

(Some) Transparency is a Paradox

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Open Government: Defining, Designing, and Sustaining Transparency
Panel on Designing Transparency
Princeton University Center for Information Technology Policy
January 21, 2010

Examples of Gov't Data Apps

GovTrack.us (me)

FedThread.org (CITP)

(among dozens of other good ones)

Wins in 2009:

Senate votes, FR, and CFR in XML, and for free

Making Open Government Data

- **Online & Free** (Sunlight Foundation)
- **Primary** (8 Principles of Open Government Data)
- **Timely**
- **Accessible**
- **Machine-Processable**
- **Non-discriminatory**
- **Non-proprietary**

Making Open Government Data

- License-Free
- Promotes Analysis
- Safe File Formats (US ACM Recommendation)
- Has Provenance
- Public Input (Assoc Govt Accountants)
- Public Review (Me?)
- Inter-agency Coordination

Making Open Government Data

- Permanent Web Addresses (Citability.org / LTV)
- Web Searchable (Google)
- Uses Globally Unique Identifiers (?)
- Linked Open Data (Me / TBL / W3C)

<http://razor.occams.info/pubdocs/opendataciviccapital.html>

Open Government Directive

- As memorandums go, it's good!
- Strong in:
 - Public input
 - Public review
 - Inter-agency coordination
- Adds:
 - Be pro-active about data release
 - Designate an accountable official

Let's Distinguish...

Info Is A Resource

- Read the Law
- Is World Safe?
(NYTimes's drinking water report based on gov't data)
- Weather Forecasts
(which all basically come from NOAA/NWS)

Info. To Police Gov't

- WH Visitor Logs
- Disbursements
- Bundled Contributions
- Secret Holds

Let's Distinguish...

Info Is A Resource

- Directly Empowering
- Makes life more efficient & fulfilling.
- Supports civic engagement.

Info. To Police Gov't

- Do we really need the information or is it about deterrence?
- It's like TSA screening.

Wonderlich Transparency Paradox

“How ever far back in the process you require public scrutiny, the real negotiations . . . will continue fervently to exactly that point.”

--- John Wonderlich (2009)

(term coined by Marci Harris?)

[http://groups.google.com/group/openhouseproject/
msg/94060a876083d86a](http://groups.google.com/group/openhouseproject/msg/94060a876083d86a)

HLOGA

- S. 1: Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007 (Reid/Obama)
 - Bans on unethical behavior by Members of Congress
 - New/improved disclosure of conflicts of interest
 - New/improved public record keeping of official business

HLOGA: Record Keeping

- Conference reports online 48 hours before Senate consideration.
- **Senate committees must put video recordings of meetings online.**

HLOGA: Bans

- **Gifts from lobbyists, some travel.**
 - “Rules for Congress Curb but Don’t End Junkets”,
The New York Times, December 6, 2009.
- Official conduct between staffers and the lobbyist spouses of Members they work for.
- Members from lobbying for two years after leaving office
- Earmarks added too late in the game.
- **“Secret holds”**

HLOGA: Disclosure

- **Bundled contributions.**
- Earmarks listed 48 hours before vote
- Public travel database on the Internet
- **Lobbying reporting frequency & quality**
 - “Law to Curb Lobbying Sends It Underground,” The New York Times, January 17, 2010
- Public Internet database of lobbying information, linked with FEC records

Shirky's Transparency Paradox

“1. Make Congress more transparent.

2. ?????

3. Public benefit!

If transparency lets all interest groups make use of improved information, then we would expect that the better organized interests to make better use of any new transparency. This is not to say that transparency is never good; it is to say that it isn't always good, and that the negative effects result from imbalances in the will to collective action, not just access to information.” -- Clay Shirky, Nov. 23, 2008

<http://groups.google.com/group/openhouseproject/msg/53867cab80ed4be9>

Neo Josh

Neo Clay



Read The Bill

OMB Watch writes:

- Rep. Brian Baird (D-WA) introduced H.Res. 554 on June 17, along with 180 cosponsors from both parties. The resolutions would amend House rules to require that non-emergency bills and conference reports be posted online for at least 72 hours prior to consideration by the full chamber.
- Sen. Jim Bunning (R-KY) introduced S.Res. 307 on Oct. 7, which has gained the support of 28 Republican cosponsors.
- The bills are stalled.

