of "e-government," that "e-government" only refers to bidding on contracts with the state and not to things as nebulous as, well, elections and initiative petition signing? Are digital certificates perfectly acceptable for use in functions the Secretary of State believes are worthwhile, or politically expedient, or fun to officiate over, but completely unacceptable for functions (like initiative petition signing) that he'd just as soon not see happen?

If so, then let him make it clear that e-government has nothing to do with how the citizens of the state govern themselves and has only to do with how they are administered. Unpleasant as such a realization may be, at least it will be, in the words of the Secretary of State himself, "an important step in the march toward electronic government in California."

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The Untold History of Internet Voting and Smart Initiatives in California

By Marc Strassman
etopia@pacificnet.net
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project
http://www.smartinitiatives.org

January 15, 2001

As we all know all too well, whenever a person to be confirmed or a program to be enacted is announced in Washington, the political and journalistic machines rev up to find every last bit of the story behind the story, the hitherto hidden facts that can push the result of the ensuing controversy one way or another.

In Sacramento, such intense scrutiny is not always applied to every issue. Five years after I first brought the issues of Internet voting and Internet initiative petition signing up for political discussion, there has still not been a single report in any on- or offline publication dealing in any depth with the politics behind these very political issues. Nor has there been a single analysis of the players in this area, beyond token statements that Internet voting system vendors seem to favor the adoption of Internet voting while the Secretary of State wants to go slow, because, as he always says, he's worried about the "security" of systems that use the Internet for electoral purposes.

Where are the investigative reporting, the digging up of facts, the tough interviews and the rigorous analysis of the data? Where is the context for the public discussion of these important subjects?

I've waited for five years for such journalism and it hasn't appeared. Next Monday, on January 22, 2001, I'm scheduled to testify before the Speaker's Commission on the California Initiative Process. I would like to kick off my remarks with a history and analysis of my efforts over the last five years to implement Internet voting and Internet initiative petition signing ("Smart Initiatives") in California. But I will only have a few minutes for my remarks, and there are other points that need to be addressed, including a refutation of the Secretary of State's case against Smart Initiatives, some comments about how Smart Initiatives could be implemented, and a brief listing of all areas outside of online petition signing where the universal system of digital certificates necessary for Smart Initiatives can deliver tremendous benefits to the people and government of California.

So I'm going to take a few minutes here to set out the points that I would like to present as part of my testimony to the Commission, but which time constraints prevent me from doing. Please keep in mind that I am not claiming to present the true and

complete story of these events. I am claiming to present my version of what happened. The other players may have different views. They may believe that what I call manipulation, subterfuge, and deceit are, in fact, straight-shooting, cleverness, and efforts to protect the interests of the government and people of California. If they think that, let them respond to my version with their own, and let the people decide. But to say nothing would, I think, be to admit that my narrative of events is true.

In 1996 I wrote the Virtual Voting Rights Initiative. This proposed ballot measure called for the provision to every Californian of a digital certificate, which is a means by which individuals can be unambiguously and rigorously associated with the "signing" of documents over the Internet. My research showed me that this was the emerging standard for establishing legal identity over the Net and I included it in the VVRI as the method to be used by citizens to register to vote, sign initiative petitions, and vote. (While it is incidental to our purposes here, I might add that the VVRI gave the Secretary of State the responsibility of developing standards for Internet voting and for certifying Internet voting systems that met that standard, then outsourcing or internally developing the means for implementing Internet voting, Internet initiative petition signing, and voter registration.)

Lacking the hundreds of thousands of dollars then (and now) required to qualify this initiative for the ballot, the VVRI had died by October, 1996. Late in that month, however, staffers in the office of then State Assemblymember Kevin Murray contacted me on the strength of an article about the VVRI that had appeared in State Legislatures magazine and asked me for a copy of the bill, which I readily provided.

A few days later, Assemblymember Murray's office notified me that the VVRI, completely intact except for the addition of some administrative boilerplate and a stronger punishment for perpetrators of Internet voting fraud, had become AB 44, and was now pending in the California Assembly.

This seemed great. But nothing at all happened with the bill for several months. Finally, without telling me that it was under consideration, a deal was negotiated between Assemblymember (and now State Senator and Congressional candidate) Murray and Secretary of State Bill Jones. As related to me after the fact by Murray's legislative aide, it was a simple deal. Republican Jones agreed to lobby his fellow Republican legislators in support of the bill, and Murray agreed to gut the bill entirely and substitute for a bill, not to implement Internet voting, initiative petition signing, and voter registration, but to study these subjects.

I was disappointed not so much because there would not now be a chance of implementing my vision of using the Internet to modernize elections, but that there would not even be a full and public discussion of the subject, now that the bill at issue called merely for a task force to study it. Nevertheless, I decided to support the amended bill. After it passed the Assembly, I flew to Sacramento on June 18, 1997, and testified in

favor of it (for around 20 seconds) before the Senate Elections and Reapportionment Committee, where it passed, 3-1.

Despite Jones' promise that he'd gather Republican support for the amended bill, it was necessary to bring it up for a floor vote three times before it gathered the 21 votes necessary to pass it.   As far as I know, every Republican in the Senate voted against it every time it came up. Either Bill Jones carried very little weight with his fellow Republicans in that chamber, or he did a lot less in support of it than he had promised in exchange for Kevin Murray's decision to kill the VVRI and replace it with Jones' preferred task-force-to-study-it bill.

All this was immaterial in the end, since Republican Governor Pete Wilson swiftly vetoed the watered-down bill anyway, saying that since the security of Internet voting was unproven, it would be premature to study it. The exact words of his veto message were:

> Although current encryption technology is making advances in providing a more secure environment to prevent tampering by third parties, no one can yet guarantee a completely safe, tamper-proof system. Without such a guarantee, a study is premature.

Thus, by the end of October, 1997, Internet voting seemed utterly and completely dead.

All through 1998 I would occasionally be interviewed by reporters from one national publication or another, asking me how I felt about Internet voting. I would say I thought it was a good idea. When I read the articles my comments had gone into, I started reading another paragraph, eventually as predictable to me as my own statements were, from spokespersons for California Secretary of State Bill Jones, saying that he was considering appointing a Task Force on Internet Voting to study the whole subject.

This was a rather mysterious development, as far as I was concerned. Hadn't the bill, AB44 as amended, that would have set up such a Task Force, been resoundingly vetoed by Governor Wilson? Why was Secretary of State Jones, who had done so much to thwart my efforts to implement Internet voting, or to bring it up for debate in the Legislature, now seriously considering organizing the same Task Force that I thought had been forestalled by Wilson's veto?

So I called his office and asked about this. "Oh, " his spokesperson told me, "we could have set up an Internet Voting Task Force whenever we wanted." "Even without legislative authorization?" I asked. "Sure," they told me. Taken somewhat aback, I naively asked my follow-up question. "They why did you bother to create an amended version of AB 44 calling for the Task Force?" Silence. Silence. Silence.

Obviously, they did it to kill the original bill. And they had succeeded. And, as it turned out, they had managed to delay the creation of the Task Force by more than a year. And they had put it totally under the control of Bill Jones, who would be, henceforth, the top expert and spokesperson on the subject of Internet voting, the "go-to guy," even though he was in fact the premier opponent of Internet voting. Yours truly, the original and originally the only, proponent of Internet voting in California (and elsewhere) was now completely out of the loop and marginalized.

This result is not too surprising when you remember that Bill Jones was a successful rancher, a prominent Assemblymember, the author of three-strikes legislation, and one of only two Republican politicians serving in statewide office in California, while I was a minor political activist with no resources other than words at my disposal.

In January, 1999, Bill Jones announced the creation of his Internet Voting Task Force. Among its appointed members were the Adler brothers, owners of Washington State-based VoteHere.net, an Internet voting start-up, and David Jefferson, a computer scientist from Palo Alto, who had been an employee of Digital Equipment Corporation when I drove up from Los Angeles at his invitation in the mid-90s so he could, as he put it "pick my brain" on the subject of Internet voting and related subjects.

While walking along University Avenue from his office to a local restaurant, he made two interesting admissions to me. The first was that he was indeed a collateral descendent of the Virginia patriot who had written the Declaration of Independence. The second was that he was strongly opposed to any form of direct democracy. "Why's that?" I asked. "Because people are too busy and too stupid to make good decisions," answered the collateral descendent of the man who'd famously written that "all men are created equal." Maybe he'd meant that they were equally busy and stupid.

Now, in 1999, David Jefferson assumed the technical leadership of Bill Jones' Task Force. A year later, when the Task Force issued its final report, that report said, not surprisingly, that Internet voting, and Internet initiative petition signing, were just too vulnerable to every kind of security problem to allow them to be implemented.

Later in 2000, after Digital Equipment Corporation had been acquired by Compaq and David Jefferson was occupying a position similar to his old one at DEC at Compaq, Compaq made a substantial investment in VoteHere.net and entered into a strategic alliance with them. One can only imagine how conducive to this arrangement it had been to have Jefferson and the Adler brothers working so closely together on the Internet Voting Task Force throughout 1999. Or how engineering this deal enhanced Jefferson's position at Compaq.

I, of course, was not invited to join the Internet Voting Task Force that had emerged from a bill I was originally responsible for writing. On May 8, 1999, at a conference on initiatives in Washington, D.C., after he'd fled from the podium rather than answer my question about whether he'd be certifying Internet voting systems and under what criteria he might do so, I managed to exchange a few tense words with

Secretary of State Jones, who, whatever you might want to think or say about him, is a really tall person. He clearly didn't want to talk to me off-stage any more than he did on-stage, so I asked his number two, Alfie Charles, the departmental spokesman, why I hadn't been appointed to the Task Force.

"We can't work with you," he said.

Expressions of Support for Smart Initiatives from Everyday Citizens

Compiled by Marc Strassman
etopia@pacificnet.net
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project
http://www.smartinitiatives.org

January 15, 2001

Good luck. It's amusing/bothersome that you file your state taxes on-line but you can't vote or sign petitions on-line. On the other hand, it's trivial to register your dog to vote, and have it vote by absentee ballot, since the voting process can all be done by mail with no need to show identification at any point in the process.

Walter Deal
January 14, 2001
shwa65@yahoo.com

I read the rebuttal to the Jones position on Smart Initiatives and thought you did a great job in answering most of the questions and problems he raised.

Paul Hamilton
January 14, 2001
Paul@techcampaigns.com

Best of luck on your lecture. Talk of the good stuff, the benefits, the involvement of more citizens...

Arik Schenkler
January 14, 2001
shenkler@netvision.net.il

The Smart Initiatives Papers

Chapter 2

**Smart Initiatives the Key to E-Government,
Reducing the Digital Divide, A New Political Machine, and Freedom of the
Press Belongs to Those Who Own One**

Written by

Marc Strassman
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project
http://www.smartinitiatives.org

February 24, 2001
Los Angeles, California

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Smart Initiatives the Key to E-Government

By Marc Strassman
xd@smartinitiatives.org
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project
http://www.smartinitiatives.org
January 27, 2001

On January 24, 2001, the Legislative Analyst's Office of the State of California issued an important report on the present and future of e-government in California, and therefore everywhere. You can access it in PDF format at:

http://www.lao.ca.gov/2001/012401_egovernment.pdf

This report includes references to some potential benefits of e-government, including;

1.   the potential to reduce the size and cost of government
2.   streamlining government processes
3.   24/7 service availability
4.   less waiting in line
5.   one-stop interaction with the government
6.   reducing traffic
(pp. 4-7)

Also noted is the overall lack, in California and elsewhere, of much actual e-government up to this time. In the words of the LAO report: "However, our review found that relatively little has actually been implemented that meets our definition—the process of transacting business between citizens and government agencies." (p. 9) The same is found to be true for municipal jurisdictions. "But, overall, widespread use of interactive e-government systems is not yet available at the local level." (p 10)

The report further notes, however, that when e-government programs are put into place, "it is imperative that the program staff, not IT staff, lead the initiative," so that primary emphasis will be placed on improving services to the public, and not on technology for technology's sake. (p. 12)

The authors of the study make the point that "It is important that the e-government services provided are those that the public has expressed an interest to use." (p. 13) Given the large and growing support for such online services as Smart Initiatives, we can hope that this streamlined method of signing initiative petitions will be included among the first new interactive services to be offered by California and other states as part of the general move towards e-government.

Initiative petition signing is not usually listed as an existing or potential future e-government service, along with paying taxes and applying for a fishing license. But it clearly falls within the LAO's definition of one: "the process of transacting business between citizens and government agencies" over the Internet. Smart Initiatives' absence from this list is probably due to the fact that, as an official expression of the people's will, it has the possibility of **changing** government policy, not just participating in whatever it is at any given moment.

But the government is not just a mechanism for administering policy. It is equally the means of formulating and choosing policy. That is why we have elections and a Legislature. And initiatives. To give the people a means of making the policies they will live and work under. So, Smart Initiatives has to be an integral part of the transition to e-government, just as do the other parts of the government system, like the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Employment Development Department.

In fact, because of the centrality to Smart Initiatives of providing every Californian with individual strong authentication credentials in the form of smart cards and digital certificates, Smart Initiatives has a special role to play in the changeover to e-government.

This is because of the critical need within the context of the evolution to e-government to protect the private confidential data of each citizen when it is collected by a government system and to establish absolutely the identity of those wanting to do business with the government online (not to mention establishing with equal certainty the identity of the government server to which citizens will be sending their confidential personal, business, and credit card information).

As the report notes on page 17:

> As e-government systems expand, new means such as digital signatures or use of a PIN for authenticating service recipients will have to be explored. The Legislature will need to ensure that these new methods protect both the rights of Californians while ensuring that government services are provided to those who are eligible. Therefore, we recommend that the Legislature direct the administration to develop an e-government authentication policy that describes the methods which will be used to authenticate services and how these methods will protect Californians' rights and eligibility to services.

