

Federal Election Commission

Public Hearing on Website & Internet Communications Improvement Initiative
Aug. 25, 2009

FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION
999 E Street, N.W.
9th Floor Meeting Room
Washington, D.C. 20463

COMMISSIONERS:

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SCHEDULE OF WITNESSES:

PANEL 1

JONDA BYRD, Environmental Protection
Agency, Chief of Policy and Program
Management Branch
MARTHA DORRIS, General Services
Administration, Acting Associate
Administrator of the Office of Citizen
Services and Communications
LISA WELCHMAN, Welchman Pierpoint,
Founding Partner

PANEL 2

JAN BARAN, Wiley Rein LLP, Partner
ROBERT BIRSACK, Federal Election
Commission, Special Assistant to the Staff
Director for Data Integration
SHEILA KRUMHOLZ, Center for
Responsive Politics, Executive Director

PROCEEDINGS:

(10:06 a.m.)

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

Good morning everyone. My name is Steve Walther, and we are now convening an open session of the Federal Election Commission on August 25, 2009. The purpose behind this session is to learn more about how we can improve our website and internet communications. This is the second day of our hearings. We held a hearing on July 29th, pursuant to a Federal Register Notice that was published on July 1st 2009. The first day of our hearings was very helpful, and I believe each of the panelists has received a copy of the transcript of that, and we've made that part of our website, and along with the comments that we've received, pursuant to the Federal Register notice that was published on July 1st.

With me on my right is Commissioner Cindy Bauerly. On my left is the Vice Chairman Matt Petersen. Next on my left is Commissioner Caroline Hunter, and then farthest on my left is Commissioner Don McGahn. Also on the farthest left is Alec Palmer, our Acting Staff Director. On our right is Tommy Duncan, our General Counsel for the Commission. Commissioner Ellen Weintraub called and said she is running a little late but to go ahead without her. She will be joining us fairly soon.

I want to thank everyone for coming. We're excited about hearing from you today. We're learning, and as most people do, the more you learn the more you realize you've got more to learn, and that's where we are today. We've learned a lot about the basics, about ourselves, as well as about other people. And I know today will result in the same benefit for us. First, I'd like to introduce our panelists. We have Jonda Byrd from the Environmental Protection Agency. She's the Chief of Policy and

Program Management Branch. In her role as Chief, Ms. Byrd provides oversight in web governance activities, including infrastructure and web policy. She also serves as the National Web Infrastructure Manager for the EPA. In this role, she Co-Chairs the Agency's Web Council with EPA's Office of Public Affairs. The Web Council is responsible for overseeing the governance of the EPA public website, and it promotes agency-wide standards for web practices. In her role as Infrastructure Manager, Ms. Byrd coordinates the implementation and monitors the progress of the Agency's web infrastructure projects, including a web content management system. Ms. Byrd has been working with the EPA's website since 1995.

Next, in the middle, is Lisa Welchman, from Welchman Pierpoint. She is the founding partner of Welchman Pierpoint and a recognized leader in the area of information governance. Lisa leads consulting engagements with high level strategic vision, clear understanding of the challenges of senior executives, and real world problem solving. Lisa is a sought after speaker for web management conferences and symposium for insightful analysis of the complex problems faced by large-scale websites. Her past clients include the World Bank, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, USA.gov, The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, Clorox, Wells Fargo, Firstgov, the Social Security Administration, World Savings Bank, and Seattle Times Interactive, among others. With a group of clients like that, we really are most appreciative of your being here today.

Next is Martha Dorris from the General Services Administration, and Acting Associate Administrator of the Offices of Citizens Services and Communications. In her role as Acting Associate Administrator, Ms. Dorris is responsible for setting the vision, strategy,

and operational direction of the communications program. She oversees the progress in citizen outreach and governmental solutions and provides assistance to other federal agencies in their service delivery. Ms. Dorris is also responsible for establishing partnerships with stakeholders, including the Offices of Management and Budget, state and local government agencies, federal e-government program managers, and other GSA colleagues. Ms. Dorris has been at GSA since 1992. So with that introduction, we are all very pleased and honored to have all of you here today.

I would like to begin with Ms. Byrd.

MS. BYRD: Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you the web governance model that EPA has adopted, as you continue on your quest to improve your website. I will give you a little bit of background about where we have been, how we got to where we are, and lessons learned, and what we might do differently in the future. Our web governance model is a formal structure with policy, procedures, standards and guidance. It is developed within the framework of the CIO of our Agency. And the CIO is the one that is officially signing all the policies. It provides accountability for content and infrastructure. So I want to give you a little bit of background about how we got to where we are. EPA's website was established in 1994. In 1995, EPA developed the first look and feel to its website, and that's when I became involved in the web. And so from '94 to '95 we grew up a little bit. The website was managed by the predecessor organization to our current Office of Environmental Information. It was still basically the CIO's organization. In 1996, recognizing that we had many people working on the web in the Agency, the EPA established a Web Work Group. Basically this is a community of people that work on the web; they may be content developers or they may be technical web developers or programmers. But this community consists of about 400 people

across the Agency. We established this web work group to provide us with advice and help facilitate communications concerning any web issues. In the early 2000s, however, as we all know, the web became the primary communication mechanism for most agencies. And the Office of Public Affairs became more and more involved in our web activities, and using the website and providing content, and generally helping to set direction of where the web was going. There was a little bit of tension between the two offices, and I think part of that was just not having clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities between the two, and how we were going to operate. So in 2004, a task force was formed that consisted of senior managers, across the Agency, as well as the Chair of the Web Work Group, and they decided upon a web governance model for the agency. These recommendations were made to the administrator at the time, Michael Levitt. Michael Levitt then, in December of 2004, issued a memo to establish the Web Council.

The Web Council consists of two representatives, one content, and one infrastructure manager from each program and region of the EPA. We have thirteen program offices, and we have ten regions. So 23 times two is 46, pretty big body. It's co-chaired by the Office of Public Affairs' National Content Manager, and the Office of Environmental Information's National Web Infrastructure Manager. One of the things we did do relatively quickly was to adopt deputies so that we could have assistance in co-chairing and helping to staff the Web Council. The Web Council recommends web policy, approves content and technology procedures, standards and guidance, promotes web consistency, quality and unity of message, in the respective organizations. The Web Council convened their first meeting in the spring of 2005. They created a charter, decided to meet semi-annually, face-to-face, and this is bringing people together all across the Agency.— We conduct a monthly tele-conference. And I will say that, that

doesn't happen every month. If we really don't have something to meet about we don't have a tele-conference, but we do have them most months. The Council was successful in developing and recommending an overarching web policy for the Agency, and the name of that policy is Web Government and Management. The website on the EPA is called Web Governance. And I believe Stacey may have given you the URL, but it's EPA.gov/webgovernance, and all of our documents are on that website: the Charter, the initial Charge Memos, and the policies and procedures are there, as well as the contact information for all of the Web Council members. We also developed a set of procedures that are under the policy. These procedures speak to things like complying with EPA.gov's look and feel, insuring access to EPA, information on EPA servers, and also external links. The Web Council was very productive the first two years. Building this policy framework took a lot of time, and it, I think, made a difference. It was very good to have something to point to, especially in codifying the roles and responsibilities of the Office of Public Affairs and the Office of Environmental Information, and explaining just who was going to do what, and how we were going to operate. It also codified a set of principles of how we were going to operate the EPA. So, looking at this, four years later, it's time to reflect, to see what has worked, what's still relevant, what lessons we've learned, and what we should do in the future. Having a governance body works, whether it needs to be 46 people, I'm not sure. It helps discuss and recommend the direction and resolution of many web issues. And as I already said, establishing that policy framework really did make a difference for us, particularly having the procedures and the standards and the guidelines so that people would know where to turn to, as you have new people coming on board. And the Office of Public Affairs and the Office of Environmental Information work well together. We don't have that tension anymore, and I think that has been

very gratifying. But what we've learned is that when you have a web governance body it's really important to have the right level of people on it. We started out with higher level people, and they soon delegated down. And so we have a mix of levels of management. We have an Office Director. We have Branch Chiefs. We have staffers. When you start talking about resources and FTEs, it's important that you have somebody at the table who can speak to that and make the decisions for their agency -- I mean, for their organization. The other thing that we've discovered is, not all people who are on the council are comfortable, or have the ear of the person they should have the ear of, to speak to about important decisions. And even though we try to remind them and help them in that aspect, we have not been able to, really, resolve that issue. It's important to communicate at all levels, though, even if you do have the right people at the table. Having the Web Work Group is also a valuable organization to us because they are the people who are actually putting up the pages and it's good to hear their input. They're often the people that research and come up with innovative ways to do things, and come to us and recommend new products and services.

It is also very important to have management at the highest level supportive of the organization, and we had that at the beginning, and we still have it at the highest levels in the Office of Public Affairs and in the Office of Environmental Information. The EPA has several governance bodies; one of them is the Quality Information Council. Over the years there has been a disconnect between the Web Council and the Quality Information Council. It is very important that any governance bodies that exist on related issues connect and continue to have liaisons and talk. The other issue, with 46 people on a Web Council, the turnover is a little bit greater than what you might have with a smaller body and often starting over is not easy. And I wouldn't say that we actually start over, but a new person comes on board you do

have to bring them up to speed, and sometimes decisions that we've already made, we have to go back to why we are where we are and if we can, maybe be flexible and adapt, that's one thing, but sometimes when you're in the middle of doing a migration you have to go forward. And the other thing that I think is really important is for us to periodically review our Charge Memos. Really find out what we were set up to do, and to see if we're fulfilling that mission. And if we're not, to make the necessary adaptations and be flexible and modify how we are organized. So that brings us to relevance. The EPA is currently looking at its web governance structure. We are migrating to a web content management system. But more than migrating to a web content management system, we're looking at our website and looking at how we can truly integrate our website. We have 500,000 pages.-- Every office has its own homepage, and we want it to be -- and while we think that we have one look and feel not so much anymore, one agency, one voice -- we could be better integrated. We truly want to achieve that goal. And we have had that goal since 1998. We knew it would take us awhile to get from where we were to where we want to be. I would say we're somewhere at about 60%. And I think that the new tool is going to enable us to do the rest, but the other part is going to be political will. And in terms of looking at the political will, and the organizational structure, I think that we are going to have to create something that is more like an editorial board, and be a smaller group with a little bit more discipline, and engage the work group for more of the standards and the issues that the managers might not want to take time to do. Like, when we have to decide boxes and bullets we need on our website. With that I would be happy to take any questions that you might have, and share with you further about our experience.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:
Thank you very much. I'm not sure whether we have questions now, or whether we will continue, but I know that

I certainly have some questions. I'm sure all of us would. But let's continue with the other comments, and then come back. Ms. Welchman.

MS. WELCHMAN: Yes, thank you Mr. Chairman. Thank you so much for inviting me to be here. This is really exciting for me. I'm going to tell you a little bit about my background just because I'm not within the Federal Government, and never have been. And I do something a little bit unusual. My firm helps people work specifically with web governance and web team formation problems. So, not implementing anything, not designing anything, so we're all about the web, and all around technology and understand those things, but we're not putting our hands on it.

My personal background stems from managing the web publishing structure at Cisco Systems, during the Internet boom. And when I was there, I was very fortunate enough to be there in 1996 -- I think is the same year you all started your web presence. It was really the first big, giant website that I had worked on, and it had hundreds of thousands of pages at that time. And so I was very fortunate to be able to see firsthand, hands on, what it means to manage a web presence of that size, that was global in scope and had a lot of interactivity. I also, and didn't really realize this until about a month ago, took something for granted, and that was that the person in charge, the CEO, was web enabled, and got the web. Because it was Cisco Systems, everyone there had to take networking classes, everyone was all about the Internet; everyone was all about the web, and we were really pushing it. And I really took for granted that John Chambers really understood how to use the Internet, and the whole e-commerce push that Cisco was so famous for.