<http://www.ombwatch.org/node/10463>

<http://congresscantread.org/> <http://www.readthebill.org>

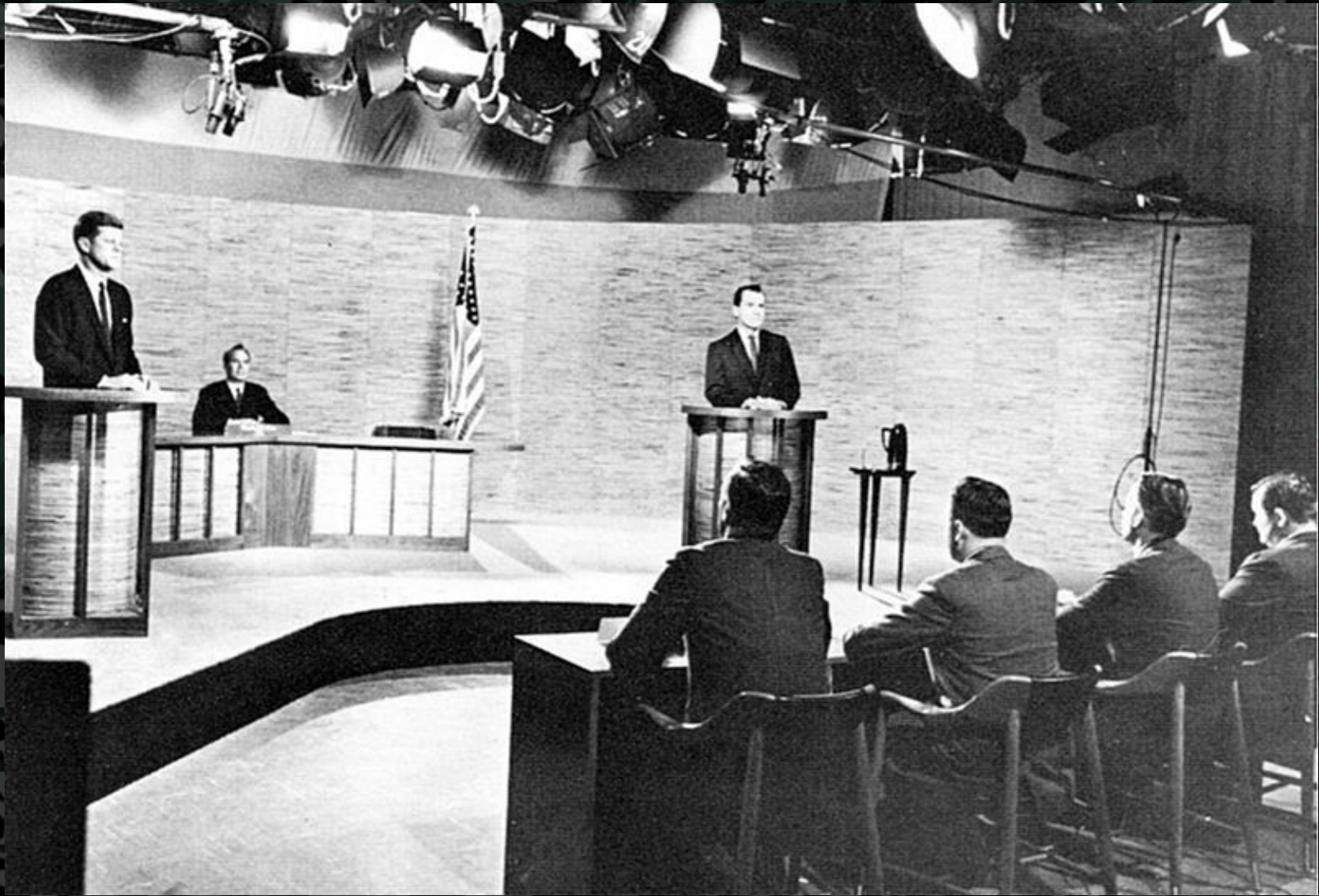
Let's Distinguish...

Info Is A Resource

- I think we're on the right track here with Principles of Open Government Data.

Info. To Police Gov't

- Can't escape the paradoxes.
- Forget it.
- We can change the system another way.



My Two New Projects in 2010

GovTrack Insider

govtrackinsider.com

- Extends GovTrack with legislative backstory.
- Paid original reporting + syndicated content.
- Open content / experimental interfaces.
- Launches today!

How Congress Really Works

- Video Documentary
- No idea how I'm going to fund it.
 - Suggestions welcome.
 - Really.
 - Cash better.

What's our role?

- In terms of making good government better:
 - We serve journalists, or we are journalists.
 - We give citizens the tools they need to participate in government.
 - And tools to keep healthy skepticism from turning into apathetic cynicism.

Thank you

Josh Tauberer

<http://razor.occams.info>

(also www.govtrack.us &
www.civicimpulse.com)