Fortunately, Smart Initiatives, in cooperation with Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) industry leaders Gemplus and Celo Communications, is already pioneering the means to do all this in the initiatives milieu, by means that can easily be adopted and expanded to provide similar functionality for other e-government services and transactions.

The early adoption of Smart Initiatives will therefore serve simultaneously the purpose of reforming an important electoral institution (by countering the effect of recent court and administrative decisions limiting on-the-ground access for paper-and-ink signature gatherers) while laying the basis for the wider implementation of e-government services of all types.

The process of getting the entire population of California up-to-speed in the use of the hardware and software that will enable them to benefit from e-government is a necessary, but non-trivial, task, and it is one we will need to accomplish if California is to maintain and strengthen its position as the dominant technological and economic power in the world.

Further, by establishing itself as the global leader in civic empowerment through the deployment of Public Key Infrastructure (smart cards and digital certificates), California will position itself both as a role model for all other political jurisdictions and as the standard and foundation for building a similar system for worldwide secure authentication and democratic self-government conducted over the Internet using that secure authentication.

The rapid adoption of Smart Initiatives and the application of its lessons and processes to the whole of e-government are therefore essential to our future. "These issues," concludes the Report of the Legislative Analyst, "will touch upon both the rights of citizens and the long-term cost of government operations."

The LAO Report urges that all e-government projects be "piloted" or tested before being generally introduced. The Smart Initiatives Project concurs with this suggestion and is about to launch the Gemplus-Celo-Smart Initiatives Project Pilot Test of the Smart Initiatives System. All members of the Campaign for Digital Democracy and Smart Initiatives Online Newsletter mailing lists will be invited to participate. If you or someone you know isn't yet a member of one of these lists, he, she, or you can sign up at:

http://SmartInitiatives.listbot.com/

Regards,

Marc Strassman
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project

Smart Initiatives the Key to Reducing the Digital Divide

By Marc Strassman
xd@smartinitiatives.org
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project
http://www.smartinitiatives.org
January 29, 2001

Everyone talks about the Digital Divide, but not very many do anything about it. One who has is Jabari Simama, Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Community Technology in Atlanta, Georgia, which created and runs the Atlanta Government's Community Technology Initiative. In an article that appeared in the January 8, 2001, edition of FCW.com, Simama describes and discusses how this grass-roots program works.

You can find the article at:

 http://www.fcw.com/civic/articles/2001/jan/civ-fperson-01-01.asp)

I read the article on January 29th and then sent the author the following e-mail:

Dear Jabari Simama,

I just read your recent piece in FCW.com concerning Atlanta's efforts to reduce the digital divide in your city. I applaud these efforts by you and your team. As a person who has been actively working to introduce appropriate and secure forms of Internet voting, I have become very familiar with this concept, mainly in terms of it being raised as an argument against Internet voting by individuals and groups who never had and still haven't done the slightest thing to reduce it.

My current focus is Smart Initiatives, a method of allowing citizens to sign initiative and other official petitions online using digital certificates and smart cards. Once the infrastructure allowing for universal and ubiquitous digital identification and authentication of citizens over the Net is in place, not only will everyone be able to sign initiative petitions there, but they will also be able (with suitable additional privacy safeguards) be able to vote online, conduct e-government transactions, and do e-commerce at a high level.

You can hear my January 22, 2001, presentation on the subject of Smart Initiatives to the Speaker's Commission on the California Initiative Process at:

http://www.bookchat.org/SmartIni.html

It is crucial that ALL people be able to participate in these processes, not just those with powerful computers at work or home, or both. This is where the idea of issuing everyone a digital certificate on a smart card comes in.

While no one has suggested or is willing to spend the $600 or so it would take to provide those without computer access with a decent PC, it's not quite as wild, or as expensive, to suggest providing everyone with a smart card that costs $6.00 (in quantity) and a digital certificate that costs a dollar, especially when the smart card is the substrate of a driver's license or state identity card that most people have anyway.

Once a person has this "computer-on-a-card" and the subsequent ability to unambiguously identify him- or herself on the Web, all the tools you are deploying in Atlanta to facilitate Net access become much more useful and powerful. Individuals can transact all manner of e-government business whenever they visit one of your centers and log on and log in. State and local governments can transact all manner of business with their citizens without the need to build new physical facilities.

I am writing now to let you know what I am trying to do with Smart Initiatives, to compliment you on your own work, and to suggest that we discuss how we can synergize your approach and mine in order to speed the arrival of universally-available e-government services while working to diminish and eventually dissolve the digital divide.

I can be reached by e-mail at xd@smartinitiatives.org.

Sincerely,

Marc Strassman
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project

It would be great if we could foment a "PKI race" among the 50 states, where each one is trying harder than the next to envision and implement digital systems to facilitate democratic participation in decision-making and security and ease-of-use in accessing e-government services through the creation of a universal and ubiquitous system of digital authentication.

Wherever you physically live, please join the effort to convince your elected representatives that you need and very strongly want them to look out for your interests by pursuing such a course.

Towards a New Kind of Political Machine:
Smart Initiatives in the Latest Public Policy Institute of California's "Californians and Their Government" Survey

By Marc Strassman
xd@smartinitiatives.org
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project
http://www.smartinitiatives.org
February 24, 2001

Just as I was thinking how useful it might be to find out what ordinary Californians think about Smart Initiatives, along comes a distinguished public policy think tank and asks them.

Dr. Mark Baldassare is a senior fellow and program director at the Public Policy Institute of California, an extremely prestigious public policy think tank based in San Francisco. It is the primary public policy legacy of the legendary and recently-deceased William R. Hewlett, co-founder of Hewlett-Packard.

Since 1998, under the leadership of Dr. Baldassare, the PPIC has been conducting a series of surveys focusing on the theme of "Californians and Their Government." You can access their latest such report, issued in January, 2001, at:

http://www.ppic.org/publications/CalSurvey16/survey16.pdf

The polling data about Smart Initiatives are on page 5, where Dr. Baldassare has been thoughtful enough to arrange them as a table showing the results of asking 2,011 California adult residents by phone between January 2 and January 8, 2001 the following question:

"Would you favor or oppose a new law allowing signature gathering for initiatives over the Internet?"

Here are the responses:

Party Registration

	All Adults	Democrat Registered	Republican	Other Voters	Not to Vote	Latino
Favor	33%	35%	26%	34%	43%	40%
Oppose	61	59	69	61	48	54

Don't know 6   6   5   5   9   6

Before we look at these data in more detail, please take a look at this and another set as they are summarized on page vii of this report:

Other Key Findings

?? *Influence of Special Interests on Initiative Process* (page 4)

Nine in ten Californians believe that the initiative process in California is controlled "a lot" (52%) or "somewhat" (40%) by special interests. A smaller majority (60%) also believes that state government is controlled by a few big interests.

?? *Online Signature Gathering* (page 5)

A majority of residents (61%) say they would oppose a new law allowing signature gathering for initiatives over the Internet.

It's interesting, to say the least, that while almost EVERY person in California (92% is almost everyone) believes that the initiative process as it now exists is controlled to some extend by "special interests," groups and individuals with enough cash to qualify an initiative under current law, not nearly as many believe that the way to resolve this issue is by implementing Smart Initiatives.

In fact, the only other signature-gathering reform asked about in the poll, banning the use of paid signature gatherers, was supported by 60% of respondents. Of course, doing that, in the current climate of extreme political apathy and alienation, without also implementing Smart Initiatives, would likely mean that NO initiatives would be qualified, a very tolerable result both for sitting state legislators and the same special interests being scorned in the first question above, who will then have a "one-stop shopping" system when it comes to buying special treatment in Sacramento.

Now let's look more closely at the results of the poll question on Smart Initiatives. At first, I was a bit disappointed to see that only one-third of all respondents favor implementing Smart Initiatives in California, while more than sixty percent oppose it. Then I recalled my surprise at seeing this question included in the report at all, mainly because it was really the first time I'd seen the issue of Smart Initiatives being treated seriously by any respectable, Establishment-oriented, news gathering and dissemination outlet. A tiny, tiny fraction of Bill Hewlett's money was being spent to ask people if they'd like to sign initiative petitions securely over the Internet. I felt a tiny, tiny bit of pride.

And, in fact, one out of three Californians questioned said they WOULD like to use the Internet to securely sign initiative petitions over the Internet. What is most significant about this finding, in my opinion, is not the smallness of this figure, but its largeness. The reason this is such an encouraging result is that one-third of the

population has ALREADY decided that it wants to be able to sign initiative petitions online, even though it has been exposed to NO information about Smart Initiatives, no public debates about its value and efficiency, and has had no opportunity to ask the experts, weigh opposing views, consider the implications, do additional research, or talk it over with family, friends, co-workers and strangers.

There are at least two reasons for this. First, the Smart Initiatives Project has no money for paid advertising and has done none, thereby depriving people of the opportunities they often have in the case of proposed initiatives that are highly-financed by the above-referenced special interests, who have millions of dollars to "educate" the public about proposals that will often save or make them tens or hundreds of millions of they are qualified and passed.

Second, the electronic signing of initiative petitions is not as interesting, to many, as the on- and off-screen exploits of high-income and/or indicted film stars, high-income and/or indicted athletes, and "musical performers" who claim to be play acting a homophobic- and misogynous persona and can bring entire television networks to their knees for a discussion of the "meaning" of their oh-so-"rebellious" and/or "transgressive" lyrics and "life-style."

So, given the fact that almost NOBODY is California has any idea that there even IS a Smart Initiatives Project, that there are powerful reasons beyond making the initiative process fairer and more open to non-millionaire organizations and individuals that provide additional support for it, that there are refutations of the major criticisms of Smart Initiatives around (mostly developed by me and available in audio, but not MP3, at: http://www.bookchat.org/SmartIni.html), it is most gratifying and most encouraging to know that a third of the people in California ALREADY support Smart Initiatives.

Imagine what that figure might be if anyone had actually HEARD of the Smart Initiatives Project and the case it's making for reforming the initiative process through the use of the same technology that's right now bringing you this message.

So, it's up to you, if you want to have the right to use the machine you're using to read this to participate actively in making the laws you have to live under, to tell friends, co-workers, strangers, and, if you really feel like it, family members, as well as newspaper, magazine, radio, television, and Internet reporters, through letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, e-mails, on the telephone, in chat rooms, by every means possible, that you are repulsed by government to the extent that it excludes you from its deliberations and decision-making processes and that you want to participate, securely, interactively, conveniently, and inexpensively in these activities.

And that, for now, the way you most want to do this is by being able to electronically sign initiative petitions over the Internet.

Make your voice heard, let the media gatekeepers know that you are willing to hear the arguments against Smart Initiatives, but that you'd also like to hear the

arguments for it (actually, you can hear those already, at: http://www.bookchat.org/SmartIni.html, but not yet on CNN).

Here are some final notes about the statistics revealed in the PPIC survey. You'll notice that 33% of "All Adults" supports Smart Initiatives, while a slightly higher total, 35%, of registered Democrats is in favor and a significantly lower percentage, 26%, of registered Republicans wants to allow anyone to use the Internet to sign initiative petitions.

Certainly, Democrats and Republicans must be equally aware of whatever security-related dangers lurk within Smart Initiatives. Then how can we account for the fact that Republicans are so much more opposed (10 percentage points more than Democrats and 8 percentage points more than all non-Democrat/non-Republican voters) to letting ordinary people sign initiative petitions from their ordinary computers? Other than technophobia, projected and imputed technophobia for others, support for the status quo, a desire to exclude emerging groups which include individuals who are "not our kind," an interest in maintaining the special right to qualify initiatives for people and companies that have proven themselves worthy by earning or inheriting vast sums of money, and a generalized fear of the future, I can't see any really convincing reasons why Republicans don't support Smart Initiatives.

Indeed, given the considerable difference between Republican and Democrat views on Smart Initiatives, one might event think that a revitalized and progressive Democratic Party might want to use Smart Initiatives and the related issues of e-government facilitated by the universal PKI necessary to implement Smart Initiatives as a "wedge" issue to gain and advantage over their major party opponent. And, if after they had succeeded in doing that they actually carried out their stated pro-technology and pro-democracy policies, then we might begin to see a bit more support for government, in the new form they will have brought forth.

This would be in stark contrast to the existing state of affairs, in which alienation, apathy, and withdrawal are the most common political attitudes in much of the population. This general tendency makes even more significant one of the most striking revelations of this poll, the fact that 43% of the people who are not registered to vote support Smart Initiatives.

Only 70% of those eligible statewide to vote are registered to do so, so the attitudes of the unregistered belong to a group almost half as large as all the registered Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, Natural Law, Green, and so on, parties combined. It's unlikely that they are unregistered without a reason. It's safe to say that the alienation, apathy, and withdrawal mentioned above plays at least some part in their existential decision NOT to sign up for participation in the electoral circus.

These reasons for their noninvolvement is are highlighted by the fact that, as a group, they are the highest in the percentage of their "group" who wants to use the security and convenience of the Internet to participate in making policy, or, at least, in the

words of the question itself, favor "a new law allowing signature gathering for initiatives over the Internet." Some may argue that taking the word of these non-players on a subject so central to the playing of the democracy game is a little like letting the uninvolved and even non-observant observers at a football game help set the rules.

But democracy is not a sporting event, and the ideal of democracy is to involve all the members of a community in its operation. When almost half of those who've chosen to sit out the game say they would like to see some of the rules changed, if we care about including everyone, we need to listen to what they say.   What they say, loud and clear, in this poll anyway, is that they'd like to see it made easier to get involved in a process with a meaningful connection to how they will be governed.