I left in 1999 to start consulting in this space, at first helping people with content management system technologies, but very shortly thereafter realizing that most people couldn't effectively implement those technologies, or support those technologies, because basically they

had governance problems. A lot of people use the expression "Wild West" to describe what's going on in most web presences, and the way that they're produced. There were very few controls in place, so I spend a lot of time trying to not hinder creativity and expression, and freedom of speech, but enable through establishment of standards.

So that's the specific space that I work in and I'm very un-web-enabled today. I have wonderful little index cards that I've never gotten away from since college. So, I've got a few remarks to make. Just to give you some structure around them, I'm going to tell you historically what I've seen a lot in the federal sector. And we've worked with a lot of large federal agencies, and continue to do so, and just some general trends that we've seen. And then, what I'm hoping to do is to put the Commission more on the hook than you've already put yourself with these wonderful public hearings. The fact that we're having these at all is a strong indication of engagement at the senior level of the organization. And I've got to tell you, that's usually not the case in the federal sector, and that can sometimes be a serious problem. So I have some specific tasks that I would recommend that I think you all could do specifically. So, let me talk about the three things that I see mostly happening. The first one of them is a compression of web strategy, web governance, and web execution, and that historically makes a lot of sense. When you think about even ten or 15 years ago there was maybe one person in the organization who was kind of geeking out over things, and little by little that grew and grew, and we all know that organic growth story, right. So at this one time there was this person called the webmaster. And you might still have some of those in your organization, and that webmaster did everything, right? They sort of figured out what was going to go on the web, they figured out the rules around it, and then also did it, right? So that in my mind meant that they were doing strategy, governance -- that's the rules part -- and then the execution part is

the getting it done part. And so that's kind of the history of how we all worked in the World Wide Web, and what we were used to. It was that culture, and it's also one of the major culprits on why we can't do some of the sophisticated work that organizations would like to do. So this compression, I think there needs to be a separation of web strategy, and that needs to be addressed separately -- web governance addressed separately -- and then the tasks that you use for the actual execution of the work done separately. I'll talk about that a little bit more.

The second one that I see, and I know when I listened to and read the hearings that went on, I think, last month, I think it was a gentleman from the Sunlight Foundation that mentioned the IT marketing communication battle over ownership of the web presence. That's really a classic dynamic, and it continues.

It's a little bit frustrating for me because, from my view, the web presence is owned by the organization. It's not owned by the IT group, or owned by the marketing communications group. The web presence is really a digital manifestation of your organization, and should functionally act the way that you act, except online. So that means that everyone's got to be involved in the process. It's not something that happens off in this little silent corner whether it be IT or communications and marketing, or both of them combined. That's been a dynamic that I saw as early as when I was doing my work at Cisco. I wrote a paper on this in 2001, I called it, Commercial Web: the Marriage of Marketing & IT, and it was all about this battle of back and forth. So that's common and needs to be settled down.

The third piece is really just a product of the other two, and an observation, which is that I think organizations are focusing so much on the production of the web presence or website, whatever you want to call it, that they're missing the opportunity to actually web-enable the entire organization. And when you look at the demographics and the transition between -- I think

technically part of the digital immigrant generation, and my son who's 14 years old is a digital native. Right? So as these digital natives start to move more and more into the workplace, I think their tolerance level and its citizens' tolerance level, and everyone's tolerance level for un-web-enabled types of activities is going to change somewhat. So I think that's truly a missed opportunity and I think everyone knows that the Internet and the World Wide Web as a service, is revolutionary. But in the federal sector, and in general most people have not reacted to it as if it were revolutionary. They're trying to make a website, do these very, very tactical things and not thinking about, how do we really need to fundamentally change the organization, given the existence of the World Wide Web.

So those are my three observations that I see going along a lot in the federal sector. Let me talk about three things. I'll try to be brief about them, that I think would be, kind of, calls to action. And one of them would be directly at people at your level, which is to have structured and persistent and clear leadership from the Commission about what needs to get done. That can manifest itself very easily. I think people at a senior level frequently distance themselves from the web because they see it as technical, or something beyond their understanding. And certainly the execution and creation, and the tactics of creating web presence should be, and are. But I think the strategizing about it, and the way that they can manifest is through a set of guiding principles that you can provide the organization about how the web is actually going to work in your organization, and how you're going to use it. How is it going to be used to meet the mission? Not at a technical level, but at a very, very strategic level, something that could be on one or two pieces of paper and is very visionary in tone, but really sets the standard.

The second piece is, I think, much more difficult -- and it's one that I see missing in most federal agencies --

and that's a really strong formalization of authority. Because the web grew organically, frequently there was no top down surveying and analysis of what it means to have a web presence and what you need to do to get it done in your organization. So frequently folks are working on the site, and its collateral duty. Many people have been working on websites for ten years and it's nowhere in their job description. They're not really evaluated against that, and while that may seem like a small thing, when you think about motivation and why people work, and they're being evaluated based on what's in their job description and web's got nothing to do with it. I think that's very, very important and it's important that it come from this level. There are three types of formalization of authority, one of them has to do with expressing who is going to be the top level governing authority. So if you had some sort of policy council, who would be chairing that, and where would that sit?

The other piece is really the execution tier, and that's really saying, who's going to actually make our web presence? Who is in charge of that? Who is properly staffing them, and properly funding them. That's a hard choice, because usually I'm a proponent of the stand alone web team with completely integrated web resources, right? All the technical resources that you need, as well as the communications resource. that's heresy in the federal government because IT and those two pieces are two arms that -- just not only might be fighting with each other, but -- don't work well together. But when you think about what it takes to build a web presence, you need those two sets aligned. So barring that, at least some expression of how those folks are going to work together and some mandate about that.

And the other piece and I think this one is really key and frequently does not come up, and that's about key performance indicators. What area you, as senior individuals, expect the web presence and the use of internet technology to provide to the organization?

And that gives people something to execute against, particular goals. And if you don't do that, what you'll have are people, sort of, willy-nilly second guessing, implementing what they want, and you get this, kind of, mal-shaped, not working all together web presence.

So the second one, and this is great follow up with what Jonda Byrd was saying here, which is: the recommendation to establish some formalized governance for any organization; but specifically with you all in mind, and there's three components of that. One is the expression of a web governance framework through a charter.

And that's really formally specifying who has input and who makes decisions about the web in this organization, and how do the decisions get made when there are exceptions made. How does that rule? I'm sure that sort of thing works very well in your type of culture, but most organizations don't have a web governance charter, and it's not very clear.

So what happens at a project by project basis, people fight, right? Should we put this application up? It becomes a battle of wills. Because it has not been specified who gets to make decisions about editorial matters, who gets to make decisions about which applications get implemented. These sorts of things can be decided once, instead of every single time you have a project.

The second piece of the web governance has to do with policy setting, and this is part of the -- there's compression even within the web governance piece, which is people frequently compress policies and standards together. The policymaking function, I see, is a fairly senior one, and it's about protecting the organization from liability risk, making sure you're meeting the mission, they're these types of things, like right now, social media policy. There are largely ignored things in the web world and Internet, as it is now I think with e-mail, such as records management, records retention, those sorts of things are very, very big policy decision. Standards are about, "How are we going to actually

make the web presence? Is it XML? What color font? Is it natural language? Are we writing for the fifth grade, or are we writing for college level, grad level? " There are all sorts of standards, and there is a lot of those. Far fewer policies. And I think that those need to be created by two different groups of people, because there are two different sets of interests; one is protecting the organization, and its mission, and the other is setting standards to execute against. Then there's the standards-making bodies, and I just talked about those. Those are a different group of people, and I always like to point out, and I think I said earlier that web people frequently perceive standard as being something that keeps them from being creative, but the reality is that standards enable collaboration. Web 2.0 and social media is all about standards. Look at Wikipedia, you can't just put up any kind of page you want, and it's heavily monitored. Look at blogs. What can you really do on a blog? You can write an entry, you can comment, if you've got some widgets to it, you can send things to people. That is a very controlled environment. There's a lot of freedom of speech, and expression involved, which is great, but it's very, very standards driven.

And then the last and short piece is making sure that you have a well formed and an enabled web team. That would mean making sure that you take care of the programmatic administrative component, as well as the product management. Right now, that's a little shaky in most organizations. You have a bunch of web people running around. If you're lucky you've got someone at the program level who can go get you money when they need to, or whatever, but there's really not this definitive understanding that they're measuring how effective we are as a programmatic body, as opposed to looking at the website and deciding how it should be as more of a product management piece. So that's usually something that's not working particularly as well as it may be.

So my last thing, before I stop talking, is that I think this process is really

wonderful, but I would also urge you to have the same process internally with the folks who work on your web presence and others who interact. My experience has been that you have a lot of solutions in your organization, but they're either embedded way down at levels with people who are either afraid to speak, or too timid, because it's not in their personality.

But you really have to have this open conversation, because those folks are also aware of your internal processes, and how the dynamics of your organization work, in a way that somebody from the outside just couldn't know. And they're frequently very, very brilliant solutions embedded in your organization, and they just haven't had an opportunity to surface. So thank you.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

Thank you very much. That was very great, very interesting.

Ms. Dorris.

MS. DORRIS: Well, thank you, Chairman, for the opportunity to be here today and share our story in the Office of Citizen Services within GSA with your team, here. Just a little history.

We were created in June of 2002, by integrating all of the citizen service delivery channels within GSA. So, in one organization, we had Firstgov.gov, which was the main federal portal at that time. We had a contact center that had been in place for years -- we answer the telephone number 1-800-FED-INFO -- for citizens to call and get information about the government. And we've been delivering print publications from our distribution center in Pueblo, Colorado, which you've probably heard about, for over 30 years. So we have a wealth of knowledge in our office, of people who have been dealing with consumers, and with the public for, you know, 30, 35 years, and so we were able to actually leverage the lessons learned in the way that they had been working with the public into this electronic age. I always say your work is never done. If you look at -- the citizens change, the demographics change, the technology changes -- they're influenced significantly by what experiences they're

having in the private sector, and dealing with public websites or commercial websites. So, your work is really never done. This is an ongoing process. In the history of USA.gov, for example, which we re-named from firstgov.gov, which would be one lesson learned right there was, nobody knew what firstgov.gov was.

We did lots of testing and found out that people thought that it was governors' offices and banks. When we re-named it to USA.gov the name recognition and the traffic went up tremendously, so something as simple as what you call your site is very important. But in the history of it, you know, we launched it back in September of 2000; it's gone through several re-designs, one where we wanted to go three clicks to service. We re-named it about two years ago. We've changed recently to a new infrastructure, re-designed it again, about a year ago. I'm not sure I will ever go through a major, total, redesign, again personally. What we will do, is probably, incremental improvements to the site over time, because the big leap, in terms of a huge total re-design is very difficult. We moved to the Cloud back in May of this year, and right now we're looking at, "What is the next generation of search, government-wide search?" We're moving our content management system, right now. We've just selected a new content management system, and we'll be moving that. So it's continual. The pieces are always moving a million miles an hour. If you've heard about the disconnect between content and the infrastructure, I happen to have both the content and the infrastructure groups in my own office. So I'm the referee. One's left brain, one's right brain; one's IT focus, one's marketing and communications focus. So, it's a natural dissension between the two types of thinking, and it used to really bother me until I heard the CTO from Google talk about how having people with different opinions, at the end you come out with the best solution. And so now I kind of embrace it, and let them work it out; and we always end up, I think, with the better solution, at the end.