They feel excluded, and so they've further excluded themselves. Allowing Smart Initiatives could be a powerful means of re-integrating them into political society. Doing so would also, of course, provide an equally powerful means of increasing the participation of other individuals and groups whose current levels of involvement range from the minor to the almost, but not quite, nonexistent.

Finally, let's take a look at the 40% support figure among "Latinos," which are not more specifically categorized in this study, and certainly not according to voter registration or lack thereof.

The most frequent criticism of using the Internet for political purposes, after security, is the "digital divide." This argument claims that it would be wrong to move any political processes to the Internet because doing so would comparatively disenfranchise and be unfair to minority groups.

Now, four out of ten Latinos say they would be willing to allow Smart Initiatives. It doesn't sound like comparative disenfranchisement is much on their minds. It does sound like an emerging political powerhouse wants to make sure its input makes it onto the table as soon and as easily as possible.

In closing, I just want to re-iterate my point that having a third of the population (and more than forty percent of the politically self-exiled) support Smart Initiatives at a time when it has received virtually no coverage in any media in the state is a tribune to the power of the idea and to the desire of citizens to put Internet technology to work for them in a milieu they are not very comfortable in.

Maybe like any worker in a difficult or dirty job, voters might be very glad to see the arrival of a machine that will let them keep their distance from the slime, but still let them participate in the vital work that needs to be done. Smart Initiatives, a means of qualifying the people's initiatives from the relative security of their offices, homes, and other personal venues, might be just the kind of political machine that modern-day Californians are looking for. From the results of this poll, it certainly seems so.

Freedom of the Press Belongs to Those Who Own One

By Marc Strassman
xd@smartinitiatives.org
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project
http://www.smartinitiatives.org
February 24, 2001

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The document in the attached PDF file is a facsimile copy of an article that appeared in the February 23, 2001, issue of the *Silicon Valley/San Jose Business Journal*, entitled, 'Web government'? Not yet - but he's working on it." It's (loosely) based on an hour's worth of conversation between me and the reporter who wrote it, Robert Mullins.

If you don't already have the free Adobe Acrobat Reader that you need to read this document, you can download it at:

http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html

It's generally fair and accurate and I want to express my appreciation to Mr. Mullins for tracking me down, listening to me for as long as he did, writing the article and following through to make sure it appeared in his publication, the leading business newspaper covering the heart of high-tech in Silicon Valley.

There are one or two factual slip-ups in the article, however, that I'd like to make sure are corrected before the wrong impressions are propagated any further than they may already have been. To whit:

In paragraph 1, where it says that I am the "executive director of the California Smart Initiatives Initiative," it should say that I hold that position with the "Smart Initiatives Project," even though I'm the author and chief proponent of the Smart Initiatives Initiative.

In paragraph 2, reference is made to "digital signature cards that will enable them to vote and obtain government services online." First, there's no such thing as "digital signature cards." What the Smart Initiatives Project is trying to do is provide everyone with a smart card containing a digital certificate, which combination COULD be used for Internet (or non-Internet) voting, if all the remaining technical, security, political and administrative barriers to this were removed. These digital certificate-equipped smart cards COULD also be used by citizens to obtain government services and conduct secure transactions with the government, IF the political will to greatly expand e-government existed and steps were taken to pass the laws, reform the bureaucracies, and set up the procedures for such use.

The point in paragraph 9, that "uncertainty over Web security has kept his initiative from gaining support among state legislators," is certainly true. Other factors relayed to me recently by legislative staff as reasons why members of the California State Senate and Assembly would not "carry" (or introduce and shepherd through the legislative process) a bill to implement Smart Initiatives were:

1. A fear that there would be too many initiatives qualifying for the ballot (this from a famously-liberal state senator, one who was also worried about security).
2. One member, who is already "carrying" a bill to spend $300 million dollars to "modernize" elections in California, declined to carry a Smart Initiatives bill even though he thought it was a good idea "in the long term." He was, he said, "a little concerned about security through the Internet." He also found Smart Initiatives a little too "ambitious."
3. My favorite excuse though, came from a member of the Assembly leadership who has been way out in front on the issue of Internet voting, which he is still pursuing legislatively this session. He declined to carry a Smart Initiatives bill on the grounds that, since he's already pushing for limited but real Internet voting and is also sponsoring another technology-related bill, he can't also be associated with Smart Initiatives legislation, because it would "typecast" him (my term, not his) as "a high-tech guy." I leave it to each reader of this text to figure out why a prominent member and leader of the California Assembly, in 2001, doesn't want to be tarred with a "high-tech guy" brush.
4. Of course, the real reason legislators don't like the initiative process, and why they especially don't like Smart Initiatives, (although they are willing to say they oppose it because they're afraid it will open the floodgates to "too many initiatives"), is because they are jealous of their prerogatives as the only people able to legislate, to the exclusion of the other 99.99 % of the population.

No one likes be disintermediated, not record companies, not travel agents, not legislators. The battle for Smart Initiatives is the battle to decide if only those select few, "elected" on average by about 18-20 percent of the eligible voters, will, by themselves alone, be able to make the laws we all live under, collect the campaign contributions from folks looking for paybacks, and get all that adulation, or whether our elected representatives will be joined by a broader group, one empowered by the Internet and legally authorized and properly equipped to use it for our own self-governance, in the making of our laws and therefore the shaping of much of our lives.

Let's return to the article's text, specifically paragraph 10. The effect of the "federal legislation signed by President Clinton last year" to legitimize digital signatures was a positive one, but the E-Sign Bill referred to lacks sufficient impact without the universal distribution of the certificates that enable people to create digital signatures. Making any spoken language universally acceptable but then not teaching anyone how to speak it won't do much good, and neither will legalizing digital signatures without giving everyone what they need to use them.

Finally, and worst, is the complete misunderstanding of the whole point of Smart Initiatives and e-government generally that emerges from the article's final paragraph, which reads, in its entirely, as follows:

Secure digital signatures technology is still being developed, Mr. Strassman says.

This isn't what I said. I said that digital signature technology has already been developed, is being increasingly used in the private sector, and now needs to be put to work in the public sector.

I don't know about you, but to me this misrepresentation of what I said means I'm indicating that the very method I've been arguing ought to be borrowed from existing applications in the private sector (where it's used for financial transactions of all sizes, the digital signing of contracts, business-to-business e-commerce, and so on) and put to work to facilitate faster, cheaper, more secure and more convenient public sector processes (such as initiative petition signing, electronic benefit transfers, tax transactions, and so on) DOES NOT YET EXIST and so we need to sit around and wait until it does, since we can't move ahead until this necessary development takes place.

If I had actually said what the reporter has written here, I might as well have said that "automotive technology is still being developed," or "aviation technology is still being developed," while being confined in an SUV on a jammed highway while jets and propeller planes whoosh conspicuously overhead.

The whole point of my argument for Smart Initiatives and e-government generally is that the private sector has **already** developed technologies that can make the government sector more cost-efficient, more secure, more accessible, and more flexible. We need to put them to use in e-government, including the collection of signatures on initiative petitions over the Internet. We need to do that now. One way to speed up the adoption process is to educate people about these new technologies,

how they work, the benefits they are bringing to business and the advantages that they can bring to the initiative process and e-government generally.

So even if something as completely wrong and inaccurate as this final alleged quote is published in Silicon Valley's leading business newspaper in an article by a conscientious and hard-working reporter, there may still be a way to get the REAL message out and to use such errors as a means of calling attention to the important issues involved.

That way, of course, is the same Internet that has brought you this communication and which can also be used to bring us all the kind of digital infrastructure for self-governance that we all deserve and which is already seriously overdue.

'Web government'? Not yet – but he's working on it

BY ROBERT MULLINS
rmullins@bizjournals.com

E-government efforts such as San Jose's are laudable, but the promise of "Web government" won't be fully realized until everyone is data-enfranchised, says Marc Strassman, executive director of the California Smart Initiatives Initiative.

Mr. Strassman, based in Los Angeles, is heading a campaign to provide all Californians with digital signature cards that will enable them to vote and obtain government services online.

The cards would be as ubiquitous as state drivers' licenses or identification cards. A "smart chip" would allow their use online.

The cards would serve as secure online identification, providing access to government services, and perhaps allowing holders to vote from a Web-connected booth at a polling place, Mr. Strassman says.

But his organization's initial objective is to enable California citizens to digitally sign petitions seeking to place initiatives on the ballot.

Obtaining manual signatures from around the state to get an initiative on the ballot can cost as much as $1 million, Mr. Strassman says, adding that this can keep some initiatives from making the ballot.

He has received estimates from computer security firms in Silicon Valley that 25 million Californians could receive digital certificate cards for 50 cents to $1 apiece.

Although he's campaigned for online initiatives since 1996, he says, he hasn't succeeded yet.

Uncertainty over Web security has kept his initiative from gaining support among state legislators.

Mr. Strassman is encouraged by federal legislation signed by President Clinton last year to give digital

> ## 'It's essential
> for the development of
> e-government ... to have
> a means of establishing trust
> at a distance.'
>
> **Marc Strassman**
> California Smart Initiatives Initiative

signatures the same force of law as manual signatures on contracts and other official documents.

"It could jump-start my initiative," Mr. Strassman says. "It's essential for the development of e-government ... to have a means of establishing trust at a distance."

While the federal legislation gives digital signatures the force of law, it does not specify that a particular type of digital signature technology be used.

Secure digital signature technology is still being developed, Mr. Strassman says.

ROBERT MULLINS is a member of the Business Journal's technology team.

A year after this hearing, and four months after the Commission's chief of staff promised me their report would be issued, when all my interest and all the interest of anyone else who cared about these things had been thoroughly extinguished, the Speaker's Commission on the California Initiative Process finally issued its report. You can read the whole sorry non-downloadable mess at:

http://www.cainitiative.org/pdf/initiativereportfinal07feb2002.pdf

Not surprisingly, everything I said to the Commission was completely and utterly ignored. Included below are all of the places my efforts were mentioned in the 37-page report. My contributions to this final work product of the Commission take up less space than the multiply-repeated names of Speaker Robert M. Hertzberg and Commission Chair David Abel on the two multi-colored cover pages.

Anyone who's heard a word about reforming the California Initiative process since the Commission's report was issued nearly a year ago has been listening a lot more closely than I've been able to. In terms of its own goal, to stifle reform, it has been a complete success. In the context of the original Progressive intention to empower Californians through the initiative process, it's been a pathetic and utter failure.

Smart Initiatives in the Speaker's Commission
on the California Initiative Process Final Report
(January, 2002)

APPENDIX A: COMMISSION MEETINGS

January 22 , 2001
State Capitol, Sacramento

Guest Speakers:
Walter Baer, Rand Corporation
Marc Strassman, Online initiative proponent
David Jefferson, Compaq Computer Systems
Mina Yaroslavsky, Research Associate, Public Policy Institute of California

The very last entry on the last page of the report's main text (page 23) reads, in pertinent part:

PROPOSALS CONSIDERED BUT NOT ADOPTED

ALTERNATIVE PETITION GATHERING METHODS
* Authorize the collection of petition signature through the Internet

APPENDIX B: RESOURCE MATERIAL

The Smart Initiatives Papers. Marc Strassman, Executive Director, Smart Initiatives Project.

For a taxpayer-financed photo of the architect of the whole tax-payer financed waste-of-time, click below:

hertzberg.jpg
Robert M. Hertzberg
Speaker Emeritus of the Assembly

Smart Initiatives was obviously going nowhere, so I looked around in search of some area where technology and government were actually coinciding. I discovered e-government. I set up a new group, "Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government," and set out to put it and its advocacy of more and better e-government on the map.

To access this article in its native habitat, go to:

http://netpulse.politicsonline.com/soundoff.asp?issue_id=5.08

NetPulse Vol. 5, No. 08, April 17, 2001
Soundoff

NEW GROUP SEEKS TO MAKE E-GOVERNMENT A REALITY

By: Marc Strassman
Contributing Editor

LOS ANGELES -- Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government (CUEE) is a new group that's working to convince voters, policy makers and elected officials that it's time to put the most powerful e-business technology to work in government. If government responds, it will lower costs for taxpayers, increase convenience for citizens and give the same power and flexibility to government that is now enjoyed by the most technically advanced corporations.

One of the ways CUEE is trying to do this is by spurring the development of a new XML-based language called Public Sector Process Modeling Language (PSPML). XML-based languages are now being developed to provide standard ways of describing data everyone uses in industry specific sectors.

For example, a group in San Mateo, California, is developing an XML-based language (called Business Process Modeling Language or BPML) that will allow private companies to specify exactly how they carry out their work. Once they've done that, they'll be able to put their business processes up for bid to providers of Web services. In turn, Web providers then will be able to serve the needs of companies by remotely performing these business process services in the same way that they can now meet their clients' needs for paper clips or trucks, by letting them order them over the Internet.

Public Sector Process Modeling Language will be an extension of BPML that will emphasize precise descriptions of the processes involved in the work of government agencies. Under the system envisioned by CUEE, government agencies will be able to lower costs or boost efficiencies by outsourcing services to private companies or other government agencies, which will use the PSPML description to guide their performance.

Implementing PSPML across an agency or jurisdiction will facilitate accountability and has the potential to lower costs significantly. PSPML, however, is not the only initiative relating to the outsourcing of government work now on the table. The Bush Administration seems prepared to privatize up to half of all Federal government jobs. (More) In fact, the US Department of Justice is preparing for the virtualization of government work by drafting rules for the e-ification of government processes.

Communication within groups is a central part of both the governmental and political processes. That's why CUEE is already using the recently released, Napster-like Groove program for online collaboration to develop PSPML and to educate and mobilize its membership for the lobbying work ahead. The platform also may be able to facilitate a rudimentary-but-powerful system for online deliberative democracy, one that could provide an integrated system for remote and distributed discussion, consensus building and online voting.

The ultimate vision being pursued by CUEE is to combine the power and flexibility offered by different digital tools to create an integrated system of self-governance. Through always-on wireless broadband networks, citizens will be able to discuss and decide on the policies they want adopted and then see those policies carried out by a highly automated government directly responsive to their preferences. The technology to accomplish this vision is beginning to emerge from the university laboratories and research firms of California and Massachusetts. Whether and when this vision will be implemented is an emerging political question and one that everyone involved in government or politics may soon find themselves confronting.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Strassman, a longtime NetPulse contributor, is president of Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government. You can sign up to be on its mailing list by going to: CUEE.listbot.com.

Shortly afterwards, I followed this up with a laundry list of the elements I thought were essential to excellent e-government.

To view the original, go to:

http://netpulse.politicsonline.com/soundoff.asp?issue_id=5.10

NetPulse Vol. 5, No. 10, May 16, 2001

Soundoff

A Dozen Things Excellent E-Government Should Be

By: Marc Strassman
Contributing Editor

LOS ANGELES - - What's e-government? Here are two definitions: "e-government means 'online, not in line' " and "e-government is the application of e-commerce technology for the delivery of government services to citizens."

What constitutes excellence in e-government? Here are my choices:

1. Comprehensive. Citizens should be able to do everything they have to do or want to do with their government through one e-government portal.
2. Integrated. All e-government applications should be integrated with each other so that citizens can avoid the need to provide the same data over and over and governments can save time and money by not needing to re-enter data.
3. Ubiquitous. Access to a jurisdiction's e-government portal and its connected sites and applications should be available to users/citizens from any Internet-capable connection.
4. Transparent/Easy to Use. E-government sites should be designed and operated so that the most novice of computer users can readily take advantage of its empowering capacity.
5. Accessible. The design and operation of e-government systems should take into account the special needs of the disabled, and make it possible for them to use these systems as easily as the non-disabled.
6. Secure. E-government systems need to protect the confidentiality of all data. Smart cards, perhaps using biometrics, along with digital certificates, can be used to provide part of this security.
7. Private. Data about citizen-government transactions needs to be fiercely protected by the government.
8. Re-engineered. It's necessary to thoroughly evaluate what government wants to do and build a system that can deliver the requisite functionality most efficiently.
9. Continuously evolving. E-government sites need to be continuously upgraded, updated, and modified to suit the citizens' needs, the evolving structure and agenda of the government, and the latest technology.
10. Fun to use. All else being equal, e-government portals/networks should be entertaining, aesthetically satisfying, and fun to use.
11. Interoperable. An excellent e-government site is one that provides up-to-date links to other e-government sites and is functionally integrated with these sites.
12. Be linked to Internet voting, Smart Initiatives, and Constituent Polling Systems. E-government systems can just as easily implement democratic, totalitarian, or even monarchical government policies and procedures. To ensure that e-government is democratic e-government, the Internet must serve not only as a means of administration, but also as a primary method of democratic decision-making.

The synergy of e-government and e-democracy will facilitate a political renaissance wherever citizens are able to implement it.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Strassman, a longtime NetPulse contributor, is president of Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government. You can sign up to be on its mailing list by going to: CUEE.listbot.com

Here's a more concise version of the list.

A Dozen Things Excellent E-Government Should Be
(concise version, June 10, 2002)

1. Comprehensive

2. Integrated

3. Ubiquitous

4. Transparent/Easy to Use

5. Accessible

6. Secure

7. Private

8. Re-engineered

9. Continuously evolving

10. Fun to use

11. Interoperable

12. Be linked to Internet voting, Smart Initiatives, and Constituent Polling Systems

Here's the version I submitted to NetPulse, before they edited it down to the length they published.

A Dozen Things Excellent E-Government Should Be

By Marc Strassman
etopia@pacificnet.net
President
Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government
http://CUEE.listbot.com

May 15, 2001

What's e-government? Here are two definitions: "e-government means 'online, not in line' " and "e-government is the application of e-commerce technology for the delivery of government services to citizens."

What constitutes excellence in e-government? Here are my choices:

1. **Comprehensive**

   Citizens should be able to do everything they have to do or want to do with their government through one e-government portal.

2. **Integrated**

   All e-government applications should be integrated with each other, so that citizens can avoid the need to provide the same data over and over and governments can save time and money by not needing to re-enter data.

3. **Ubiquitous**

   Access to a jurisdiction's e-government portal and its connected sites and applications should be available to users/citizens from any Internet-capable connection.

4. **Transparent/Easy to Use**

   E-government sites should be designed and operated so that the most novice of computer users can readily take advantage of its empowering capacity.

5. **Accessible**

The design and operation of e-government systems should take into account the special needs of the disabled, and make it possible for them to use these systems as easily as the non-disabled.

6. Secure

E-government systems need to protect the confidentiality of all the data them. Smart cards, perhaps using biometrics, along with digital certificates, can be used to provide part of this security.

7. Private

Data about citizen-government transactions needs to be fiercely protected by the government.

8. Re-engineered

It's necessary to thoroughly evaluate what government wants to do and build a system that can deliver the requisite functionality most efficiently.

9. Continuously evolving

E-government sites need to be continuously upgraded, updated, and modified to suit the citizens' needs, the evolving structure and agenda of the government, and the latest technology.

10. Fun to use

All else being equal, e-government portals/networks should be entertaining, aesthetically satisfying, and fun to use.

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An excellent e-government site is one that provides up-to-date links to other e-government sites and is functionally integrated with these sites.

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The synergy of e-government and e-democracy will facilitate a political renaissance wherever citizens are able to implement it.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Strassman, a longtime NetPulse contributor, is president of Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government.

You can sign up to be on its mailing list by going to: http://CUEE.listbot.com

Here's a considerably longer version, which includes a discussion of obstacles to the implementation of excellent e-government.

A Dozen Things Excellent E-Government Should Be

By Marc Strassman
etopia@pacificnet.net
President
Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government
http://CUEE.listbot.com

May 2, 2001

Assuming that the economy, gasoline prices, the weather, and the behavior of politicians will fluctuate around their current levels for the next two years, how much e-government can we expect to see by 2003?

In Part 1 of this essay, we look at what e-government is and what makes it excellent, as well as enumerating some of the obstacles to its realization. In Part 2, we will consider how it can come about and what it will look like when it has.

First, what's e-government? Here are two short definitions: "e-government means 'online, not in line' " and "e-government is the application of e-commerce technology for the delivery of government services to citizens."

Second, what standards can we establish to judge the virtue of e-government applications, or, put another way, what constitutes excellence in e-government? Here are my choices:

A Dozen Things Excellent E-Government Should Be

1. **Comprehensive**

   To the greatest extent possible, citizens should be able to do everything they have to do or want to do with their government through one e-government portal.

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   All e-government applications should be integrated with each other, so that citizens can avoid the need to provide the same data over and over and governments can save time and money by not needing to re-enter data.

3. Ubiquitous

Access to a jurisdiction's e-government portal and its connected sites and applications should be available to users/citizens from any Internet-capable connection, including PCs, PDAs, smart phones and other Internet appliances.

4. Transparent/Easy to Use

E-government sites should be designed and operated so that the most novice of computer users can readily find the information they need, provide the information requested by the government agencies with which they are dealing, and otherwise perform all e-government transactions.

5. Accessible

The design and operation of e-government systems should, from the ground up, take into account the special needs of the disabled, and make it possible for them to use these systems as easily as the non-disabled.

6. Secure

E-government systems need to protect the confidentiality of data provided by citizens, the records created and stored by government, and the content and existence of citizen-government transactions performed over the Internet. Smart cards, with or without biometrics, along with digital certificates, can provide this necessary security.

7. Private

Data about citizen-government transactions, and the content of those transactions, needs to be fiercely protected by the government. Under no circumstances should governments unilaterally give, sell, or trade electronic information about their citizens to private entities eager to advertise to them, nor should the government itself be allowed to use this data in any way not allowed by law and explicitly approved by the citizens.

8. Re-engineered

It's not enough to replicate electronically the administrative processes and procedures currently in place. It's necessary to thoroughly re-evaluate the overall mission of the jurisdiction and then design a digital structure that creates a government-citizen interface that simplifies and streamlines each transaction individually and the entire process of government administration generally.

Re-thinking the entire organizational structure of the jurisdiction, allowing the citizens and representatives to consider and approve a new form of organization (through a popular referendum, convention, or other means), and then designing a digital network to implement these new forms is also a possibility.

9. Continuously evolving

Based on citizen usage patterns and explicitly expressed preferences (in online surveys and online focus groups, as well as in individual e-mails), e-government sites need to be continuously upgraded, updated, and modified to suit the citizens' needs, the structure and agenda of the government, and the latest technology in data processing and network design, construction, operation, and access.

10. Fun to use

All else being equal, e-government portals/networks should be entertaining, aesthetically satisfying, and fun to use.

11. Interoperable

An excellent e-government site is one that provides appropriate (and up-to-date) links to other e-government sites, at its own and other levels in the government hierarchy. All e-government sites need to work together seamlessly, so that a citizen applying for a Federal grant involving a State program under County administration for use in a City program will be able to complete a single, short, clear form online and get an answer in Internet time.

12. Be linked to Internet voting, Smart Initiatives, and Constituent Polling Systems

E-government systems can just as easily implement democratic, totalitarian, or even monarchical government policies and procedures. To ensure that our e-government is democratic e-government, the Internet must serve not only as

a means of administration, but also as a primary tool of collective and democratic decision-making.

Fortunately, the power and ubiquity of the Internet make possible a wide range (or a pastiche) of means for group decision-making. By adding these tools for democratic self-governance to what e-government can provide in terms of government administration, the technology of distributed data processing and communications can become the instrument of advanced self-government and a prime means for the achievement of some of mankind's highest aspirations.

What are the obstacles to excellence in e-government? Or to implementing e-government at all?

In no particular order, the obstacles are the usual suspects: ignorance, fear, vested interests, lack of money, lack of imagination, and a firm belief that things are so good now that to change them in any way is to court apocalyptic disaster.

Taking them in that order, we can saw without fear of contradiction that, today, most people have never heard of e-government, while everyone does know how to say, "You are the weakest link. Good-bye." Perhaps that's because e-government is not regularly featured on network television, or is not as amusing as Howard Stern, or as cute as Brittany Spears. In the long, and even the short, run, though, it's considerably more important.

Our species can be very innovative, but it also has a strong conservative, "we've-always-done-it-this-way" streak. This is true even in cases where it only seems we've always done it a certain way. Fear of technological change is largely the result of ignorance (a cognitive issue) multiplied by the hard-wired emotional response associated with imagining the harm that could be done to you by something you can't control or even profitably relate to because you don't understand it.

Bureaucrats lounging around all day reading the tabloids and doing nothing, or "Customer Service Representatives" for whom service of any kind is a foreign concept are the vested interests most likely to suffer from the coming of e-government. But so are contractors who get the job because they know a procurement official and get illegal special treatment that would be obvious with the full disclosure capabilities of a fully-implemented e-government system.

Lack of money is the most serious and the most significant obstacle to e-government. Every government budget is already filled to overflowing with every possible expense that that jurisdictions' budget makers can stuff into it. To suggest spending the considerable sums excellent e-government will cost is therefore a non-starter in budgetary terms, and in budgetary politics.

Imagination doesn't really cost anything, but it is often in even shorter supply around City Hall, the Statehouse, or Congress than cash.

A final, and very hard to overcome, obstacle to implementing e-government is residual, irrational, immovable opposition to change, of any kind, justified by any reason, however logical, historically-grounded, plausible, intriguing, promising, and well-argued.

With all these impediments to the way of e-government, by what path might we expect it to arrive nonetheless, and what shape might it take once it has arrived? In the next installment of this essay, we will look into those aspects of the issue.

The article was re-printed in the UK, on the headstar.com site VoxPolitics.

Find it at:

Objectives for e-government

Posted: 5/22/2001. By: Marc Strassman

What do we mean by the phrase 'e-government'? Here are two possible short definitions: 'e-government means online, not in line' and 'e-government is the application of e-commerce technology for the delivery of government services to citizens.'

But what standards can we establish to judge the virtue of e-government applications, or, put another way, what constitutes excellence in e-government? Here are my choices:

A Dozen Things Excellent E-Government Should Be

1. Comprehensive
To the greatest extent possible, citizens should be able to do everything they have to do or want to do with their government through one e-government portal.

2. Integrated
All e-government applications should be integrated with each other, so citizens can avoid the need to provide the same data over and over and governments can save time and money by not needing to re-enter data.

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Access to a jurisdiction's e-government portal and its connected sites and applications should be available to users/citizens from any Internet-capable connection, including PCs, PDAs, smart phones and other Internet appliances.

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E-government sites should be designed and operated so that the most novice of computer users can readily find the information they need, provide the information requested by the government agencies with which they are dealing, and otherwise perform all e-government transactions.

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any way not allowed by law and explicitly approved by the citizens.

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It is not enough to replicate electronically the administrative processes and procedures currently in place. It is necessary to thoroughly re-evaluate the overall mission of the jurisdiction and then design a digital structure that creates a government-citizen interface that simplifies and streamlines each transaction individually and the entire process of government administration generally.

Rethinking the entire organisational structure of public sector bodies, allowing the citizens and representatives to consider and approve a new form of organisation (through a popular referendum, convention, or other means), and then designing a digital network to implement these new forms is also a possibility.