Creating a safe environment where they can actually be respectful and talk about the ways that they see things a little differently. But to go back; our goal, in our office, is to provide timely, accurate, and consistent information to the public, regardless of the channel that they want to use. So whether they're coming to us via the Internet, so we have the USA.gov. We have a Spanish version of that, GobiernoUSA.gov. We have a whole family of consumer websites that we manage -- mymoney.gov, consumidor.gov, consumeraction.gov. We're the ones who create the Consumer Action Handbook, so that when consumers want to find things about different products, that this gives them a place to go. So, that's on the Internet side.

We've also gotten heavily involved in the "new media" area. So when we are getting information out, we've come to the conclusion that it doesn't really matter how; we're not trying to get people just to come to our website; we are trying to get the information to the people who need the information. Even if that means that we send it out through intermediaries. We started developing like, syndicating content, and creating widgets, and pushing those out to other areas. So we are really more about getting that information out. Our office is very unique in that by bringing all of these different channels together to serve the public, we are able to, in almost every national emergency or situation we have been involved -- provide information to the public. Whether it's the bombing in Mumbai, whether it's London bombings, tsunamis. The VA laptop, when that was stolen we put a contact center in place for VA. Wildfires, you name it, we usually have some role in getting the information out. So, just to give you an example of how this works together, we do our direct service through these sites, but also -- our job is to help other agencies improve their information, and the way that they deliver service to the consumer, or the public. So, we do things like, we have a contract in place for contact center services. So agencies use our contract to set up a

contact center. We really leverage networks across the government. One of our largest networks is the web managers. And so we run a council of 1,500 web managers. That's basically enabled through a new Facebook-like product called, Your Membership. But that's how they share information across these 1,500 web managers. If they have a question, you know, they go on the site and are able to get information from other people in the same situation that they're in. We run an annual conference where we bring them together -- this year it was like a revolution -- it was like standing room only. You would've thought that we were selling something there, or giving something away. It was amazing to see 500 web managers in one room, with the passion that they have for what they want to get done. So we bring all of them together, and that's a very mature network, from our standpoint. We recently brought together contact center leaders from across the government. And we're creating a citizens services council of people at a senior level within an agency, so that we can start looking across the whole government, and how do you measure the services that you're delivering to the public. We run Web Manager University, so we do absolutely low cost training that agencies -- there's webinars and there's in-classroom training. They range from \$30 to about \$200 for a day or two training. This covers our costs, with a little bit of overhead so that we can put on our annual one-day conference, or two-day conference, for the web managers. We're an appropriated organization, so we're not trying to make money. We don't put overhead on anything that we do. So this is a perfect opportunity and right in line with the mission that we do. We also do a lot with sharing best practices. A website that you may be familiar with, webcontent.gov, gives you a lot of information. What policies and procedures do you need to look at? What's a checklist of things you should look at? How do you optimize your site for search engines? What is the process

that you go through for knowing your customer? So there is a lot of best practices on that website. And then in the new media area, this is really one of our growing areas in terms of best practices, and creating public dialogues on what are the best ways to do it. We are in the process of creating a platform where all agencies will be able to use a set of common tools to run different kinds of citizens engagement opportunities, and dialogues. We've also negotiated terms of service agreements with about 25 providers so that your General Counsel doesn't have to start from scratch. If you want to do an agreement, a terms of service agreement, for Facebook or YouTube, you can go on webcontent.gov, and pull down the terms of service agreement that we did for GSA, and that can be used as the template that you use to negotiate with them. Because the providers didn't want to negotiate separate agreements with all agencies that we've gone through and negotiated, and we brought other agencies, General Counsels in when we did that, so that they're, I would say they're not going to be 100% all of the time, but they're probably going to be 90 or 95%, because we've had multiple agencies involved in that. We're also -- our website, citizenservices.gov, actually in the process of re-designing ourselves, is where all of the information that's available for other agencies to use, in this space, in the citizens services space. We're doing research around what citizens want from government, how they want it from government, and that will be located there. So that kind of gives you a perspective of how, we provide direct service. But we're also in the business of helping other agencies. And when you have a national disaster like Katrina, what we did was we hold -- we got the information, "What is a citizen asking on the phone?" and we fed that into the Web Managers Council, and the web managers across different agencies, and then they created lanes, so that we made sure to insure which content went on which websites around the government. There

were daily calls to make sure that we were feeding in what the citizens were asking, and so we could make it available online. So that's sort of a little bit of history and background about what we do. I have some you know, basic, best practices that I would share with you -- that we've learned. You know, every agency goes through its own struggles, and its own decisions as you deal with websites, and we're at a pivotal point with USA.gov where we're starting to look at what is the future of a websites. Is it more user generated content? Right now, it's a portal that links to all other agencies. We do a lot of day-to-day maintenance and management of that, making sure we don't have broken links, and all the day-to-day stuff. But just strategically, what will websites look like in the next couple of years? I think it's really important. The first thing I would say is, to know your customer. You know, we have a customer, whether it's USA.gov, or Gobierno, they're both two different customer bases. You've got the public and the citizens on one side, and then you've got mostly the Spanish speaking population, which there's about 30 million that speak Spanish in their home, as a part of the other -- the customer of the GobiernoUSA.gov. We've got web managers that are the customers of webcontent.gov. And we've got the agencies that are the customers of citizenservices.gov. So, understanding and knowing the customer and what it is that they want is really one of the most critical things. I mean if you think about any product that any organization is creating, knowing those expectations is probably the most important thing. Also knowing what are the top things that your customer comes to your website for. We're very big in our office about pushing top tasks. So, you know, many agencies have websites where it's the secretary of whatever's picture on the front page with a message from them. That's not why people are coming to that website, for the most part, they have certain business functions and reasons that they're coming to your agency to conduct, and being able

to put those things on the front page, and they're easily found and accessible and easy to understand, it's very simple to make that happen, it's just knowing what those are.

The next thing I would talk about is providing mechanisms for two-way dialogues. You know, whether it's just to contact us, whether there's ways for people to give feedback. The new media stuff is really opening that world up, but being able to get ongoing feedback, we actually do web chat through our contact center; so from USA.gov you can enter into a web chat that's answered by our contact center. So, that's another way that we actually do that. And Lisa mentioned some of the policies, I mean, there's a lot of policies around, you know, accessibility, security, privacy, what kind of information is available through your site, and making sure that all those things are protected, because the citizen does have high expectations of the government and how we protect their personal information. The big thing that people really think about is just the content, and I mentioned top tasks, we know that about 50% of the people search, and about 50% navigate, although, I think search is becoming more and more popular over time. So, how do you create a robust search capability so that your information is transparent, the data is accessible, it's structured in a way that search engines can find it, that you have site maps, so that search engines can find that as well? Making sure that your information is accessible. One of the things we push -- best practice, is plain language. What level are you writing for? We have the problem in GSA where we do fleet management. Not many people know what fleet management is, and many think it's around cars. People think it's aircraft. We've fought with our own GSA.gov people about how do you put the information on GSA.gov so that the average citizen understands it that when you talk about fleet, you're really talking about cars? Then you get into, is it cars or automobiles? So, you know, figuring out the way to write this so that it's

understood by the most people. The other thing -- don't duplicate existing information. If you need to, link to other sites. One of our next steps is, how do we pull information from a lot of other agency sites, mash it up together and present a different picture to the citizens so that the value that we add could be around automobiles? And bringing information in on fuel safety, our fuel economy, and the safety ratings and pulling all of that together and presenting it. Or if we have a national disaster, we will pull together information from federal, state, and local governments about resources that are available to the citizens and pull it together so it's easy for the citizens to find information. Clearly displaying your agency's name, you know, making sure that that's done, your URL. And the other, by URL, I meant, exactly what the name is as I mentioned before with USA.gov. Another thing we push is usability testing, when we last redesigned USA.gov, we did three rounds of usability testing. We tested the existing design. We did a preliminary design, and did usability testing, and then we tested the final design to make sure, is the search box long enough and is it in the center of the page versus on the edge of the page? So those rounds of usability testing, while it drags out the schedule a little, and it can be a little more expensive -- we found to be very worth the time and effort that we went into. There are classes at the Web Manager University on usability testing. We have a lot of expertise internally, on usability testing.

I mentioned search engine optimization. The other thing your continual assessment of the content that you have, and going into the commercial search engines and finding out what are people searching for, to make sure that you're constantly updating you site with the information that the public is looking for, and keeping the content current. So all of those things are around -- just around your content.

The next thing is around the use of new media. We do a lot of that. For the inauguration, what we did was we got

press passes, we put people on the ground, and we actually gave the public a bird's eye view of being at a lot of the inaugural events. They did Twitter feeds.

We updated the Facebook page. So the whole time, all of that was being fed into a blog that we have, called gov.gab.gov, and that's basically a daily entry of everyday life situations. The public doesn't quite understand all of the government information that affects them everyday. But it could be a story about it's Fall and you want to take a trip to the country and you want to get apples. I mean, it could be around -- farmer's markets that are listed by government agencies, and USDA, organic foods, I mean food pyramid, nutrition, all of this is government information that we kind of integrated into a blog entry that we put out everyday, and that's gov.gab.gov. So we've implemented RSS feeds, e-mail alerts, widgets and gadgets, you can see a library of all the government podcasts from USA.gov. And then the stuff that we did with the inauguration -- we also did a photo gallery, during the 4th of July, where people submitted their photos, and we had, kind of, the Americana slideshow of photos, which went on Flickr, but was accessible through USA.gov for a week or two around the 4th of July. So, some of that is around just making it a little bit fun, and engaging the public. There's a line for me around two much of the marketing and fluff piece and not enough about the actual business of the agency. But some of it is really good to drive traffic and get people so that they actually know your website. We have a USA.gov, and GobiernoUSA.gov Facebook page, that you can become a fan of. And we do daily feeds, so that it gets the information out to the different demographic of people that are using Facebook.

Lastly, I'll talk a little bit about the infrastructure. I said we moved to the Cloud. I mean, really you're looking for a secure scalable, flexible and robust infrastructure. We saved about 90% of our infrastructure costs by moving from our old architecture into the Cloud infrastructure. We're still in the process

of getting our staff up to speed in terms of being able to manage the site from an infrastructure standpoint themselves. But we've been sidetracked with a lot of new administration priorities, so that's been part of the holdup. We have run the gambit in terms of providing information to the public. So, we have a great job, and I always say, "To get up everyday and to know that you can change the lives of the American public is a pretty good way to go."

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

Thank you very much. That was great. We appreciate it very much. Are there any Commissioners that have questions at this point, on any particular subject?

I did have a couple of questions for Ms. Byrd, and I was interested in the budgeting issues. We don't have a budget, per se, for our website, but maybe any of you could answer that. But do most of you have a separate website budget or do you share it? I know there was one comment that some people don't have evaluations in their job description on how their performing in terms of the website, which is probably so, and we are, you know, beginning in an area where we need to maybe consider more technical approaches and better organizational structure. So I'm just wondering if you're budgeting and that kind of thing.

MS. BYRD: I can speak to the budget. At the EPA, we estimate that we spend around \$8 to \$12 million on the web, and that's pretty much distributed across all program offices and regions. The Office of Environmental Information does pay for the infrastructure for the Agency, and they pay the hosting cost for the Agency. I am responsible for the E-300, the capital investment that you have to submit to Office of Management and Budget, for that particular aspect of the web. And I would say my budget is about \$5 million for the infrastructure. Some of the hosting -- we pay for comments that come into the web to be answered, frequently asked questions, we pay for web analytics program so that we can look to see what people are asking for, and whether they were able to find it and

to use that to continue to improve our site.