9.Continuously evolving
Based on citizen use patterns and explicitly expressed preferences (in online surveys and online focus groups, as well as in individual e-mails), e-government services need to be continuously upgraded, updated, and modified to suit the citizens' needs, the structure and agenda of the government, and the latest technology in data processing and network design, construction, operation, and access.

10. Fun to use
All else being equal, e-government portals/networks should be entertaining, aesthetically satisfying, and fun to use.

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An excellent e-government site is one that provides appropriate (and up-to-date) links to other e-government sites, at its own and other levels in the government hierarchy. All e-government sites need to work together seamlessly.

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E-government systems can just as easily implement democratic, totalitarian, or even monarchical government policies and procedures. To ensure that our e-government is democratic, the Internet must serve not only as a means of administration, but also as a primary tool of collective and democratic decision-making.

Fortunately, the power and ubiquity of the Internet make possible a wide range (or a pastiche) of means for group decision-making. By adding these tools for democratic self-governance to what e-government can provide in terms of government administration, the technology of distributed data processing and communications can become the instrument of advanced self-government and a prime means for the achievement of some of mankind's highest aspirations.

What are the obstacles to excellence in e-government? Or to implementing e-government at all?

They are the usual suspects: ignorance, fear, vested interests, lack of money, lack of imagination, and a firm belief that things are so good now that to change them in any way is to court disaster.

Taking them in that order, we can say without fear of contradiction that, today, most people have never heard of e-government, while everyone does know how to say, "You are the weakest link. Good-bye." Perhaps that's because e-government is not regularly featured on network television. However in the long, and even the short, run, it's considerably more important than most TV shows.

Our species can be very innovative, but it also has a strong conservative streak. This is true even in cases where it only seems we've always done it a certain way. Fear of technological change is largely the result of ignorance (a cognitive issue) multiplied by the hard-wired emotional response associated with imagining the harm that could be done to you by

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Bureaucrats lounging around all day reading the tabloids and doing nothing, or "Customer Service Representatives" for whom service of any kind is a foreign concept are the vested interests most likely to suffer from the coming of e-government. But so are contractors who get the job because they know a procurement official and get illegal special treatment that would be obvious with the full disclosure capabilities of a fully-implemented e-government system.

Lack of money is the most serious and the most significant obstacle to e-government. Every government budget is already filled to overflowing with every possible expense that that jurisdictions' budget makers can stuff into it. To suggest spending the considerable sums excellent e-government will cost is therefore a non-starter in budgetary terms, and in budgetary politics.

Imagination doesn't really cost anything, but it is often in even shorter supply in the public sector than cash.

A final, and very hard to overcome, obstacle to implementing e-government, is residual, irrational, immovable opposition to change, of any kind, justified by any reason, however logical, historically-grounded, plausible, intriguing, promising, and well-argued.

With all these impediments to the way of e-government, by what path might we expect it to arrive nonetheless, and what shape might it take once it has arrived? Let's debate these issues now on VoxPolitics.

*Marc Strassman is President of Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government

In a stunning corroboration of claims of the Web's global reach, this piece was translated into Korean and posted on the PIB Korea website without a word of notice to me.

Read it in its original location at:

http://www.pibkorea.co.kr/newpib/information/News/ePolNews_cntn.php3?postno=225&page=5

News >>

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"A Dozen Things Excellent E-Government Should Be" (By Marc Strassman)

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4. ? ? ? /? ? ? (Transparent/Easy to Use) – ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? + ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?
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5. ? ? ? ? ? ? (Accessible) – ? ,? .

6. ? ? ? (Secure) – ? .? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? 6 ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? e ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? 6 ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? .

7. ? ? ? (Private) – ? .

8. ? ? ? (Re-engineered) – ? + ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? .

9. ? ? ? ? ? (Continuously evolving) – ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ,? ? ? ? ? ,? ? 6 ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? (upgraded, updated)? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? .

10. ? ? (Fun to use) – ? .

11. ? ? ? (Interoperable) – ? , 6 ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? .

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On May 3, 2001, I compiled several articles I'd written about e-government, other e-government articles by two guest contributors, and, for good measure, copies of some Smart Initiatives pieces, to create the "The E-Government Reader, Vol. 1." Here it is.

The E-Government Reader

Volume 1

Smart Initiatives the Key to E-Government
Creating a Movement for Excellence in E-Government
An Introduction to the E-Government Project
The Bush Administration's Plans for E-Government
E-Government Links List
Outsourcing Government with EZGov
Future Government Forum Posts
A Dozen Things Excellent E-Government Should Be
A Dozen Things Excellent E-Government Should Be (short version)
High-Tech Tools Are Only As Good As the Users
E-Government in Latin America

Written by

Marc Strassman
President
Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government
(http://CUEE.listbot.com)

May 3, 2001
Los Angeles, California

Table of Contents

Chapters 1-3 and 5-9 written by Marc Strassman

Smart Initiatives the Key to E-Government

By Marc Strassman
xd@smartinitiatives.org
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project
http://www.smartinitiatives.org
January 27, 2001

On January 24, 2001, the Legislative Analyst's Office of the State of California issued an important report on the present and future of e-government in California, and therefore everywhere. You can access it in PDF format at:

http://www.lao.ca.gov/2001/012401_egovernment.pdf

This report includes references to some potential benefits of e-government, including:

7.   the potential to reduce the size and cost of government
8.   streamlining government processes
9.   24/7 service availability
10.   less waiting in line
11.   one-stop interaction with the government
12.   reducing traffic
(pp. 4-7)

Also noted is the overall lack, in California and elsewhere, of much actual e-government up to this time. In the words of the LAO report: "However, our review found that relatively little has actually been implemented that meets our definition—the process of transacting business between citizens and government agencies." (p. 9) The same is found to be true for municipal jurisdictions. "But, overall, widespread use of interactive e-government systems are not yet available at the local level." (p 10)

The report further notes, however, that when e-government programs are put into place, "it is imperative that the program staff, not IT staff, lead the initiative," so that primary emphasis will be placed on improving services to the public, and not on technology for technology's sake. (p. 12)

The authors of the study make the point that "It is important that the e-government services provided are those that the public has expressed an interest to use." (p. 13) Given the large and growing support for such online services as Smart Initiatives, we can hope that this streamlined method of signing initiative petitions will be included among the first new interactive services to be offered by California and other states as part of the general move towards e-government.

Initiative petition signing is not usually listed as an existing or potential future e-government service, along with paying taxes and applying for a fishing license. But it clearly falls within the LAO's definition of one: "the process of transacting business between citizens and government agencies" over the Internet. Smart Initiatives' absence from this list is probably due to the fact that, as an official expression of the people's will, it has the possibility of **changing** government policy, not just participating in whatever it is at any given moment.

But the government is not just a mechanism for administering policy. It is equally the means of formulating and choosing policy. That is why we have elections and a Legislature. And initiatives. To give the people a means of making the policies they will live and work under. So, Smart Initiatives has to be an integral part of the transition to e-government, just as do the other parts of the government system, like the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Employment Development Department.

In fact, because of the centrality to Smart Initiatives of providing every Californian with individual strong authentication credentials in the form of smart cards and digital certificates, Smart Initiatives has a special role to play in the changeover to e-government.

This is because of the critical need within the context of the evolution to e-government to protect the private confidential data of each citizen when it is collected by a government system and to establish absolutely the identity of those wanting to do business with the government online (not to mention establishing with equal certainty the identity of the government server to which citizens will be sending their confidential personal, business, and credit card information).

As the report notes on page 17:

> As e-government systems expand, new means such as digital signatures or use of a PIN for authenticating service recipients will have to be explored. The Legislature will need to ensure that these new methods protect both the rights of Californians while ensuring that government services are provided to those who are eligible. Therefore, we recommend that the Legislature direct the administration to develop an e-government authentication policy that describes the methods which will be used to authenticate services and how these methods will protect Californians' rights and eligibility to services.

Fortunately, Smart Initiatives, in cooperation with Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) industry leaders Gemplus and Celo Communications, is already pioneering the means to do all this in the initiatives milieu, by means that can easily be adopted and expanded to provide similar functionality for other e-government services and transactions.

The early adoption of Smart Initiatives will therefore serve simultaneously the purpose of reforming an important electoral institution (by countering the effect of recent court and administrative decisions limiting on-the-ground access for paper-and-ink signature gatherers) while laying the basis for the wider implementation of e-government services of all types.

The process of getting the entire population of California up-to-speed in the use of the hardware and software that will enable them to benefit from e-government is a necessary, but non-trivial, task, and it is one we will need to accomplish if California is to maintain and strengthen its position as the dominant technological and economic power in the world.

Further, by establishing itself as the global leader in civic empowerment through the deployment of Public Key Infrastructure (smart cards and digital certificates), California will position itself both as a role model for all other political jurisdictions and as the standard and foundation for building a similar system for worldwide secure authentication and democratic self-government conducted over the Internet using that secure authentication.

The rapid adoption of Smart Initiatives and the application of its lessons and processes to the whole of e-government are therefore essential to our future. "These issues," concludes the Report of the Legislative Analyst, "will touch upon both the rights of citizens and the long-term cost of government operations."

The LAO Report urges that all e-government projects be "piloted" or tested before being generally introduced. The Smart Initiatives Project concurs with this suggestion and is about to launch the Gemplus-Celo-Smart Initiatives Project Pilot Test of the Smart Initiatives System. All members of the Campaign for Digital Democracy and Smart Initiatives Online Newsletter mailing lists will be invited to participate. If you or someone you know isn't yet a member of one of these lists, he, she, or you can sign up at:

http://SmartInitiatives.listbot.com/

Regards,

Marc Strassman
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project

Creating a Movement for Excellence in E-Government

By Marc Strassman
xd@smartinitiatives.org
Executive Director
Smart Initiatives Project
http://www.smartinitiatives.org
March 3, 2001

I was once a Federal bureaucrat. In the Bicentennial Year of 1976, I worked in the Military Claims Adjudication Division of the General Accounting Office in Washington, D.C., as, well, a Military Claims Adjudicator. I will spare us all the details of that milieu and limit my report to two elements of immediate relevance to a discussion of e-government.

First, even though the Apple II computer was then selling wildly in some quarters, we used manual typewriters for "word processing" and primitive calculators for "number crunching." Second, while it wasn't the official mission statement there, it should, I thought, have been engraved in the stone over the entrance to the building, this oft-repeated management mantra, the standard (and only) reply to every suggestion I ever made for improving, speeding up, or otherwise upgrading the antiquated procedures and processes of that agency: "**WE'VE ALWAYS DONE IT THAT WAY**."

So you can imagine how impressed and glad I was to see, only twenty-five years later, that an extremely prestigious organization dedicated to improving, speeding up, and otherwise upgrading the operations of government at all levels (federal, state, local, and tribal) had issued a detailed yet evocative report calling for the very reforms I had suffered from the lack of a quarter of a century earlier.

"The big idea here is e-the-people," begins "E-Government: the Next American Revolution," a report released by the Council on Excellence in Government on February 21, 2001. It goes on to say that e-government can put "ownership of government truly in the hands of all Americans—most of whom, according to opinion research sponsored by the Council for Excellence in Government, currently think in terms of *the* government, not *our* government." The report continues:

"This is especially true for young people, who have come of age in a time when political scandals and foibles have tarnished the ideal of public service."

Continuing the introduction to its recommendations, the report cites statistics that testify to youthful alienation from the political system, especially the fact that "only a third of young people ages 18-24 vote in presidential elections." The answer to this deplorable situation, say the authors of the report, is to put the government online.

Their recommendations are based in part on the results of two surveys commissioned by the Council by famously-Democratic pollster Peter Hart and famously-Republican pollster Robert Teeter, which showed, in a therefore provably non-partisan way, that a strong majority of Americans favor what the authors of the report call "a sweeping transformation that information technology has now made not only imaginable but achievable."

Here's what the report's authors say we can expect from e-government:

A place not only to get information but also to complete transactions with government, get services, talk with elected representatives—even to vote. A government that organizes and furnishes information and services around the needs of people while protecting their privacy.

The report includes a number of specific recommendations for implementing e-government. These include:

1. Action by the President of the United States to create and support officials at Cabinet-level to inspire and co-ordinate the Federal transformation to e-government

2. Creation of a Public/Private Council on Electronic Government to generate and co-ordinate efforts to bring together government agencies, the non-profit sector, and private companies in the business of creating e-government

3. Creation of a Congressional Office of E-Government to spearhead efforts in the Federal legislature to move towards e-government

4. The creation of a Strategic Investment Fund, of three billion dollars over five years, to jump-start this e-government initiative.

5. Relying on the private sector to provide a significant part of the innovations needed to put e-government into operation

6. Making it easier for government to hire, retain, and train the work force needed to implement e-government

7. Putting an emphasis on privacy, security, and interoperability as e-government rolls out

8. Closing the digital divide by establishing "a goal of ensuring that all Americans have *access to the Internet in their homes*, regardless of income, disability, or educational background."

9. Organizing public forums (including ones online) that "focus particularly on engaging people in the democratic process and the potential for electronic voting technology in which the public can have complete confidence."

The report's authors conclude with a call to action:

> This bold vision of E-the-People electronic government—of the people, by the people, and for the people—is revolutionary in its potential impact on the strength and vitality of our government and our democracy.

> We believe that this is one of those exciting moments in history when leaders are challenged to act, with imagination and determination, to achieve the quantum leaps that electronic government makes possible.

> Leaders in the public and private sectors must, together, seize this opportunity to take the bold, decisive actions—as we have suggested in this report—to make electronic government a reality. The people are ready. We can do this, together.