I'm trying to think of some of the other things. We pay for, basically, the EPA.gov, the homepage, and the top 200 pages of the website. And the web content management system that we are getting, that we're migrating to, we are paying for that. So, our office pays for a considerable amount of the funding, but it is distributed across the Agency, because every office has somebody that actually posts information to the web. They may do it themselves, they may have a contractor. And to address the issue that Lisa brought up, which is really an important comment about the fact that it is collateral, right now, for people to work on the website, and what we're recognizing is that we really need professional web people. We need people that this is their job, and this is their only job, so that they do have the time and the training and the skills to do the good editorial, the content, plus we need professional designers on the infrastructure side. So, this is something that we would like to see in our Agency. We are not there yet, but we would really like to see that.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

(Indicating yes.) Any other comments? Commissioner Hunter.

COMMISSIONER HUNTER:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a quick question for Ms. Dorris. You mentioned that you have some contracts available for other government agencies to take a look at. Is there something like that for, just very basic information about how to build a web page that is most conducive for public use, sort of like building a web page 101, making it searchable, and that sort of thing?

MS. DORRIS: On webcontent.gov there is a lot of information available. I don't have any contracts that are -- that are in place or used by other agencies on the web side. The big one we have is for the contact center solutions. But I could give you the names of companies that we've used to help do that.

The question is -- the Chairman's question about the budget. We have in our office for USA.gov, we have an infrastructure budget and then the content side is in a different office, all under my office, and I don't remember the exact number, but we probably spend close to \$15 million a year on the infrastructure part of USA.gov and Gobierno, and web content because you've got all the security features, you've got the content management system. There are a lot of contractors in place that help us. And we have been doing a lot with contractor support, to migrate to the Cloud. The other thing brought up in the issue, is, you know, how many government people do you need, versus how many contractor people? When you need graphic designers, sometimes you only need people for a very short period of time, and we found that if we had companies in place, that had a variety of different kinds of resources on it, then we can get them to come in for short periods of time and provide the support that we need, when we need it.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: I think we do that too.

Ms. Welchman.

MS. WELCHMAN: Yes, I'd just like to address the budget issue as well, and talk about what I've seen across the federal sector. And Jonda and Martha are both rare in that they can actually express their web budget. Most organizations, that's usually one of the first questions I ask them, because it's an indicator, it's like "How much do you spend managing your website?" and you sort of get a deer in the headlights look. Or you get a number that's all about the marketing communications side, or all about the apps development side. So that rift that you see, between those two organizations. There's a lot of applications and development that gets embedded in IT, that sometimes people don't express in the web budget, but it's actually the development of web applications. There's a lot that comes out of that disconnection, so I would probably offer that most organizations really don't know

how much money they spend on the web, because they don't understand the FTEs that are supporting the web, because that's scattered, and it's collateral duty. Their budgeting structures don't take into account that integration that is actually really happening.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: I asked the question for the same reason, because for me it would be a deer in the headlights reaction too.

(Laughter)

So it's a nice description.

MS. DORRIS: I should probably amend my estimate, because it did not account for all the applications, the IT applications. But it does account for the pages that those applications eventually -- the interface to the public.

MS. WELCHMAN: It's possible we don't want to have the big number because it's very expensive, when you add it all up.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: I have a question. I know that some people here, and I'm sure Alec will understand, but what do you mean by "Cloud?"

MS. DORRIS: Cloud is basically the Internet.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: I see Mr. Biersack smiling, so I'm sure everybody else knows.

MS. DORRIS: So for example, in a client server environment, you have one server, and it has one application; you have another server and it has another application. In the virtual environment, you can take one server and put multiple applications on it. So, when you read a lot about going from one environment to a virtual environment -- and the savings that you're getting -- mostly you're getting a lot of savings out of the reduction of the footprint from all your servers. It also allows you to have different applications that run different versions of things there's a way to partition off the servers in a different way than in the old environment. So, when you move from that to the Cloud, it's more like, it's a virtual environment, and there's different kinds of Clouds. There's a public cloud, a

private cloud. A public cloud is basically the Internet, I mean, everything is out there, it is open. We went to a private cloud, which means you can secure it a little bit easier. Right now GSA's in a process of creating a storefront for agencies to go on and actually buy services in the Cloud through the storefront where it's already secured on the backend and provisioned by just using a credit card, or a requisition number. But it's just a newer technology that allows you to reduce the footprint.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: I sort of see. I'm going to ask Mr. Palmer if we've got any questions as we go along, please feel free to ask any as we go along too.

Mr. Vice Chairman.

VICE CHAIRMAN

PETERSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm most interested in the comments that we've heard regarding knowing your customer. Obviously investing money into your web presence can be very expensive, as you pointed out, so trying to get the most bang for your buck is vital. And trying to find out what value you can give to your customers, is obviously of paramount importance. So I was very interested to hear what Ms. Dorris had to say about some of the ways in which, through some of the feedback mechanisms, from your customers that -- you were able to find out what it was that they wanted. And I was wondering if you could give us a few more details, and maybe a few more examples of how an organization can better develop ways of understanding what it is that their customer wants so that that sort of content can be provided to them. And also I would be interested, if Ms. Byrd, or Ms. Welchman had some ideas on this whole idea of getting to know your customer better, so that we can provide the services that they most demand.

MS. DORRIS: Well, you have a whole range of ways that you can engage with your customer. One would be, some of the new public dialogue kind of tools like the open government initiative, where they put out a question -- or the

recovery.gov initiative, where you put out a question -- "What tools, ideas, and processes do you have that would help the government make the information more transparent?" These tools allow the public, or if you target it to your customer -- to provide comments, and it provides other people the ability to comment on those comments. It allows you to tag those comments, and sort of bucket them in like buckets so that you don't have to sift through millions of comments. And then it allows them to rate and rank them, so that you can come out with a "top ten" of issues, that people might be interested in. So, that's one area. If you come out with your top three issues you may want to use another kind of tool, or the same one, to get more information on that specific topic that they've brought up. It's as easy as putting something on the website that just says, you know, "If you have comments on the website, send it to" an e-mail address. Usability testing is fascinating. You sit your customers in a room, and there's cameras on each computer, and they're given scenarios, and then they look for the information that you've asked them to, and they kind of talk through it. As they're looking for it, you can see, "Well, they don't know that you get a passport from the Department of State, or they don't know that their drivers license is a State -- a State government feature or service." It's not from the Federal Government. Oh my God, we ask them to find their drivers license and everybody went to the Department of Transportation. All of those things you kind of watch, or they say, "Oh, this search box isn't long enough. I can't get my information in it." So that gets you down into the nitty-gritty of the actual design of your website. We're looking at: Does the public want to get information on the phone? Do they prefer to do it via the web? How does the public feel about the use of social media? We've done it specific to our website and now we're looking at it from a government-wide perspective on how to gauge what the citizens want.

Just reviewing what people

search on when they come to your site, or what they search on. It's fairly easy to go into even some of the tools that Google offers, or go into their site, and start searching and the top search terms come up so you can see, what they're currently contacting -- and then doing some customer satisfaction, and measuring their satisfaction with what you currently provide. To me that would be kind of the gambit of things that you could use to kind of get a feel for what your customers want.

MS. BYRD: We use a number of tools too. I agree there's a range, everything from having a focus group to listening sessions.

I'm going to talk a little bit about our web analytics program that we have established, and then talk about an initiative that we did, very quickly. We used the American Customer Satisfaction Index. A lot of other government agencies do use this. It's a survey on customer satisfaction. In the last 18 months we've had 34,000 people take this survey. We get about 2,000 people a month that actually provide us comments, and we have a clustering tool that we can take and apply that tool onto these comments. So if we're interested in a particular hot topic, we can go in and look at the comments that we received, apply that clustering tool on the comments, and then come up with all of the comments just on that. And then we can also see the questions that they answered, and how they rated us on the different questions within the survey. It's a very powerful tool. And it's basically opinions.

It's basically getting opinions from people. And you also have the ability to come up with open-ended questions that you want to ask them, and we're in the process of revising some of those. We also have a tool that helps us with the traffic. Where do they come from? Where do they go? We don't have the ability to actually follow their path because we don't have persistent cookies, but we are able to see the traffic for the various websites and pages, so that helps us. So looking at those things together

really gives you a picture.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

Do you ever look to how people get to you?

MS. BYRD: Yes, we do. We look at the refers, like you know: how many came from Google? How many came from inside EPA -- which is a lot of them. How many came from other government agencies? But we do know the refers of the site, so how they came to us. We also--

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: We learned to our surprise that most of the people that come to us don't come to us through our website.

MS. BYRD: Yes, we do know that. Don't we?

MS. WELCHMAN: That's true for commercial sites too.

MS. BYRD: Most of the people come to us from Google. And they don't come through EPA.gov; they go straight into a page that they found on Google. So that's how they come to us. We also have this other thing that we do -- it's something called "crazy egg," -- where we put the heat map on a page, and we can see how many clicks different items on the page get, so that we can see what is being looked at and what is not. And that's been very valuable, and it also gives us referring information. We review search logs all of the time. We have monthly reports that gives us the top ten search phrases or terms, and they are pretty consistent. And we also look at trends and see over a period of years how we're trending. In 2008 we established a national dialogue with the public, and with stakeholders, other government agencies, to talk about information access, and how we can improve information access. We've got valuable input. We did just something very simple by having a comments database where people could go in. We did blogs. We did jam sessions where we did blogs, where we said, "Okay, we're blogging right now; we'll answer your question if you submit something, right now." So, those were very valuable. We also had listening sessions. And from that we came up with

an access strategy, and our goals, and what are important.

Our goals are similar to GSA. It's to be able to find accurate timely information. People also wanted more information on data. And so we have developed a data finder. They also wanted more raw data published, so we're looking at that. They were still very interested in making sure we met the digital divide, making sure that people that didn't have web access, had access to information. And they also wanted to connect better to the EPA. So, in that they really wanted to be able to talk to an expert. They didn't want to have to go through some of these other forums. The other thing -- every web page has to have a "contact us" button, so that they have to take comments. Many of us use a system called an "enterprise customer service solution," where you can go in and actually put a comment in, ask a question, but it also gives you frequently asked questions that have already been addressed. And so that you can go in and search that by topic and often times your question has already been answered. That has really reduced our labor in answering questions by deploying that.

MS. WELCHMAN: I'll just say briefly -- because these two set me up perfectly -- when I think about measuring effectiveness, in a web presence, it is three pieces, one of which is usability, which Martha talked about extensively, the other one is analytics, the actual behavior of what's going on. But I would just say as a caveat, I believe that it's important to pay attention to what the public's asking for, and what they're demanding. But it's also important to have another bookend on the side of that bookshelf, which is: "What are you trying to do, and what is your mission?" Because a lot of times people will define success as, "We had a lot of hits." Or "they really liked it." Or "We got a lot of comments." But were you actually able to translate that? So really understanding what your performance indicators are. What are you trying to do, and when do you know when you're going to succeed will keep you

from pushing, and pushing technology, and all sorts of things, kind of willy-nilly.

It's a challenge, because I'm trying to write a paper on what are web performance indicators, and it's not as simple as I thought it was going to be. I thought it was going to be really simple. But figuring out what those are, and I think the manifestation of that will be different for every organization, but I think it's really important for you to know what success looks like, so you know when you've gotten there. Otherwise, you'll just kind of be like the last 15 years, all over again, where everybody's doing everything, and not really knowing if you're getting anything done.