This report is full of great ideas, long overdue, cogently expressed. Following the report's recommendations (especially the one about spending 3 billion dollars to implement it) could possibly result in the creation of a lot of new websites, re-tooled administrative processes, increased profits for computer hardware, computer software, and networking companies, a more web-savvy governmental workforce, and more convenience for citizens needing to interact with the government.

But the report, in its non-partisan, non-profit, way, leaves out a few things:

1. The inertia that entrenched bureaucracies can generate to prevent even minor changes in their way of life, let alone changes that have the potential to disintermediate them almost out of existence

2. The impact of political and economic interests as they mobilize to protect and expand their political and economic interests in the face of efforts to rationalize and virtualize processes from which they are already deriving significant benefits

3. The report argues that the American people are ready to see government services moved into cyberspace, and makes the further point that doing so could (might, will, the report is not very specific on this) reverse the decline in public confidence in government which it says has been caused by "political scandals and foibles [which] have tarnished the ideal of public service."

There are two problems with this argument, or set of arguments. First, how are people going to have confidence in a transformation process overseen by the very politicians in whom they famously have no confidence?

Second, and much more important, people's alienation from government is not primarily a consequence of the sexual escapades of a few politicians, as implied in the report, but,

in addition to the tragically destructive Presidential lying of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, of the deeply-rooted and seemingly intractable domination in our own time of federal, state, and often local politics by money and the special interests who have it to spend on their own, and not the public's behalf, to nurture, support, and elect candidates who will pay them back in public policies that return their investments to them many times over.

This fact, together with the collusion of giant (and growing) media conglomerates (themselves the beneficiaries of such government policies as massive spectrum giveaways and the privatization of the "public airwaves" during elections) that so routinely cover up this fact that it ceases to exist, is why people are alternately angry and apathetic about government, not because they can't renew their driver licenses online, although that inability is certainly annoying, inconvenient, and unnecessary, given what they can already do electronically in the private sector.

4. Another issue not much addressed by the report's authors has to do not with services rendered to citizens online but with policies formulated online. The report's authors are as distinguished, dedicated, experienced, and expert as it is possible to be, and, as a result, they adhere to the idea that, being as distinguished, dedicated, experienced, and expert as they are, they have a better idea about how things ought to be run than does the average citizen. Witness, for example, the fact that this report itself is a clarion call for a revolution that hardly anyone else, present company excepted, has been calling for.

This attitude leads to the neglect of ideas concerning ways that all citizens can participate in the formulation of policy as well as benefit from it once it's in place.

In the last few years, I've proposed a number of ways in which the Internet could be used to more fully involve everyone in the making of policies and laws that affect them. One was a system of Constituent Polls that elected officials could use to survey the views of those they were elected to represent, using universally-distributed digital certificates and smart cards to authenticate pollees as genuine residents of their districts.

Most of us had e-mail long before our elected representatives did. And now that they all have it, it is widely understood that, except for batch-deleting them, e-mails we send to our representatives play almost no role in shaping their views and their votes on our behalf. At a time when e-mail technology could easily be used to solicit, collect, direct, shape, and deepen pubic dialogue among citizens and between representatives and citizens, this is not being done, at least not by government. And it's not being highlighted by this report either, which, of course, never once mentions using the Internet to collect digitally-signed initiative petitions, although the phrase "e-government initiative" appears in the text four times (and once in the text of this article).

If the transformation called for in the Council's report rates being called "a revolution," than surely so does the transformation of the Soviet Communist system into

the current "free-market" Russian one. Certainly, a lot of changes have been made, and things are very different now in many ways than they were when Lenin's revolutionary visage gazed down on all the "comrades." Things are not necessarily much better though, with life expectancy plummeting, and corruption even more widespread than it was under Communism.   Apart from the limitations of human nature and the corrosive effects of 71 years of a deeply-flawed version of socialism, the main reason this transition failed was because of the energy, creativity, and, in some cases, the brutality, of Russia's own particular "special interests," who moved swiftly and decisively to see that it was they, and not the general population, that benefited the most from the collapse of one system and the creation of the next one.

Of course, this kind of failure to live up to grand ideals is standard in revolutionary transformations. The outcome of the Council's pursuit of its laudable goals is uncertain. The obstacles mentioned above (and given concrete form in a **Washington Post** article published the day after the report's release, available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A37667-2001Feb21?language=printer) could easily scuttle the whole process.

If the Council and its allies succeed, in some form, in implementing its vision, some interests will benefit, while others will suffer. It's even possible that the mass of citizens will be better off when the dust settles. But we only will be if we are vigilant and involved from the beginning in framing the policies that will constitute the e-government transformation advocated in this report. This means we need a democratic electronic organization, a "Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government (CUEE)," that will allow us to educate ourselves on this issue, formulate and discuss the relevant subject matter, build a consensus, and mobilize politically to carry out our agreed-upon agenda in this area.

Unlike any other revolution, the transition to e-government holds not only the seeds of its own destruction, but the means for actually making our mass society truly democratic and participatory. That is because the technology at the heart of the process clearly could support the basic infrastructure of a system of self-governance, on every level/scale (tribal, local, state, national, and global) that can take into account the views and needs of everyone living within it.

It also contains the possibility of creating an administration of automated transactions and pseudo-consultations that will sooner or later devolve into a cyber-oligarchy without even government workers to buffer the decisions of a Government Command Council making full use of computer-and-network technology's power to collect and process information and none of its ability to facilitate collaborative interaction.

We therefore now have both the opportunity and the responsibility to study in detail this report on e-government from the Council on Excellence in Government, so that we can participate in an informed way in the ensuing discussion of it and its recommendations, in order to increase the odds that, at the proverbial end of the day, we

will have been able to look out for our own interests at least as effectively as other, maybe more powerful players, will have looked after theirs.

To get started on, in the words of President Kennedy, this "long twilight struggle," please go to:

http://www.excelgov.org/index.htm

An Introduction to the E-Government Project

By Marc Strassman
xd@smartinitiatives.org
Executive Director
Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government
http://www.smartinitiatives.org
March 5, 2001

I can summarize over five years of work in this field by saying that both my original and current intention is to harness the power of IT in order to create a more democratic and a more efficient government. The promise of more democracy and more efficiency has resided in this technology from its inception. The possibilities had become very apparent to me by the mid-90s when I got involved with Internet voting.

They are even more obviously apparent today, when telecommunications and networked computing, as developed and used in private industry, make possible almost unbelievable levels of prediction, communication, and coordination in a system driven almost exclusively by the quest to maximize profit and/or market share.

If individual governments, and government generally, are to have any chance at all of monitoring, regulating, or limiting the power of the private sector that has these tools at its command, it too will need to acquire and use the equipment and methods that generate so much organizational power. Since government's role is to represent the interests of ALL the people, not just powerful IT-savvy corporations, government must either become e-government or cease to have any meaningful function.

Minutes ago I spoke to a representative of the SEC about using digital signatures to sign proxy cards. It was a pleasant but sobering conversation. He said that his agency still hadn't addressed this issue, although, in light of the E-Sign Bill, it probably was planning to. We commiserated about their low funding level, and how it made it somewhat difficult to keep up with an industry that was bursting at the seams with powerful computing and networking machinery.

We wrapped up by realizing that the current administration, which needs to appoint two members (including the head of the agency) to the five-person Commission, was not likely to look very favorably on any actions that strengthen stockholder versus management rights in corporate governance.

And since the SEC is answerable to a Congress without much more interest than the Administration in heightened corporate accountability, one can therefore say, that like many previous Presidential budgets, a reform like the use of digital signatures on proxy votes, with all that it implies for corporate governance, is very likely to be DOA.

Without over-dramatizing or over-generalizing this case, it's possible to see here in microcosm the obstacles confronting any effort to digitalize government (or other critical) functions. Expense, ignorance, principled opposition, unprincipled opposition, general bureaucratic inertia, lack of funding, lack of sufficient technically-competent people to design, deploy and use a new system, public apathy, public paranoia, lack of media interest, biased and unhelpful media interest, problems caused by constant innovation in technology--these are some of the obstacles to implementing e-government. All of them will have to be addressed if it's to be built.

I hope that we can talk soon about working together to implement our common vision of government as the shared interactive project of an informed and participating citizenry, supported, facilitated, and mediated by the most dazzling and incorruptible electronic network that our collective talent and treasure can build.

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The Bush Administration's Plans

for E-Government

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From pages 179-180 of:

A BLUEPRINT FOR NEW BEGINNINGS

A RESPONSIBLE BUDGET FOR AMERICA'S PRIORITIES

Use the Internet to Create a Citizen-Centric Government: The explosive growth of the Internet has transformed the relationship between customers and businesses. It is also transforming the relationship between citizens and Government. By enabling individuals to penetrate the Federal bureaucracy to access information and transact business, the Inter-net promises to shift power from a handful of leaders in Washington to individual citizens. The President believes that providing access to information and services is only the first step in e-Government. In order to make Government truly ''citizen-centered,'' agencies will have to work together to consolidate similar functions around the needs of citizens and businesses. Citizen-centered Government will use the Internet to bring about trans-formational change: agencies will conduct transactions with the public along secure web-enabled systems that use portals to link common applications and protect privacy, which will give citizens the ability to go online and interact with their Government— and with their State and local governments that provide similar information and services—around citizen preferences and not agency boundaries.

Create an E-Government Fund: The budget provides $10 million in 2002 as the first installment of a fund that will grow to a total of $100 million over three years to support interagency electronic Government (e-gov) initiatives. OMB would control the allocation of the fund to support information technology (IT) projects in the e-gov arena. Projects that operate across agency boundaries will build off the foundation of essential building blocks, including: *www.firstgov.gov*, the online information portal that provides 24 hours a day/seven days a week access to all Government online information, search-able by topic rather than by agency; and the development of a Public Key Infrastructure to implement digital signatures that are accepted across agencies for secure online communications. The fund would also further the Administration's ability to implement the Government Paperwork Elimination Act of 1998, which calls

upon agencies to provide the public with optional use and acceptance of electronic information, services and signatures, when practicable, by October 2003. In recent years, funding for interagency e-gov initiatives has been obtained, as authorized by law, by passing the hat among agencies to support activities of interagency councils. The e-gov fund would supplement the ''pass the hat'' funds and accelerate the improvements this Administration will make on IT spending within agencies through capital planning, to provide for interagency e-gov innovation.

E-Government Links List

1. The State of Illinois is planning to distribute a million digital certificates to its citizens.

http://www.fcw.com/civic/articles/2001/0122/web-pki-01-24-01.asp

2. The City of San Jose, California, is letting its citizens apply for building permits online:

http://www.sjpermits.com/sjpermit/prereqs.htm

3. The State of California is getting more deeply into e-government:

http://www.lao.ca.gov/2001/012401%5Fegovernment.html

4. The prestigious Council for Excellence in Government has just issued a report calling for an accelerated implementation of e-government throughout the US.

http://www.excelgov.org/index.htm

5.   To read "A Dozen Things that Excellent E-Government Needs to Be," written by me, go to:

http://netpulse.politicsonline.com/soundoff.asp?issue_id=5.10

6.   Also, you might enjoy seeing what a city that really knows what it's doing can do with e-government. Virginia Beach, VA, seems like the best example yet of implementing the principles set forth in the "Dozen Things" article now appearing on the NetPulse site.

Read about it at:

http://www.pilotonline.com/news/nw0416gov.html

Visit the VBgov site at:

http://www.VBgov.com/

7.   You and anyone else in or out of the campaign who is interested in knowing more about e-government is invited to join the Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government mailing list at:

http://CUEE.listbot.com

Outsourcing Government with EZGov

By Marc Strassman
etopia@pacificnet.net
President
Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government
http://CUEE.listbot.com

March 27, 2001

Got business with City Hall? the State? the Feds? It's easy. Guess the name of the agency you have to deal with. Pay 411 to give you the number, if they have it. Call. Wait on hold. Be transferred. Wait on hold. Ask for the proper form. Give your address for the hundredth time to the same government agency. Wait for it to arrive by mail. Fill it out. Mail it. Wait for a response. Wait for a response. Be notified it was the wrong form. Repeat.

Or it's EZ. EZGov, often called E-Government, offers every one of us a much easier way to do business with government agencies at all levels. Instead of dealing with people who act like machines, EZGov lets us deal with machines that act like people. It will be a big improvement.

EZGov means using the Internet to collect and process the information which government bureaucrats now process. Transactions between citizens and government that are now confusing, slow, and costly can be made clear, fast, and inexpensive. They can also be made much more convenient.

As Internet access becomes universal citizens can be "online, not in line" in government offices. Instead of using precious fuel and even more precious time to carry yourself through jammed streets or freeways to a government building to deliver information to a less-than attentive government worker, you can deliver the same information to an always-alert and attentive computer screen, or cell phone, or PDA, which will accept and process your data faster and more accurately than its human counterpart ever could.

On March 21st, the well-regarded, Washington, D.C.-based Council for Excellence in Government issued a report calling for "full electronic government in the United States." Their report is available at: http://www.excelgov.org/. They also released a survey by Hart-Teeter that showed strong support for EZGov among a representative sample of American citizens.

A major finding of this survey was that "The public would prefer that government agencies work with private industry in developing e-government."

This public preference fits in nicely with the emerging trend towards "Web services" on the Internet. "Web services" refers to letting specialists provide different services to multiple customers through the Internet. This is really a modern version of the economists' theory of "comparative advantage," which means that countries that specialize in agriculture, or companies that specialize in diamond cutting, can give consumers a better deal than if each person had to do everything for him- or herself.

With Web services for EZGov, government agencies could outsource some or all of their work to private firms specializing in traffic ticket administration, or utility billing, or procurement. These specialist firms could do a better job at a lower cost than single specialized government departments.