MS BYRD: I'm going to tie one thing together; well, it's a lot of pieces. But we created something called the Innovations Council. And what was happening was -- I'd see some cool idea, and our content team would see some cool idea, and somebody else would, and we were constantly going to our infrastructure guys and saying, you know, we want this, we want this, we want this, and there was no way for them to prioritize what they needed to do. So we created the Innovations Council so that ideas can be brought to the group. We can decide at that point. Is it worth any of our resources to go forward with that idea, or not? It ties a bunch of this together: "What are you trying to achieve? How does it affect our measures?" because we were PARED about three years ago. We do measure touch points, we measure cost per touch point. We measured the customer satisfaction index, so that when somebody wants to do something, and they have no information about, is it going to increase our touch points, or how does it affect our measures. Some things are good government. Some things are -- we're piloting something, we want to test it and see what it's like. But this allows a group of people across our whole office to say, yes or no, and all agree that that's a priority, so that if that's a priority, by the group, this other thing is not a priority, and we all have agreed to it, together. Because, that whole content infrastructure

flair ups all the time. That was one of the ways that we've worked together. And it just proceeds through some gateways on the progress of the programs and the projects, even features that we're in the middle of doing a content management migration, and somebody wants to do a photo contest. Well, what is more important? So we bring it to that Innovations Council.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

Commissioner Bauerly.

COMMISSIONER BAUERLY:

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Thank you for sharing your expertise with us, particularly Ms. Byrd and Ms. Dorris, with respect to your experience in significantly larger agencies, but I think we have a lot to learn. And scalability, I guess, is key. Can we bring things down to our level? You know, a 46 person council is not something that we may see, but I actually think that the idea of putting together, in a formal and structured way, the content, and the IT people. Something that I think is happening across our agency on a daily, hourly basis. That consultation and communication is happening, but I think the structure that you described in the Web Council and Ms. Dorris, and the Innovation Council, that you just described, I think would be very helpful for how we move all of this forward. Our IT folks, and our communications folks, you know, do this on a daily basis, on lots of projects and plans. I think that maybe adding that layer of structure and governance that you've been talking about Ms. Welchman, would be very helpful. I also, I guess I don't really have a comment. I just really wanted to thank you and make one note. I really appreciate your final point, Ms. Welchman, that we probably have lots of really good ideas within our Agency, and I think bringing some structure to this process, and I think these hearings are a good way to start that. To bring some structure to this and create a formalized mechanism, or where that input and feedback, and the idea generation can be fully integrated into what we're doing. I know we've got some great professionals

on this already. I think based on what we heard in the last session on this hearing, people have appreciated the improvements that we've made, and I think everyone is interested in doing more. So I look forward to moving forward, and I appreciate your thoughts on how to help us structure that. Thank you.

MS. WELCHMAN: You're welcome.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

Thank you. I certainly echo that. I know all of us do. We have about five minutes left. Are there any other questions that Commissioners may want to ask? Mr. Palmer.

MR. PALMER: Thank you Mr. Chairman. I just had a couple of quick questions. The first one is for Ms. Byrd; and again, thank you for all of you being here today. Can you briefly share with us, on your web content management system, if you could, some of the methodology, the process that you went through, in making that selection, and if possible share with us, maybe not so much the pain of that process, but the success of that process, and could you even share with us what your selection was, and why, if that's possible?

MS. BYRD: This is really interesting and Lisa's laughing because she knows the process that we went through for this. And it was not a good one.

When you select a platform, typically you go out and you do systems requirements. You listen to the people who are going to need the system, and use the system, and put in the requirements, and you do an analysis and an evaluation and an assessment and then you bring in the products and you maybe test drive them. We did none of that. Our Agency had done that for a document content management system. The document management system that they selected had a web content management component. So at the same time that this other group within the Office of Environmental Information was beginning to develop their content -- enterprise content

management system to address a lot of the docket, records management issues, we put in a proposal for a web content management system. And it was decided at the highest level, within our organization, that we would combine our proposal. We would have one system, and that's how we got the system that we have. Now, that has been an issue, and I don't recommend you do it that way. And we have made the platform work, we went into it with, "We're going to test this to see if it will work," not "We're going to hope this fails." But you know, we really had to go into it with an attitude that we're going to make this work, and so it is Documentum. Fortunately Documentum has upgraded the system, and with the latest service pack, we have gotten improved functionality. We have also worked with some smaller vendors that have had to deal with the difficult interface, and had already developed a good product that we could then adopt. So, not quite the process that we should have done, but we are where we are.

VICE CHAIRMAN

PETERSEN: Thank you for your advice. My second and last question is for Ms. Dorris. You talked a bit about the cloud process, and I just want to validate, did you go through a virtualization process first, before you moved to the cloud, or did you just make the leap?

MS. DORRIS: We actually went out for a virtual, with a virtual requirement, and they bid a cloud environment. So we did not, we did it all at one time.

VICE CHAIRMAN

PETERSEN: And you mentioned it's a private cloud?

MS. DORRIS: (Indicating yes.)

VICE CHAIRMAN

PETERSEN: Who was that with?

MS. DORRIS: Terremark.

VICE CHAIRMAN

PETERSEN: Okay. Now, did you have any hurdles to overcome with your security officers and your privacy people in order to do that, and how did you do that?

MS. DORRIS: Because it's a

private cloud it has been tested to the NSA level. So security-wise, we're in good shape with where we are. The problem is, you hear about the server huggers. That's a true issue. People like to have servers. The technologists like to have them in their office, under their desk, at their house, whatever. They don't like to give up that kind of control, so we went through a lot of steps to try to get them more comfortable with going into a virtual environment; brought other agencies in that had already done it. We went through a long process, and we're 90% there, but they're still having shakes from giving up their servers. The content management question; we had a hellish process, years ago, and we just picked a new content management system, and part of the problem that we had with the first one was it was highly customized. And so it took us years and years to get the content management system in. The process -- and I can share that with you -- we have a documented way we started with like 100. We looked at the requirements, we wanted to be as off the shelf as possible, and the way that it was downscaled, and then we went through some onsite testing, I forget how they did it, and then picked one and went out and used -- one of the resellers in order to buy that. And we bought percussion, and it looks like it's going to be implemented in about three months time, which is amazing in comparison to the process that we went through before. So I'd be glad to share all that work with you because they did a really nice job on going through, at least the selection process. We're not migrated yet, but --

MR. PALMER: Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: Any other questions? Ms. Duncan, General Counsel.

MS. DUNCAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to thank the panel as well. I think you've provided us with a great deal of helpful and importantly practical information. So, thank you, very much. I was very intrigued by the discussion of a web governance model

and that notion as it might apply here at the Commission. And in particular, very interested in Ms. Byrd's description of the Web Council. One thing that I wondered, a question that I had is about the decision-making model on that Web Council. Because I could imagine that, that structure is helpful, but it might present its own challenges. Is it consensus decision making? Is there a hierarchy? How do you manage that process?

MS. BYRD: It is consensus.

And one of the things, when I said we need to go back and review the charge memos, we've done that this year. We've also looked at the Charter again this year, to see what we really were charged with, and it actually, in the memo, did say a consensus body. We have evolved to sort of an informal voting but if somebody does vote "no" -- because we've gone to a webinar, we've gone into a webinar that actually, you can vote online, and then we know -- but if somebody votes "no" then we go back, and we talk to them, and see if they can live with it. So, sometimes sit in a room and say, "Okay, not everybody's really on board, but can you live with it?" and we go forward. So it's not maybe. That's not easy either, with 46 people, but we have been able to make some good decisions.

MS. WELCHMAN: I'll just say briefly, just because we structure a lot of these models. There's a lot of different ways that you can do it and it's very specific to the organization. It has a lot to do with the culture, and how you make other decisions. So frequently it's good to look at how you make other decisions, because that one is probably going down a little easier, unless it really doesn't make a lot of sense. We've seen lots of different styles. Obviously the EPA style is challenging, with that size, and it can be very, very slow, and there's a lot of investment that people have to make in moving people's positions. We've also seen the very serious -- there's a lot of input, there's cross-functional, cross-team input -- in the various standards, making our policy-making bodies. Then there's one individual who has the final say so in

terms of making the decision. And that works in a command and control environment, right? Where you can do that sort of thing. And then most people end in-between somewhere. We've had models where there are various -- particularly at the standards creation level, where there's cross-functional input, and I can't stress that, that's really important. That keeps people from being upset when you make the decision. Right? You get cross-functional input from people, and then there's a team of four, one very technical, one very editorial, one who's applications and infrastructure tooling oriented, and one who's, like, business process oriented. There's a team of four and they as a group make the decision on what the various standards are. So there's a lot of creative ways that you can do it. But I would just stress, it's got to be clear, otherwise you'll just keep making this choice over, and over again every time you have to do something.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

That's very valuable advice. We do have to close now.

I thank you, again, on behalf of all of us. We appreciate very much that you took the time to come here and help us out with our own development in terms of beginning to look at new ways to govern ourselves in this process. Your wisdom and your experience has been very helpful. And I know it will probably save us a lot of time and energy and improve our efficiency. Again, thank you very much on behalf of all of us. It was very helpful. Take care.

MS. DORRIS: Thank you.

MS. WELCHMAN: Thank you.

MS. BYRD: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

We'll adjourn for a few minutes, and take up panel number two.

(Break)

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: In our panel of our hearing today, which began this morning, is an open session on how to improve our website and our communications through the Internet. We

just completed our first panel and are about to begin with our second.

I want to thank each of the panellists for being here today.

First, I'd like to introduce Mr. Baran. Mr. Baran was named by *Washingtonian* magazine as the "Top Campaign & Elections Lawyer" and one of the "Top 50 Lawyers" in Washington, DC. He advises clients on all aspects of political law including federal, state and local campaign finance laws, government ethics requirements and lobbying laws. He has argued four cases before the United States Supreme Court and has regularly appeared as a television and radio commentator, particularly with FOX News and NPR. During the 2000 Florida recount he served as a legal analyst for ABC News and abcnews.com. He is the author of the book, *The Election Law Primer for Corporations*, published by the American Bar Association. Recognizing Mr. Baran among the top tier of practitioners in his field, *Chambers USA* recently called him "one of the best election lawyers in the United States with the most comprehensive knowledge of the law at both state and federal levels."

Mr. Baran, I know you can live up to this today.

MR. BARAN: I wish you'd warned me.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

Next, let me introduce Sheila Krumholz, who is the Center for Responsive Politics' Executive Director, serving as the organization's chief administrator, the liaison to its Board and major funders and its primary spokesperson. Sheila became Executive Director in December 2006, having served for eight years as CRP's Research Director, supervising data analysis for OpenSecrets.org and CRP's clients. She first joined the CRP staff in 1989 and was Assistant Editor of the very first edition of *Open Secrets*, the Center's flagship publication. Sheila has a degree in International Relations and Political Science from the University of Minnesota.

We also have with us our own staff member, Mr. Bob Biersack, who's Special Assistant to the Staff Director for

Data Integration. He has served as our Press Officer and also as our Commission Statistician.

Mr. Biersack has compiled recommendations to date with how we can improve our website and has provided us with a computer printout showing that we have 251 recommendations before we even started today. So the work has been a tremendous compilation of the suggestions we've had to date. And now we need to figure out how to take those into consideration and maximize how to improve them. I'd like to begin with Miss Krumholz. Welcome.

MS. KRUMHOLZ:

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Thanks to the Commission for the invitation to speak at today's hearing and seeking public input in order to effectively update the fec.gov website for the greatest good. The Center for Responsive Politics' is a non-partisan, non-profit research organization that tracks money in U.S. politics, and its effect on elections and public policy. As such, the FEC's primary place among the sources and resources that we rely on cannot be overstated; in fact, campaign finance research has always been the core component of our work. Beginning in September 1983, when we published our first monograph on campaign spending, CRP's mission remains to inform citizens about how money in politics affects their lives, empower voters and activists by providing unbiased information and advocate for a transparent and responsive government. We pursue our mission largely through our website, opensecrets.org, offering a free and comprehensive resource for industry, coded and standardized campaign contributions, lobbying data and other kinds of money in politics research and analysis. Although we are best known for the value we add to the campaign contribution data, CRP does also advocate, on behalf of effective disclosure policies. I've previously testified before Congress in support of increased disclosure in Presidential Libraries. Earlier this year we responded to the Commission's request for public comment

on the agencies management of FEC data and disclosure, and we support electronic filing by Senate committees and other common sense disclosure measures like the Sunlight Foundation's "Read the Bill" campaign.

In my comments today I want to emphasize some key points made in the Center's written comments.

First, about the retail function of the FEC website, there should be no doubt about the need for the FEC to design its site to principally serve the public, particularly in the realm of campaign finance disclosure. The FEC is a trusted resource for voters and the fec.gov site should be a useful resource too. As professor Malban testified, the public's need must be at the forefront of all portions of a website redesign aimed at disclosure. There is no other existing entity that serves in this role in the same way the FEC can. CRP's site, opensecrets.org, and others may provide some of the same core data and search functions as the FEC's site and may be able to do so in a more friendly -- user-friendly format. Such sites provide more avenues for the public to find this information, providing easy access to reliable data and enabling others to create new tools and sites based on the FEC data should certainly be a goal in this process.

But non-profits are dependent on the varying degrees of fund-raising and even though CRP plans to stick around for another 26 years, what's funded today isn't necessarily going to be funded tomorrow. The same can and has been said of journalistic enterprises and for profit firms may choose to put public data behind a paid subscription firewall. Private entities may one day stop providing a certain resource and go in a new direction. Furthermore, they may not espouse or even wish to espouse the necessary non-partisan stance to inspire confidence as a reliable resource for all Americans. While we at CRP have invested much care in our reputation for non-partisan accurate data and analysis, the same cannot be said of all organizations that might wish to act as

private outlets for government data. In sum, providing meaningful access to public data, searchable, sortable and downloadable is an inherently government function which, regardless of other options available, the FEC should provide.

Second, we realize that the wholesale function that is FEC's role, providing the data, architecture, and protecting the integrity of the data itself, may be a lesser focus of this initiative. Nevertheless, it's one key thing that comes to mind when asked to consider recommendations for improving the FEC's disclosure function. CPR is clearly not alone in that regard. Others have also testified to their concerns about data integrity and validation rules. In fact, on Monday, when we posted a blog item asking our readers how the FEC could improve the website, within minutes we received the following recommendation from a random reader: The FEC must stop letting candidates report information however they want to, there needs to be better standard information on the website. Another comment followed that about adding functionality so there's clearly interest out there. It goes beyond, I think, the kind of usual suspects including CRP. And ultimately data quality going in has big implications for ease and flexibility of data presentation on fec.gov. The main wholesale or core data issues raised in the Center's written comments have to do with common errors in the data and the FEC's difficulty with resolving them in an efficient and timely manner. For instance, amendments and the inability to match original and amended records that have led to many duplicates existing in data over long periods of time. "Mr. and Mrs. contributions," as referenced in the Federal Register notice of these hearings, the FEC stafftime necessary to split joint contributions reported from married couples delays release of the data and also creates duplicates. Reattribution/re-designation problems and the inconsistent ways that these are reported make accurate processing of contributions

incredibly complex and greatly increase the likelihood of errors. Un-itemized versus itemized contributions are a topic of great interest, and yet, among the public and certainly at CRP, and yet the data is again rife with inconsistency, making comparative analysis difficult at best.

It is our belief and understanding that these problems are largely representative of insufficient data standards or enforcement of those standards in the campaign finance reports filed with the FEC. We recognize that the Commission may be looking for other information, more specific to revising the FEC website. As we said in our comments submitted earlier this year, back in February, offering basic search, basic data, searchable and downloadable through fec.gov's graphic map interface is a terrific way to meet people where they sit, and we hope that that is just the beginning of similar new features to come. Interesting data visualizations, simpler descriptions and the like are all logical elements to incorporate and have been discussed in prior testimony to the Commission. Although CRP staff has not undertaken a recent top to bottom analysis of the FEC's current site we do share similar challenges to the FEC with regard to the very constituencies we serve. Like the FEC CRP's core constituency or mission, is to serve the public, so we are happy to provide feedback about design and navigation as you move forward in your redesign efforts.

Philosophically our over-arching concern would be that the FEC retain the direct public outreach and user-friendly emphasis that you've begun with items like maps. Pod casts, RSS feeds and API's are a logical extension of that.

We would also like to lend support to the idea raised previously that the FEC's site should embrace an interactive dialogue with the public and various FEC constituencies. There are at least a few communities out there that I can think of that would benefit from, appreciate and participate in, dialogue with key members of the FEC staff on a

blog or online groups forum. When CRP launched our Open Secrets Open Data Initiative in April to provide non-commercial access to our value added data, we simultaneously launched a conversation on Google Groups with those who are digging into that data. That conversation has taught us at least as much as we -- about our own data and how others would like to use it as it has facilitated proper interpretation and use of our data by others.

Another means of engaging the public and especially key users of FEC data might be to create a service ticket system for tracking errors and corrections that both the FEC staff and the public can monitor. This too is in comments submitted earlier this year to the Commission. There needs to be a uniform and official method to report errors or suspected errors and to track corrections to the public record on campaign finance disclosure. In any given year CRP reports to the FEC's data systems staff errors that may affect dozens or hundreds or even thousands of records. Some of these corrections are made quickly; most of them are made eventually after some delay for verification. Some are still wrong, months or even years later. There should be a more efficient and effective method to report and track these errors to be certain that they are reviewed and corrected.

In addition, having this tool would engage the consumers of FEC data in the dialogue, academics, researchers, the regulated community, educating these important constituencies, tapping their expertise and getting eyes on the data -- more eyes on the data. I know that such a system would be enormously helpful to our organization and most importantly, to the common goal of providing the public with reliable data. Together offering forums for online dialogue and a place for reporting and tracking resolutions of errors provide concrete ways to bring the public into the process in an ongoing and mutually beneficial way.

I hope my comments, coupled with those submitted last week, are

helpful to the Commission as it undertakes this review. I and all of us, at the Center for Responsive Politics's are happy to provide whatever assistance we can to FEC staff as this important work moves forward. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

Thank you very much. We very much appreciate your being here.

Mr. Baran.

MR. BARAN: Thank you Mr.

Chairman, good morning, I appreciate the invitation to be here with you today and to discuss this subject. As someone who recalls the days when I worked here in 1978 when we first compiled data on information in reports that were filed at the FEC, I can recall those great decisions of how are we going to categorize political action committees and we had connected and non-connected and labor union and corporate and trade association, and then capable staff was able to compile all that data which had to be inputted by vendors into a format that could be released on some sort of a basis, usually annually or at the end of an election cycle.

Now, you know, all of this data is so easily compiled, it's all electronic, it's all on the website and, of course, we didn't have a website in 1978. But it is just remarkable what has happened and I want to just confirm, as a practitioner leading a group of practitioners at our firm, Wiley Rein, LLP, we use your website constantly, everyday, for information about filings, about client questions, about legal resources and we can confirm from our experience that having information like the statutes, like the regulations, your newsletter, advisory opinions, your many helpful basic publications which people can print out and follow as well as your enforcement data and just basic information about your meetings. Although, I do want to say I had trouble finding on your website the details of today's hearing and it just underscores that all that data does need constant updating and that, of course, is a commitment of resources.

I did want to share with the Commission three areas where I think

there can be some improvement or added enhancement and this is based on two things: one is our utilization of your website as practitioners, and secondly, comments that we may have heard from clients.

The first of the three areas is PAC data; Political Action Committee releases of statistical summaries. The Commission, almost on a quarterly basis, releases that type of data with respect to campaigns and with respect to political party data. It does so, on an extremely irregular basis when it comes to Political Action Committees and all of that information, of course, is filed electronically, unlike some campaigns like for the Senate and perhaps some party committees. So it seems to be data that should be amenable to more regular compilation and release because we hear from the PAC community that they would like that information for themselves and I assume that the public would, as well, to know what kind of money is being raised by the top 50 corporate PACs, the top 50 union PACs, and all those various categories. It would be helpful to have that information on a regular release basis, hopefully quarterly and certainly no less frequently than semi-annually.

Secondly, as practitioners we have some comments with respect to the utilization of advisory opinions. First of all, the enhancement of your advisory opinion database has been a dramatic improvement. It's searchability of opinions improved significantly. It's much quicker; obviously, it's much more scalable as well. But there are three aspects of the old advisory opinion database which are no longer present which -- I think if it can be incorporated into your enhanced database -- would be useful to not only practitioners, but perhaps the public as well.

The first is that the old database used to have a section where a user could go to any year and to link to a specific advisory opinion. So if you wanted to search advisory opinions by year it was all on one section of the website and you could just go click on the advisory

opinion that you wanted or if you wanted to search through several opinions issued in a particular calendar year, it was easy to do so. That is no longer possible, not in such an efficient way.

Secondly, it used to be possible to click onto a particular advisory opinion and then copy and paste into an email the link to that particular advisory opinion. So if someone had a question and the user wanted to provide a link to the advisory opinion it was doable under the old system. Under the current system an attorney can still provide the advisory opinion number to the client or whoever's asking the question. Then the client has to go onto your website, get onto your advisory opinion homepage, input the advisory opinion number and then click and then it would get all that information.

This is all there but this type of a copy and paste link would make it much more easy for the users to get right to the information that they want.

Third, with respect to the older advisory opinion database, for those who are advancing in years and wear bifocals, the opinions were in a large print format, which was very nice when it appeared on the screen and it also lended itself to copying the entire advisory opinion, you could do that with your cursor and paste it into an email as well. So that the whole document could be inserted into an e-mail. These are obviously not major issues but they are features in the old system that were used. I can confirm that, in our practice group, we used it quite a bit when it comes to links directly to advisory opinions. We deal with that everyday repeatedly. People have questions and we like to just allow them to go directly to your site and get the opinion.

And then finally, in terms of a suggestion, it would be nice to have more links, particularly with respect to state campaign finance informational websites. I know from talking with Bob Biersack that there are links, but they tend to be buried into another documents, so you would have to pull up all the documents and then go into that particular state. It

should be fairly simple to provide a page which would contain all of the states and then links to the agencies in each state that deal with campaign finance information. I know I do this for findlaw.com with respect to links not only on campaign finance but also on lobbying and ethics rules. This is a feature that's on that website, it's also an appendix in my book, *The Election Law Primer for Corporations*. It basically allows people who are looking for information to have all of that data on one Internet page and to go to exactly the source for that particular information. Obviously your mandate is campaign finance but this principle can be expanded to include information about voting, about voting dates, all of that data is contained in each state's relevant campaign finance and voting and secretary of state websites and links would be useful; and I'm sure it would be used extensively by the public as well as by the regulated community. Of course I recognize that all of that has to be kept up to date, links change constantly I know from my own experience so it is a potential researcher's burden but to the extent that it can be incorporated in your website I think it would be well used by the public.

And those are my suggestions, Mr. Chairman, and thank you again for inviting me here today.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: Thank you very much. That was very interesting. We've got some more questions for you as we go along, I'm sure. Mr. Biersack, would you like to tell us about the 251 recommendations we received to date?

MR. BIERSACK: I thought I'd start reading at the top. (Laughter)

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: That sounds great.

MR. BIERSACK: Thank you Mr. Chairman. What I really wanted to do was to try to summarize, in a sort of overarching sense, what I think we've heard in the last couple of months, which has been enormously useful, I'm sure for you, but also for the staff to get a sense for the different audiences we have and

their perspectives on what we have available, how they use it. We learn something every day from people who use our information in different ways. We used to, I'm old enough to remember the days when we learned that by having phone conversations with people and discussions, and that's kind of still the orientation that I have in my own mind. But it happens now on the web instead and one of the adjustments we have to make is to learn how to use the tools that allows us to have those conversations and that interaction and understand it in that way and we're working toward that. But to give you a sense, we've tried to put them all together to categorize them to some extent and then to give you a sense for where we think we are in terms of how we're thinking about implementing some of them, moving forward on some of them. And to the extent that it's possible to identify ones that are relatively more short-ranged, things that we can do fairly quickly, also things that are going to require some more study, some more understanding, some larger implementations that will take longer. And at the back, the last page in that long compilation of comments is that kind of summary. Where we got some categories and some sense for how the comments broke down. Then I'll talk about some opportunities that I think we have in each one of those categories for moving forward.