To make this all work smoothly will require a carefully-worked out and precisely-implemented infrastructure. Fortunately, work is already well underway, under the leadership of the BPMI.org consortium, to develop just such an infrastructure for purely business transactions. This framework, called Business Process Modeling Language (BPML) will allow companies to very specifically describe how they operate and allow them to outsource those services they would rather not provide for themselves. Learn more at: http://www.bpmi.org.

Now in its earliest stages, the creation of an analogous "Public Sector Process Modeling Language" will similarly enable government agencies at all levels to precisely describe what it is that they do, and then to outsource the provision of those services that they can get at a lower cost and at a higher level of quality from private firms who specialize in providing them.

By these means, the cost of government will be less and the quality of the services it provides will be greater. Just as was the case in agriculture, manufacturing, banking and telecommunications, letting machines do the work of humans in government will prove to be far superior to using humans and forcing them to act like machines.

Marc Strassman is the President of Citizens United for Excellence in E –Government (CUEE). To join the CUEE mailing list, go to: http://CUEE.listbot.com.

Future Government Forum Posts

By Marc Strassman
etopia@pacificnet.net
President
Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government
http://CUEE.listbot.com

March 28-29, 2001

Dan Jellinek organized, and British Telecomm paid for, an online forum to discuss e-government between March 27 and 29th, 2001. I submitted a post to the Open Forum Section on March 28th:

Before government can be digitalized and virtualized, we need to know what it's actually doing. The BPMI.org consortium, based in San Mateo, California, US, is creating a "Business Process Modeling Language" (BPML) (http://www.bpmi.org) that will let private firms precisely describe just what they actually do in their business, so that they can conveniently outsource some or all of it to companies that will provide these processes through "Web services." My group, Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government (join our mailing list at: http://CUEE.listbot.com) has asked Intalio to create an analogous product, to be called "Public Sector Process Modeling Language" (PSPML) which would enable governments to precisely describe exactly what they do, so that these functions could also be outsourced to Web service providers in the private sector, thereby digitizing and virtualizing and privatizing government functions.

Someone named Malcolm told me I was all wrong, so I replied thusly:

I think you did understand my point, Malcolm, but disagree with it.

I read Mikefitz's contribution as you suggested. I don't know how it is in socialist Europe, but here in the United States, there's a big difference between governments that sue to break up alleged monopolies and private companies who exist to make money for their owners. There's also a big difference between private companies that have to be efficient and productive or cease to exist and government agencies, like the Federal Aviation Administration, which can be mismanaged in the extreme without any consequences, except to the "stakeholders" who need them to do their job properly.

"Digitizing and virtualizing and privatizing government functions," by explicitly setting forth what needs to happen for a government agency to discharge its responsibilities and then letting outside organizations bid for the chance to carry out these functions will merely allow the economic rule of "competitive advantage" to prevail in the delivery of "public" services, as it now does for "private" services.

If the City of Liverpool's IT department can issue checks for the City of London faster, less expensively and more accurately than can London's, why shouldn't they be able to? If IBM UK can do it better, why shouldn't they? In fact, do they already?

I believe that a global regime for the outsourcing of government services at the municipal, regional, state, and national level will drive down the cost of government significantly and ought to be pursued. I believe it should be "a common strategic objective" of governments everywhere. In fact I, and my organization, Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government, are working full-time to see that they do. (You and others can join the CUEE mailing list at: http://CUEE.listbot.com)

Public Sector Process Modeling Language is indeed "some sort of XML-based" standard, in this case a standard for the precise characterization of government behavior. Its creation, acceptance as a standard, and implementation are essential if every governments is to begin enjoying the efficiencies available to corporations and their customers in the non-governmental world.

No one is saying that "privatization is intrinsically good per se." If Nottingham can collect its garbage more efficiently and more inexpensively than a private company, let it. But if Glasgow can manage its surveillance cameras more efficiently and more inexpensively by hiring a private company to run them, it should be able to do so. And if an American (or a Spanish one) city wants this service for itself, it can hire the City of Glasgow (or a private provider) to manage such a system for it.

These efficiencies are possible now because of what the Internet is capable of doing. I think Adam Smith would be glad to see it.

As for all your jargon about what "Government, particularly local, is 'about'," I say that government at every level is about ascertaining the will of the people it serves and carrying it out on their behalf. I personally would like to see the Internet used to do this to the fullest extent possible, through remote Internet voting, Smart Initiatives, and Instant Electronic Constituent Surveys by all elected representatives, with all of these tools of democratic participation relying on a ubiquitous system of digital certificates and smart cards to identify and authenticate both citizens and government to each other in these transactions.

But once the people, through their elected representatives and own stated preferences, through means involving such technologies as support this Future Government Forum itself, have made a decision about what they want, it ought to be all right to get them what they want from a variety of sources, "public" or "private." If a town, or city, or nation, wants to trade-off lower cost and higher efficiency in exchange for keeping their inefficient neighbors at work shuffling paper instead of letting a far-off corporation do the same work in a tenth of the time and a twentieth of the cost, I suppose they should be able to.

But they ought not to be able to demand that no one takes advantage of the Internet, of the globalization of work, or of the power of PSPML to lower costs and improve service delivery in the public sector.

Of course, this same desire to support local workers already fuels protectionism for privately produced goods and, increasingly, for services.

The ubiquitous Internet means services, especially computer networked-based services, can be delivered anywhere anytime. With the outsourcing of government functions that have been reduced to their essential PSPML characteristics, almost anything that governments at any level does now will be doable at a lower cost and a higher efficiency than at present.

No amount of jargon slinging will change that.

Then someone named richard44 said I was spot on, and there the matter ended. For now.

A Dozen Things Excellent E-Government Should Be

By Marc Strassman
etopia@pacificnet.net
President
Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government
http://CUEE.listbot.com

May 2, 2001

Assuming that the economy, gasoline prices, the weather, and the behavior of politicians will fluctuate around their current levels for the next two years, how much e-government can we expect to see by 2003?

In Part 1 of this essay, we look at what e-government is and what makes it excellent, as well as enumerating some of the obstacles to its realization. In Part 2, we will consider how it can come about and what it will look like when it has.

First, what's e-government? Here are two short definitions: "e-government means 'online, not in line' " and "e-government is the application of e-commerce technology for the delivery of government services to citizens."

Second, what standards can we establish to judge the virtue of e-government applications, or, put another way, what constitutes excellence in e-government? Here are my choices:

A Dozen Things Excellent E-Government Should Be

1. **Comprehensive**

   To the greatest extent possible, citizens should be able to do everything they have to do or want to do with their government through one e-government portal.

2. **Integrated**

   All e-government applications should be integrated with each other, so that citizens can avoid the need to provide the same data over and over and governments can save time and money by not needing to re-enter data.

3. **Ubiquitous**

Access to a jurisdiction's e-government portal and its connected sites and applications should be available to users/citizens from any Internet-capable connection, including PCs, PDAs, smart phones and other Internet appliances.

4. Transparent/Easy to Use

E-government sites should be designed and operated so that the most novice of computer users can readily find the information they need, provide the information requested by the government agencies with which they are dealing, and otherwise perform all e-government transactions.

5. Accessible

The design and operation of e-government systems should, from the ground up, take into account the special needs of the disabled, and make it possible for them to use these systems as easily as the non-disabled.

6. Secure

E-government systems need to protect the confidentiality of data provided by citizens, the records created and stored by government, and the content and existence of citizen-government transactions performed over the Internet.

7. Private

Data about citizen-government transactions, and the content of those transactions, needs to be fiercely protected by the government. Under no circumstances should governments unilaterally give, sell, or trade electronic information about their citizens to private entities eager to advertise to them, nor should the government itself be allowed to use this data in any way not allowed by law <u>and</u> explicitly approved by the citizens.

8. Re-engineered

It's not enough to replicate electronically the administrative processes and procedures currently in place. It's necessary to thoroughly re-evaluate the overall mission of the jurisdiction and then design a digital structure that creates a government-citizen interface that simplifies and streamlines each transaction individually and the entire process of government administration generally.

Re-thinking the entire organizational structure of the jurisdiction, allowing the citizens and representatives to consider and approve a new form of

organization (through a popular referendum, convention, or other means), and then designing a digital network to implement these new forms is also a possibility.

9. Continuously evolving

Based on citizen usage patterns and explicitly expressed preferences (in online surveys and online focus groups, as well as in individual e-mails), e-government sites need to be continuously upgraded, updated, and modified to suit the citizens' needs, the structure and agenda of the government, and the latest technology in data processing and network design, construction, operation, and access.

10. Fun to use

All else being equal, e-government portals/networks should be entertaining, aesthetically satisfying, and fun to use.

11. Interoperable

An excellent e-government site is one that provides appropriate (and up-to-date) links to other e-government sites, at its own and other levels in the government hierarchy. All e-government sites need to work together seamlessly, so that a citizen applying for a Federal grant involving a State program under County administration for use in a City program will be able to complete a single, short, clear form online and get an answer in Internet time.

12. Be linked to Internet voting, Smart Initiatives, and Constituent Polling Systems

E-government systems can just as easily implement democratic, totalitarian, or even monarchical government policies and procedures. To ensure that our e-government is democratic e-government, the Internet must serve not only as a means of administration, but also as a primary tool of collective and democratic decision-making.

Fortunately, the power and ubiquity of the Internet make possible a wide range (or a pastiche) of means for group decision-making. By adding these tools for democratic self-governance to what e-government can provide in terms of government administration, the technology of distributed data processing and communications can become the instrument of advanced self-government and a prime means for the achievement of some of mankind's highest aspirations.

What are the obstacles to excellence in e-government? Or to implementing e-government at all?

In no particular order, the obstacles are the usual suspects: ignorance, fear, vested interests, lack of money, lack of imagination, and a firm belief that things are so good now that to change them in any way is to court apocalyptic disaster.

Taking them in that order, we can saw without fear of contradiction that, today, most people have never heard of e-government, while everyone does know how to say, "You are the weakest link. Good-bye." Perhaps that's because e-government is not regularly featured on network television, or is not as amusing as Howard Stern, or as cute as Brittany Spears. In the long, and even the short, run, though, it's considerably more important.

Our species can be very innovative, but it also has a strong conservative, "we've-always-done-it-this-way" streak. This is true even in cases where it only seems we've always done it a certain way. Fear of technological change is largely the result of ignorance (a cognitive issue) multiplied by the hard-wired emotional response associated with imagining the harm that could be done to you by something you can't control or even profitably relate to because you don't understand it.

Bureaucrats lounging around all day reading the tabloids and doing nothing, or "Customer Service Representatives" for whom service of any kind is a foreign concept are the vested interests most likely to suffer from the coming of e-government. But so are contractors who get the job because they know a procurement official and get illegal special treatment that would be obvious with the full disclosure capabilities of a fully-implemented e-government system.

Lack of money is the most serious and the most significant obstacle to e-government. Every government budget is already filled to overflowing with every possible expense that that jurisdictions' budget makers can stuff into it. To suggest spending the considerable sums excellent e-government will cost is therefore a non-starter in budgetary terms, and in budgetary politics.

Imagination doesn't really cost anything, but it is often in even shorter supply around City Hall, the Statehouse, or Congress than cash.

A final, and very hard to overcome, obstacle to implementing e-government, is residual, irrational, immovable opposition to change, of any kind, justified by any reason, however logical, historically-grounded, plausible, intriguing, promising, and well-argued.

With all these impediments to the way of e-government, by what path might we expect it to arrive nonetheless, and what shape might it take once it has arrived? In the next installment of this essay, we will look into those aspects of the issue.

A Dozen Things Excellent E-Government Should Be
(short version)

By Marc Strassman
etopia@pacificnet.net
President
Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government
http://CUEE.listbot.com

May 15, 2001

What's e-government? Here are two definitions: "e-government means 'online, not in line' " and "e-government is the application of e-commerce technology for the delivery of government services to citizens."

What constitutes excellence in e-government? Here are my choices:

1. **Comprehensive**

   Citizens should be able to do everything they have to do or want to do with their government through one e-government portal.

2. **Integrated**

   All e-government applications should be integrated with each other, so that citizens can avoid the need to provide the same data over and over and governments can save time and money by not needing to re-enter data.

3. **Ubiquitous**

   Access to a jurisdiction's e-government portal and its connected sites and applications should be available to users/citizens from any Internet-capable connection.

4. **Transparent/Easy to Use**

   E-government sites should be designed and operated so that the most novice of computer users can readily take advantage of its empowering capacity.

5. **Accessible**

The design and operation of e-government systems should take into account the special needs of the disabled, and make it possible for them to use these systems as easily as the non-disabled.

6. Secure

E-government systems need to protect the confidentiality of all the data them. Smart cards, perhaps using biometrics, along with digital certificates, can be used to provide part of this security.

7. Private

Data about citizen-government transactions needs to be fiercely protected by the government.

8. Re-engineered

It's necessary to thoroughly evaluate what government wants to do and build a system that can deliver the requisite functionality most efficiently.

13. Continuously evolving

E-government sites need to be continuously upgraded, updated, and modified to suit the citizens' needs, the evolving structure and agenda of the government, and the latest technology.

14. Fun to use

All else being equal, e-government portals/networks should be entertaining, aesthetically satisfying, and fun to use.

15. Interoperable

An excellent e-government site is one that provides up-to-date links to other e-government sites and is functionally integrated with these sites.

16. Be linked to Internet voting, Smart Initiatives, and Constituent Polling Systems

E-government systems can just as easily implement democratic, totalitarian, or even monarchical government policies and procedures. To ensure that e-government is democratic e-government, the Internet must serve not only as a means of administration, but also as a primary method of democratic decision-making.

The synergy of e-government and e-democracy will facilitate a political renaissance wherever citizens are able to implement it.

Taking a few minutes off from the issue of techno-political reform, I tried to stop the spam that was so annoying to me and hundreds of millions of other Internet users. I was able to get my views reported in the Los Angeles Times, but this did nothing to reduce the flow of obnoxious e-mails trying to sell me superfluous and disagreeable products.

Lone Guns Set Sites on Spam

Monday, April 16, 2001

Los Angeles Times
Home Edition
Section: Part A
Page: A-1

COLUMN ONE

Lone Guns Set Sites on Spam

A self-appointed global army has taken on the mass Internet mailings that annoy users and crash systems. It is a demanding and risky hobby.

By: MICHAEL A. HILTZIK
TIMES STAFF WRITER

"These are companies I've never heard of selling products I don't want by assuming I'm a moron," complains Marc Strassman, a Studio City Internet consultant. Strassman is so exasperated by the volume of spam filling his computer mailboxes that he is contemplating bringing a class-action lawsuit against the senders on grounds they are misusing his property and invading his privacy. "My time is being wasted and I feel violated every time I get an e-mail advertising a penis enlarger," he said.

Some people were still talking about Internet voting. I was invited by the prestigious Boston Review to contribute to a discussion of this all-but-abandoned subject in the pages of their Fall, 2001, issue.

You can access it online at:

http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR26.5/strassman.html

Internet Voting in Eurona
(October 26, 2001)

2. CURRENTLY ON THE WEBSITE

In his response to Ansolabehere's article, "The Search for New Voting Technology," Marc Strassman argues that America's firm belief in individualism, and subsequent reliance upon the decentralized control of public goods from elections to health care, merely opens the door to corporate plutocracy. In a society guided by "a smooth, integrated system for profit" stability is key, and any foray into the dangerous waters of systematic reform is to be avoided at all costs. Strassman speculates that if Internet voting became feasible in America however, voters might "become convinced they ought to be enacting the laws themselves, using majority votes, or single transferable votes, or any simple or complicated system they could agree on." Strassman notes that the E.U. has already moved to better administer their democracy by incorporating the very "Internet voting system and an e-government infrastructure" that he supports here. Read Strassman's response at:

Internet Voting in Eurona
A response to The Search for New Voting Technology

Among industrialized nations, the United States has the harshest laws, the largest prison population, the most guns, and the most executions (perhaps there's a connection). As a country, it relegates the education of its children and future citizens to a crazy quilt of independent school boards, which must carry out their educational mission with a mixed bag of guidelines and often minimal funding. Health care is in the hands of private corporations committed to maximizing shareholder value. And the elections that choose the officials and sometimes the actual laws that set policies in public safety, education, and health care, are dominated by wealthy individuals and immensely powerful corporations—entities that are, coincidently, those with the biggest stakes in the outcome of the balloting.

Most of these atrocities are justified in the name of "individualism." The case is constantly made by those in power—operating as cogs in a vast network of interlocking

universities, private foundations, and corporations—that the true American virtue is the ability to stand on one's own feet, separate, alone, proud, duped. This is rugged individualism for the many, co-existing with a supportive collectivism for the elite.

While education and voting are left, chronically underfunded, to wander through the desert of individualism and independence, the national (really, global) corporate commercial culture is a smooth, integrated system for profit and cultural/psychological control. Textbooks may vary from bad to worse in Texas and Massachusetts, but the students who are forced to use them know, and know more profoundly than they know anything about history or biology, that they can get the same Whopper or Big Mac or other artery-destroying taste treat whether they're in Boston or Houston.

No wonder then that voting reform, so elaborately discussed and exquisitely parsed in Stephen Ansolabehere's essay, is and will remain a dead letter for the foreseeable future. Voting is not a major source of corporate profit. It is, rather, a potentially dangerous source of political, economic, and social instability. Like education, which is also potentially very disruptive of the status quo, voting is and will remain a technological backwater, a venerable and venerated American institution that needs to stay underfunded, decentralized, and impotent, lest it become a means for the expression and implementation of the popular will.

For that, we already have popular culture and consumerism.

But suppose it were possible to overcome the technical, psychological, legal, and political problems that are now blocking the advent of remote Internet voting, and eliminate the "digital divide." What might happen?

One likely outcome is the death of political parties.

Allowing citizens to do their electoral business online means that the transaction cost of switching parties would be reduced to almost zero. Should it ever again happen that some political issue strongly divides or motivates vast numbers of voters, they would be able to form a new party in Internet time—choosing their candidates, writing their platform online, and agreeing among themselves to vote as a bloc for those candidates and those policies. Recalling elected officials who renege on their commitments would be equally low-cost, in time and money.

This kind of change could also be affected without forming new parties, simply by using the Internet to aggregate support for a certain candidate, or any candidate who would support a certain position or set of positions, and then voting for him or her, conveniently, online.

Of course, a few cycles of this might even convince voters they ought to be enacting the laws themselves, using majority votes, or single transferable votes, or any simple or complicated system they could agree on.

Voters might pass laws allowing and encouraging the formation of virtual buying clubs, through which they could not only buy commodities at vastly lower prices online, but also bargain successfully with airlines, insurance companies, HMOs, banks, and oil companies regarding the price they'd have to pay for these corporations' products.

Talk about a patients' bill of rights. If 10 million members of an HMO were as well-organized via the Internet and remote Internet voting as the board members of the same organization, maybe there wouldn't be such a need for those much-maligned trial lawyers.

Just imagining a scenario like this throws into sharp relief the soggy infrastructure of procedure that has grown up around the (probably wise) views of the Founders concerning the need to moderate the transient political emotions of the citizenry. Still, while direct digital democracy may not be perfect, a return rate for Congressional incumbents of more than 90 percent is not exactly Jeffersonian democracy either.

Would we miss the parties? They have venerable traditions, colorful stalwarts, and a significant contemporary role as the chief conduit of corporate money and instructions to the institutions of government. Unfortunately, they are in charge, nationally and at the state level, of determining whether we have Internet voting or not. Ironically, the very organizations most likely to be eliminated by a thoroughgoing virtualization of elections have the most say on whether to allow this reform.

In light of the American experience with Internet voting reform, retarded significantly by the decentralized nature of the American polity, it's instructive to note that during the same time when little was done, even if much was said, about reforming American elections, European nations, institutions, and individuals have been moving steadily forward, in the opposite direction, creating an ever more integrated Europe, in the form of the European Union.

The E.U. has sought, among other things, to create a remote Internet voting system and an e-government infrastructure that would allow for the direct electronic determination of the popular European will and the electronic administration of diverse European cities.[1]

So the question naturally arises: if 374 million Europeans can add remote Internet voting and universal e-government to their repertoire—in addition to universal health care, lack of executions, vastly fewer gun deaths, national educational and voting standards, and support for the Kyoto Protocol—then why can't almost 285 million Americans do the same, with or without these other accomplishments?

It seems, in fact, that the most likely way the benefits of contemporary European civilization might be brought to the New World would be for the U.S., Canada, and Mexico to apply for membership in the European Union, which might then need to be renamed EURONA (E.U. + North America).[2]

That way, the salubrious integration that is even now creating a Europe more peaceful, more prosperous, and more democratic than it has ever been, could be extended to include the energetic people and abundant resources of a second continent. Such a development might, eventually, make it possible to enjoy the same amenities of life now commonplace on the other side of the Atlantic, including universal e-government and remote Internet voting.

It might be fair to say that Eurona, the integration of the Old World and the New, under a regime that includes comprehensive electronic government and lightning-fast remote Internet voting, could be today's manifestation in space and time of the continually evolving movement of mankind and its institutions to higher and deeper levels of harmony and self-actualization—as well as to more honest elections.

Marc Strassman is president of Etopia, an e-government and e-democracy research, consulting, and sales company.

Return to the forum on machine politics, with Stephen Ansolabehere and respondents.

1: Learn more about the E.U. at: http://europa.eu.int

Learn about CyberVote, the E.U. system of remote Internet voting, at:

http://www.eucybervote.org/index.html

Learn about E.U. e-government trials at:

http://www.euro-citi.org/home.html

My research, thinking, and writing about e-government led me to some ideas about collective buying of essential web services for cities and other levels of government.

Aggregated, Customizable Web Services for Municipal Buying Groups
(June 12, 2001)

Buying in bulk is always attractive, since it saves money for customers and gives sellers large sales. The basic problem with buying in bulk is that customers are often short-changed when it comes to choice. If ten neighbors get together to collectively buy cheese, everyone's going to end up with cheddar, even those who'd prefer Brie or Swiss.

But the Internet to both aggregate and customize bulk orders, this problem can be largely alleviated.

By creating contracts that give customers menus of services from which to choose, within the context of lower prices negotiated on the basis of a large overall purchase, buyers retain their right to choose while sellers retain the benefits accruing to them due to the size of the sale.

A group of friends on vacation, for example, could agree to rent 10 hotel rooms from a chain they like, only have to pay the equivalent of 7 rentals, and be allowed to decide among themselves which 10 rooms they want, within specified parameters.

In the e-government space, Etopia is formulating a vision of aggregated, customizable web service sales based on this model.

First, the need for reliable basic e-government services (permitting, fine-paying, etc.) is established. Second, additional, advanced, and even experimental e-government services (such as Internet voting, voice recognition, smart cards, and customer relations management tools, kiosks) are identified and added to the menu of services available to participating cities.

Third, organizations responsible for the collective welfare of cities are contacted with a proposal to consider, on behalf of their client cities, the model for aggregated, customizable e-government web services being described here. Fourth, representatives of these organizations, and/or the cities themselves, examine the individual products and services being considered for the menu, and decide which ones they think can do the cities and their citizens the most good for the best price.

Fifth, by either formal or informal polling, or by using an online voting program, individual cities select products and services to place on the collective menu. Sixth, interested cities sign up for the next stage in the process.

Seventh, staff and elected official at each city decide how much of what kind of products and services they want. Eighth, these orders are transmitted to the coordinating organization.

Ninth, the coordinating organization aggregates the orders and presents them to the suppliers. Ten, negotiations ensue, as the coordinating organization tries to get the best price for its constituents and the providers try to make at least a small profit.

Eleven, agreement is finally reached. Each city and each supplier validates its deals. Financial arrangements are made. Payments are transmitted. Services are customized and personalized for each city, implemented, coordinated, and maintained.

Cites begin saving money, citizens find at least part of their lives made easier, and e-government fades into the background of municipal life.

Here's another way to accelerate the deployment of the technology needed for e-democracy and e-government.

Cyber Stamps Now!
(August 31, 2001)

The economy is hovering extremely close to recession. The Dow has dropped below 10,000 for the first time in months. Layoffs abound, accelerate, threaten to multiply. Unbought computers gather dust in gloomy warehouses. There is no joy in Silicon Valley, the mighty New Economy has struck out.

But wait. When dairy farmers overestimated future demand for cheddar, and blocks of the curdled stuff were gathering dust in gloomy refrigerators, their politically powerful Representatives and Senators stepped in. Using their clout, they created the idea of FOOD STAMPS, and got a program embodying this concept passed by the Congress, signed by the President, and enacted into law.

Food stamps, given with abandon to the calorie-challenged, did what they promised: they put food on the tables of hungry people and they cleared out those piles of surplus cheese.

Now, faced with the New Economy's version of too much brie, it's time for the still-politically powerful Representatives and Senators from Palo Alto, Cambridge, Research Triangle Park, Seattle, and so on to do no less for the device-challenged masses and the overstocked producers than did their agricultural counterparts in distant days past.

COMPUTER STAMPS and INTERNET STAMPS (hereinafter, jointly, CYBER STAMPS) offer the best way out of the current doldrums being experienced by the high-tech sector, and, indeed, the entire economy, wagged as it has become by the Silicon Sector. Furthermore, by providing those on the wrong side of the digital divide with the means to acquire the hardware, software, training, and Internet connections they need to join the highly-productive high-tech sector, the entire economy will be invigorated, as millions of new people begin to use e-mail, chat, surf, shop, learn, commute, and generally mess around online.

Every additional person who comes online with sufficient digital identification and the means to authenticate him- or herself means one more person who can officially transact business with his or her local, state, and the federal government. Every time a citizen can do that, not only has his or her life been made easier, but the government agency with which they've transacted their business has saved at least 80 per cent of their costs in doing that business.

Further, the data generated by the e-transaction can then be automatically entered into the relevant databases, saving more time and more money, as compared with the tedious, time-consuming, and expensive manual alternative.

And beyond that, once EVERY eligible voter has a computer, a smart card, and a digital certificate with which to securely and verifiably identify and authenticate him- or herself online, the way will be paved for universal remote Internet voting and the remote signing of Smart Initiatives, thereby tremendously increasing the ease and convenience for citizens wanting to participate directly in making the laws and rules by which they are governed.

Many programs already exist to bring some part of the unwired population online. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has just donated 85 million dollars to bring people in Mexico online. This is a humanitarian gesture, and it is also a shrewd move to create more customers for Microsoft.

Providing EVERYONE who wants it with a decent computer and an adequate connection to the Internet is similarly a humanitarian gesture and also a shrewd way of meaningfully upgrading the national average level of computer literacy and network access, something that will immediately and for a long time pay big dividends in e-learning, e-commerce, e-learning, e-government, and e-democracy.

And don't forget how happy it will make the management, employees, and investors in the companies that created those surplus piles of cheese, uh, I mean, computers. With inventories cleared, they'll have more money to invest in more R & D and start creating some REALLY hot products to power the NEW New Economy.

Marc Strassman is President of Etopia and the Founder of the European-North American Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government (Eurona), the mailing list of which can be joined by sending a blank e-mail to: EuronaCUEE-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.