We heard a lot about the web content, the way in which navigation works, the presentation of the material in general. A lot of comment focuses on the use of language and the need to use plain English in the way we organize things, in the way we allow for navigation through the site. That's very important. We live in a complex world, this is a difficult subject matter to work through, we all understand that, but we sometimes make it more difficult by creating our own language and it's clear on the site that we've done that. We've taken some steps initially. We've asked people around the building who deal with the public on a regular basis to look at some of this

material, the way it's been organized and the way we describe it now, to make suggestions for what kinds of changes we should make. We'll run those through the normal process of vetting through the staff and then we'll have some changes that we think we can make quite quickly, both to descriptions and also to navigation and descriptions of reports; what they mean, where you are and a particular line number or something like that. To make those kinds of changes to make it more apparent to people what it is we're talking about. There's a lot of discussion in many of the comments about the need to use more than just web pages and static content, but to look at multimedia kinds of approaches to communicating with people and we've taken steps in that direction too. Initially, the fact that we're podcasting even live today on the Internet is one example of that. We've started a YouTube channel for FEC video because we heard, and the people within the staff have argued for some time, that it's very important to be able to present the material to people in a more comprehensive way -- and the video does that -- and that this technology now has evolved to a point where we're able to use it and we're looking forward to I'm sure many exciting programs on the YouTube channel. (Laughter)

And beyond that there's something that's a little longer term but that involves this process is this need for a much more comprehensive search process on the website. We have traditionally built single objects, thinking about one particular problem, whether it be advisory opinions or enforcement or audit reports or disclosure data for campaign finance files. In much too discreet a way, and having thought about how we present this, how we might be able to store and present and query this information more comprehensively, that's going to require a bit more work and it's a larger project to build the infrastructure that will allow us to post just routinely all of the material in almost whatever form we get it.

But there are some things that we're doing in the short run as well that

will help us learn about how best to build that architecture and that infrastructure and we'll move forward on that. As we do, I think we'll also make some changes in the interim in each one of those kind of discreet processes so I hope we'll to address Jan's concerns about advisory opinion links and to get them into emails more easily, to be able to go directly to an advisory opinion, to look at some of the problems that people told us about in the context of the EQS search process, the Enforcement Query System which is apparently much more problematic. These are things we need to understand and we've heard a lot, I myself learned a lot in the last session about those problems and we'll explore those whether there are incremental ways that we can address them.

And that goes to all the kinds of legal research implications as well. It's the same kind of process. We've been incremental and too isolated in the way we've approached things and so if we're able to develop what was talked about this morning, in terms of a more global content management system, that will allow us to take better advantage of all the material we have. We're taking some short term steps in terms of trying to improve the Enforcement process by adding those cases from the very beginning of the Commission's existence.

Some of those old documents, Jan, and I'm sure they'll have your name somewhere, will appear on the web soon.

When you deal with old material like that --

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: We can click on and see Jan Baran -- see all, you know, for the last 35 years -- where he is on every one of them.

MR. BIERSACK: Well, that goes to the nature of the information itself. Some of it's going to be searchable that way. Some of it not so much because of the way it was done -- on a typewriter or mimeograph machine. But yes, it will all be available on the website. That's one of the things we heard last month and it's something that, Mr. Chairman, you've moved forward on aggressively.

Adding Administrative Fine cases to that process as well is something that we're working on now that we'll have soon, the information and data for those and also the documents that go with those cases where we issue quick penalties for late filing and non-filing. There is another example of a short term kind of project that we're involved in now. We'll be able to help incrementally again as we think about trying to build something more broadly for the future. And then of course lots of comments about the nature of the data and the disclosure information, the substance of the reports that get filed with us and how we display that. That's what I thought I was actually going to work on when I asked to take this job in the beginning. It's still the thing that's closest to me but it's a little broader than that, just, correctly a little broader than that and so we're thinking in new ways, but for, example having more flexible formats for providing the information and providing it more quickly and more directly to people. We are just about to launch in the next couple of weeks, I hope, the first template for that kind of process where we'll have files of information available. The first one that we're choosing somewhat arbitrarily comes actually from the new bundling disclosure requirements that we have developed in the last year and so we'll have, for example, lists of all the leadership PACs which have now been identified and members or candidates who sponsor those committees are identified in Statements of Organization. We'll be able to create a list of those committees, along with their sponsors that will be searchable that'll be available in -- you've heard these terms over the last month -- XML and CSV file formats, so that they can be directly computer to computer interaction can get them. You'll be able to register for an RSS feed of those -- information so that you can get it quickly just automatically sent to you when something changes -- and we'll use that as the guiding principle, as the template for filling out most of the information that we currently have available in those old

formats that you kept hearing about, and things like that. We'll change those files over time and make them available in this kind of process as well. Trying to address that concern that we make the information available as quickly as possible and as flexibly as possible so that people can take it and do with it what they will and add value to it as we've seen in many cases, Sheila's perhaps the biggest, clearest example. There are many, many other people taking our information and making good use of it in a variety of ways. We'll also, as part of that, be able to then create these programs that people will be able to automatically register for an update on their own sites. These API's you hear about or widgets that you hear about. Once we've got the data in a format in the structures that lend themselves to that we'll be able to do that fairly quickly and so that will come in short order. Simple examples probably first, the information that you get when you click on a particular campaign coming from the map if you go down to the district level and then look at the set of candidates for that district, that presentation of pie charts for breakdowns of receipts and other financial information for those candidates will be available as an API that people can put on their own machines, or on their own websites, and have readily available for their own purposes; and those kinds of things will happen in the short run as well.

Again, as we build a larger infrastructure, we've been frankly struggling for a number of years to move the basic architecture of the disclosure data to something that's current and as flexible as it can be. And the challenge is that both that the information is amazingly complex as Sheila has alluded to. Also we've had to learn the processes ourselves; we've had to juggle the fact that we have 30 years of information in some cases. Some of it in some form, and some of it in another form, and to try to make sense of that. It's another example, the way we've done disclosure on the website up to now is another example of incremental sort of putting something

together that we thought was well -- good enough, but probably didn't need to be really robust because we'll have, the next big thing will come soon. And soon didn't come very quickly for us in this case; but, we're much closer now. The basic elements are there now, and I'm much more confident about our own capabilities as well. We have staff onboard now that have the skills that we need. We can always use more but we have that basic kernel that I think is necessary to be able to do this.

So I'm optimistic now that we'll be able to move forward quickly. We could move forward a lot more quickly if the Senate would agree to file their reports on time. In ways that I won't go into that you couldn't imagine that has been amazingly frustrating and difficult and complex for us and it's held us back, both in terms of being able to do things quickly, being able to do things comprehensively, being able to do things just to have the computer do the work as opposed to having people do the work. That's really been a frustration for us over a long time and there's hope I think that there's light at the end of that tunnel and we may get there soon but that's been an important step and we'll need to do that as well. Longer term in addition to finishing this development of the architecture and coming up with create visualizations for other kinds of information.

That PAC data that Jan talked about that we don't have a handle on what the analogy to the map is for PAC, but I'm sure there's one out there and as we have conversations with people we'll find a way to make it simpler. I mean the easiest one is just to search by organization name or something like that.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: Who knows today -- I think it was on your blog -- somebody asked, "Can we search it by geography?" Well, I never really thought about that, but that's interesting approach, too, to take a look at.

MR. BIERSACK: It is. The funny thing is a lot of PACs are organized and their addresses are here. Their focus may be elsewhere but geography doesn't

lend itself that well. But there's something else, I'm sure that creative minds will tell us, will give us good ideas about how to organize that and to make those presentations more straightforward for a single committee, groups of committees, and the movement among the information. The other thing that's really challenging and kind of fun in all this is that when you get started and think about how people approach this information it really is kind of rolling around in the data. It's interrogating the data. Something is presented to me about a candidate. I see the list of donors that he or she has, well "What else are these organizations doing? Who else are they giving to? What other kinds of activities involved here?"

One of the principles that we've talked about a lot downstairs in the last few months is making sure that, not only do we present the information in a straightforward way, but we also give people context. And this goes to the other, one of the other general points that I think Sheila made and we've heard from others as well. It's one thing to provide the raw material as quickly and as flexibly and straightforward way as we can; but we also have an obligation to inform people and educate them about how the campaign finance process works and what other kinds of information might be available that would help them understand the number that they see for a particular candidate's receipts, or a particular PAC's contributions. Is that a lot or a little, how does it change over time? How does it compare to other similarly situated entities?

And the visualizations that we do need to do that function too, we need to be an educational tool and we're looking at things like that; we've got, in our minds, how those kinds of little individual elements that might appear around a screen could work. That's a longer term process. Those are those widgets and other kinds of programs that hopefully will become this full visualization that will develop over time. That'll take a little longer and then we've heard talk about portals and the ability of our users

to customize the experience that they have. We understand that they don't necessarily, come to us from fec.gov, but some of our audience does because some of it is the regulated community. They are committee treasurers, and they're practicing attorneys, and others who are involved with us in a different level. And so they ought to be able to have a presentation right in front of them in the very beginning of the kinds of tools that they typically use the most. And that may be a slightly different set than a reporter might want to see. They'll be a lot of crossover, there's a lot of legal research that reporters and members of the public might need to do. There's a lot of disclosure information that the regulated community wants to see so I don't mean to suggest that they're totally different experiences that they should have. But having the right tools in front of the audience in the right place at the right time is something that the technology allows for now. But that'll be a development that we'll have to make over time too.

The other thing that I, in summary, that I want to echo is something that we heard this morning about how important it is to use the resources both inside and outside the building that we have available to us now. I'll give you a couple of examples. When the Sunlight Foundation suggested a couple of screens of redesign of the website, one of the things we tried to do was encourage the staff to take a look at those and let us know what they thought. And in that sort of brief conversation that I had at that time with a few people around the building I learned things about the skills of some of the staff and their experiences and some ideas that they had that I would never have been exposed to otherwise. Another example, within the building, we have a group of managers who are currently undergoing some management training, it's called Action Learning, and I got to be the problem that they're supposed to solve. (Laughter) That's not an unusual experience for me. It's been very interesting to watch them work

through it and I presented this sort of the problem in its largest scale. In a very sketchy way we have this amazingly complicated system and the way in which we think about the information that we receive and way in which we provide it is sketchy and difficult. Can you think about this? Is there a better way? If we could start over today, what would we do? And they're working through that and the training part of that experience is ending soon but I never thought of it as just the training experience. This is a group of people from different parts of the building, represents really just about all the Commission. So they have different orientations, different perspectives and they've learned to work together, to think about a problem and they'll come up with creative solutions, I know and we need to work forward with them too.

And create other kinds of opportunities for that sort of thing. At the same time that we launch these little data formats that will grow over time, we're also going to launch a blog where I will get to communicate with people about how to use the information, how the data works, the nuances, the details, kind of things people need to know that we used to conduct on the telephone. We're going to use that process, but it's also going to allow us to find new users that we didn't know were there, but they're clearly there.

To take full advantage of that, to have that conversation in this new format and to build different user groups -- I've threatened Sheila many times with the fact that we're going to get their technical staffs to come in here. Her's and others around town and from elsewhere, and we're going to work through the ugly details, the sausage making of the database, so that we can take best advantage of their ideas. And sooner or later I'm going to make good on that threat, and probably sooner, so that we can take advantage of those kinds of, means of communication -- methods of collaboration, that's one of the words that we hear all the time right now. So that we can build it better together.

I really wanted to mainly give

you a sense that, yeah, we've certainly heard a lot, there are some things we weren't aware of that are new, good ideas, problems that we weren't very aware of. And that we think both, there are long term solutions that are going to take awhile but there are also some things that we can do pretty quickly to make things better in the meantime and we're anxious to get going.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

Thank you very much. That's very heartening to hear all that. I want to thank the staff, Alec, Bob and others, who have been working together so hard to put this together and I know we're going to have a lot of good changes coming up soon. Are there any further comments?

Commissioner Weintraub?

COMMISSIONER

WEINTRAUB: Thank you Mr. Chairman. When I listen to Bob I think that there's -- just listening to Bob talk is great evidence of the kind of enthusiasm and expertise that we have right here in the building. You can tell that Bob would just talk all day about this stuff and I've heard him talk all day about this stuff, and we are fortunate today to have some people here, in the room, who have years and years of experience of being dedicated to this specific issue.

All due respect to Mr. Baran and his distinguished career in election law, on this particular issue of putting data out, and promoting transparency and doing a better job of getting information out, Bob Biersack and Sheila Krumholz, Patricia Young who's sitting in the audience our head of Disclosure, have been in the trenches of this stuff for decades and really deserve a lot of compliments for all their hard work in this issue. I've frequently heard from other people, "Gee why can't you do what Open Secrets does? How come your website can't be as good as theirs?" And I think there's some things that we can do to be make it more like Open Secrets and more accessible and easier to use in that way. There's some things that I think, you know, are policy decisions that the Commission has historically made that we

didn't want to do some of the things that Open Secrets does. I think one of the things that people love about Open Secrets is that they categorize donors, this industry and that industry, this candidate got so many dollars from the trial lawyers or the oil and gas industry or the tobacco industry or whatever the industry is. And the Commission has historically felt that categorizing donors in that way wasn't really our job. It involved the kind of judgment calls that maybe we shouldn't be making. We can think about whether we want to re-visit that or whether it really is a more appropriate function for somebody like CRP to be doing.

Some of the basic issues that have been raised about being able to cut and paste a link that will work. I know I have this problem also and I think it goes across all of our databases, I know our staff has pointed it out to me. And perhaps it came up in the earlier hearing that you cannot currently cut and paste a link to a specific campaign finance report and you have to, as Jan was saying earlier, you have to go in and do your own search. You can describe to people how to do the search but you can't just say here, this is how you can get to this particular report. And particularly, given some of the issues that Sheila raised about redundancies and it not being always apparent which is the amendment and which is the final and which report you're talking about. I think that's just something that we have to -- it's a basic Internet function and we have to figure out a way of doing that.

But I do have an answer for one problem that was raised by Mr. Baran because it's a subject that -- and Alec probably knows what I'm going to say because this is something that came up when we were doing the redesign of the AO database and I said the print got smaller, you can't do that to people like me because I can't read that small. And of course what happened was we added an extra panel of information along the side which has very useful information about the history of the AO and comments and we've got a lot of good links there which are useful. But, mostly because I

was complaining about it, we -- Alec incorporated a feature so you've got to look for this. Maybe it's not as obvious as it could be, but there is something that you can click on the left side of the screen to reduce that panel on the side with that extra information so then the AO will expand to the full screen and it will be much easier to read.

MR. BARAN: I'm familiar with that high technology. And yes, the document can be enlarged, but it would be nice to just have the old format augmenting all of these wonderful features so that on the Home Page of the advisory opinion search page, there used to be something, search by year. You have something like that now but it's a new format and not the old format; you could just put that in there and it would basically produce all the same material.

COMMISSIONER

WEINTRAUB: I'm with you on that, I also look for it that way but I have to say I think that's partially because you and I learned how to do it that way when that's the way it was organized, and, because I'm the same way, I'm more comfortable looking for it in the way that I'm used to. But I do think that would be a useful thing to build back in. I thought I had the answer, but you already figured it out. That's really all I had, Mr. Chairman, and I do want to thank the panels and I hope this will be the beginning of a lot of interactions, I think we ought to put together a task force and perhaps with Mr. Biersack at the head of it that would be able to draw on a lot of the expertise that we have out there, people who are willing to come in either with written comments or come in and testify. Maybe we can talk some of these folks into serving on some kind of advisory board for us and can work with us on an ongoing basis, to highlight some of the issues we have with the Internet and the website because it's a constant process. I think every single year that I've been here there have been improvements to the website but it's not a static thing and people expect it to be constantly improving and we need to do that and we need all the help we can get in

doing that because, unlike the EPA, we are never going to have \$12 million to invest in our website. If we did, I bet you guys could really do a bang up of it but we're just not, never going to have those kind of resources.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

Thank you very much. Other comments?

I had a question, Ms. Krumholz, your earlier comment about wholesale versus retail, and that has come up in our previous discussions about what our role should be and whether we are infringing on the good work that foundations do with their own more retail approach toward data, assembly and disclosure. Your point was interesting that we should not shy away from retail in a number of ways, and as Commissioner Weintraub points out, policy-wise some things we don't do. But what would be some of the ways that you suggest that we stick with or maybe, say, five or ten things that we might do more retail, maybe visualize more with our maps, that kind of thing. Any suggestions?

MS. KRUMHOLZ: Well, that's really all I was referring to, is just making the site speak to the average American, and not shying away from that role because other organizations are perhaps meeting that need right now. They may not tomorrow; and so it's really, I think, not an option of prioritizing kind of the backend infrastructure over the front-end interface for average Americans coming to the site. I think you need to -- this is a given but -- just to be certain that the FEC website should really provide a lot of the functionality sites like Open Secrets have provided is ease of use and just ability to get to the core raw data. Whether you go beyond that to do the kind of value added research that we or others do, I think is a separate secondary question. The first thing is just making the site work for people in the way that they would expect a contemporary, state of the art, important agency interface to work. You must deal with the inconsistencies in the data, and in doing that first will aid the secondary process of creating the website front-end but I just don't think that whether or not

other organizations are providing that function now is relevant.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: Any other questions? Mr. Palmer?

MR. PALMER: I just wanted to make a brief comment of thanks to these panelists because it certainly helps us as we go down the road to look at our information technology Strategic Plan. It's always good to realign one's self, and many of the suggestions that have been raised over the past several months have certainly helped us in that direction. And as we look at data warehousing and enterprise content, management and enterprise search, we always need to realign ourselves so the things that we have learn and we will hope to learn over the weeks and months to come -- we think that we can get better and this process has certainly been helpful for that; and I just want to say "Thank you."

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: I did have a question maybe of our own staff. When Mr. Baran indicated we lost some of the searchability of features, what would cause that?

MR. BIERSACK: When we redesigned the advisory opinion search process; the way in which they wrote the process, the way in which they built the program, made it much more flexible in terms of searching the texts, in terms of presenting all of the materials associated with an AO, the original requests and the comments and all of that material. In exchange for that, because of the way they did it, it wasn't possible to embed a link that goes directly to a specific document within that process. That's something we know we need to address. We've heard about it before and, hopefully, we'll be able to find some short term measure that'll take care of that.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: Good. Any other comments? Mr. Vice Chairman? Ms. Duncan?

MS. DUNCAN: Thank you Mr. Chairman. I just had one question about a topic that hasn't come up here today, but was one that was addressed in the notice for the hearing, and I just can't resist the temptation to ask Mr. Baran his opinion

of this or how you might react to this; and that has to do with the electronic filing of documents through the website in the areas of advisory opinions, rulemakings and maybe even in our enforcement process. So not talking now about e-mailing documents but, actually, through the website, electronically filing advisory opinion requests, comments, partitions for rulemaking, comments to rulemakings, as well as potentially complaints, which would be a little bit more complicated because of the requirement to have complaints signed and sworn. But I wonder how you would react to -- or whether you think that would be a good idea and then, just to put a slightly finer point on it, if you'd have a favorable reaction, how would you react to maybe mandating the online version of that and the Commission not accepting potentially paper versions of any of those documents that I've described?

MR. BARAN: Well, we pretty much do everything electronically with the Commission these days anyhow. We will, just as a courtesy always file an advisory opinion in a PDF format with your office or the Secretary of the Commission. Comments are routinely transmitted electronically. I think that, of course, is the trend elsewhere, you know, District Courts and now the Court of Appeals here in the District of Columbia have pretty much mandatory electronically filing of all the pleadings, and I think it is something that seems to be available to virtually all people although you'll have to consider whether that will impede, for example, the filing of a complaint by somebody. And then if you do have electronic filing in enforcement matters there will be the added consideration of preserving confidentiality which is statutorily mandated. So there are some obvious considerations but electronic filing, at the very least, should be encouraged, and if it could be made mandatory, assume you could work out all those other considerations then it certainly would be something that would not be an impediment to me or my group and, I

think that for the vast majority of Americans. But there are those who do not have electronic access and that will have to be taken into account.

MS. DUNCAN: Thank you, that's all.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: Ms. Krumholz, you mentioned a service ticket system. What did you mean by that?

MS. KRUMHOLZ: I just meant a formal process by which we would inform the FEC and others, data users, consumers of the data, of an issue we're finding in the data and a way to record that, so there is an electronic paper trail and that it ultimately gets resolved, and that others are informed how it is resolved or whether it cannot be resolved and why. So right now, historically, the process has been I'll call Bob or Paul Clark or Jeff Chumley and I'll say -- or I'll e-mail -- I'll say "What's going on?" and they'll say, "There's a reason for that," or I'll just email them saying here are the transaction ID's for the problematic records that appear to be erroneous to me, unless you can explain why they are correct. And sometimes we will get a reply saying, "You're right, delete these records. Here are the changes. Here are the changes you should make," and we tell -- people call us all the time and say, "This is wrong; you've got the data wrong" and I say if it's on the FEC's site we would like it changed there first so if you're the filer contact the FEC to get it, get the process going so that when we download next the data is correct. Anyway, creating this service ticket system would just put some structure into that process and I think again, very helpfully create a dialog between all the users, kind of advanced users and average Americans, for that matter.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: So you would write in and others would see the request with the changes and so they would chime in, "Yes, I agree, not a problem let's do this," that type of thing. Is that the theory?

MS. KRUMHOLZ: Right, depending on how you structure it, it might be that only FEC staff could

respond to a request, or maybe there's an ancillary kind of Google Groups forum where people could say, "Oh I see you made that request but actually that's not a problem and here's why," or "I had the same request a year ago and it still hasn't been dealt with," so just to either create dialogue, public dialogue so that other's can benefit from it. Between users and the FEC and maybe have, as part of that, or a separate forum for people to discuss issues they're seeing. That's what we're experiencing now with our Google Groups on the Open Data Initiative. We're seeing people talk about our data, and we're learning from that, and it's been incredibly helpful to us.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER:

What are your recommendations for a new media manager?

MS. KRUMHOLZ: I think I would defer that to Clay Johnson. He as an IT professional that is more in his expertise, but I understand the logic behind having someone who integrates the functions. I think in a way that's what Ms. Dorris does in her shop, she has both IT and marketing reporting to her so that there is someone who is the decision maker that is considering both prospective; but beyond that, I would defer that to the Sunlight Foundation.

CHAIRMAN WALTHER: Any other comments? Questions?

If not, I think this concludes our Open Session on website improvement. I want to thank all of you very much for being here. You can watch us develop, and we'll probably be back in touch with you, like Commissioner Weintraub said, to be on an advisory panel or focus group, to help refine some of our thinking along this line. Again, thank you very much, and we'll conclude this Open Session for today.