

AFTER THE STORM:
Jennifer González-Colón leads
the effort to rebuild Puerto Rico.



The Rippon Forum

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A large portrait of Matt Cutts, a man with glasses and a blue shirt, smiling, which serves as the background for the main headline.

From Silicon Valley to Washington, DC

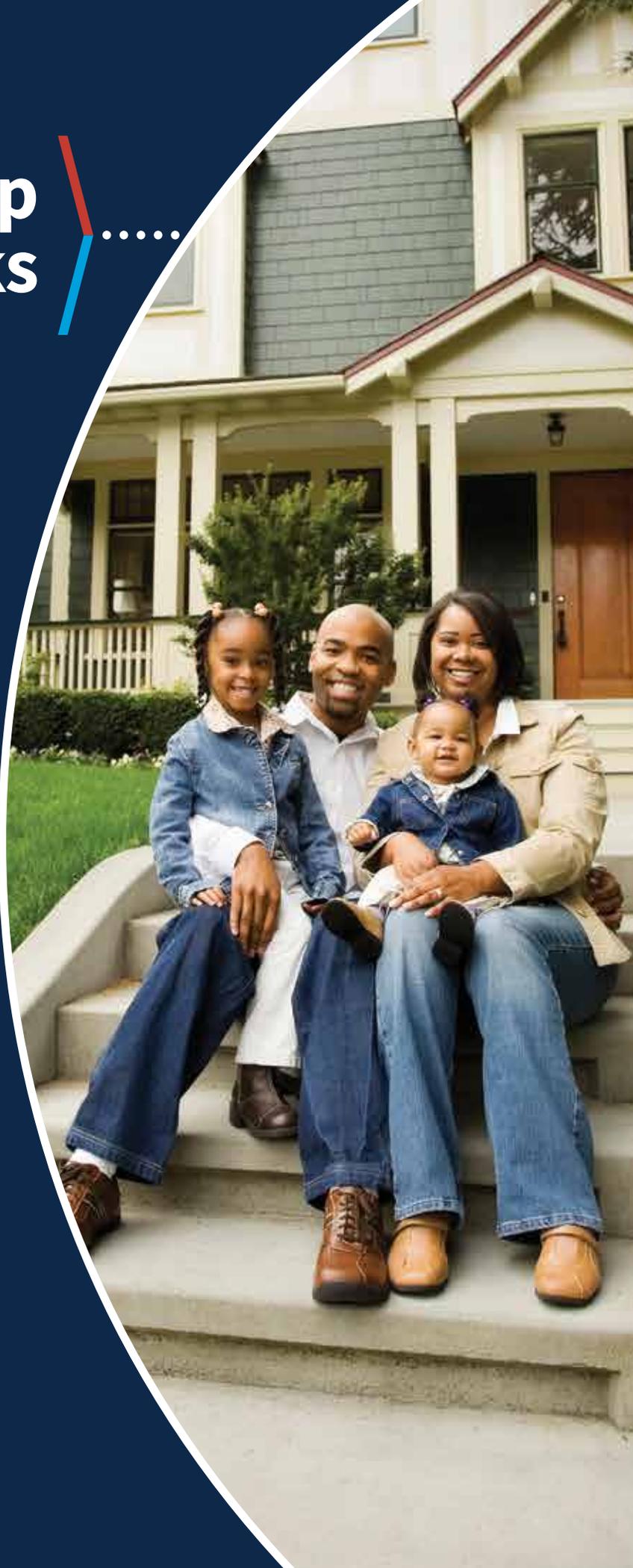
Last December, Matt Cutts officially quit Google to join the U.S. Digital Service. Today, he is helping to spearhead the push to modernize government.

**Plus: Why federal IT systems need to be brought into the 21st century.
And: How states are tapping emerging technologies to improve performance.**

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In publishing this magazine, The Ripon Society seeks to provide a forum for fresh ideas, well-researched proposals, and for a spirit of criticism, innovation, and independent thinking within the Republican Party.



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In this Edition

As this edition of *The Ripon Forum* was going to press, the Washington Post was reporting that the Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate in Alabama had allegedly once made inappropriate advances on several teenage girls.

It is another sordid story in what has become a politically sordid year. From reports that Russia interfered in last year's presidential election to the reappearance of white supremacists marching across the South, the last 10 months in American politics have been a period that would make even the most diehard political junkies feel like they've had enough.

At the end of each of their broadcasts, NBC Nightly News airs a segment called, "Inspiring America." The segment typically focuses on an American who is making a difference in some way in the life of his or her community or the life of our nation. The segment is a good news story to say the least. It's also an upbeat way to end what is typically a downbeat broadcast filled with a lot of bad news.

Given the fact that so much of this bad news seems to be connected to our nation's capital, it may seem funny to think that an Inspiring America segment could be set in Washington, DC. After all, public trust in Washington is at an all-time low. A Gallup survey from this past June found that the federal government's approval rating is currently lower than any other sector in the United States. And yet amid these low ratings and behind the sordid headlines, there is actually a lot of inspiring work being done.

Case in point – less than 100 yards from the Northwest Gate of the White House, in a 19th century brownstone on Lafayette Square, is the unassuming headquarters of the United States Digital Service. The USDS is a relatively new organization. Borne out of the fiasco of HealthCare.gov, its job essentially is to modernize the federal government. The USDS is populated with experts who know how to do just that – software engineers and computer hackers who gave up high paying jobs at tech companies and are now using their skills to make government work. They are led by Matt Cutts, who left a successful career at Google last December and serves as Acting Administrator of USDS today. We talk to Cutts in this latest edition of the *Forum* to find out not only more about the mission of his organization, but why he left Silicon Valley at a time when working for the government gets such a bad rap. His responses are, well, inspiring.

Equally inspiring is the subject of our latest Ripon Profile – Jennifer González-Colón. González-Colón represents Puerto Rico in the U.S. House of Representatives. On September 20, she was in Puerto Rico when Hurricane Maria hit. She spent nine harrowing hours in a closet, riding out the storm with her brother. In the seven weeks since, she has been spearheading the effort to help the island rebuild, lobbying for aid and relief here in Washington, and escorting congressional delegations to Puerto Rico so they can see the devastation for themselves. At a time when Congress is held in low regard, the work of González-Colón is also inspiring. Her story, along with the story of Matt Cutts, is a reminder that there are good people serving in government today.

The Ripon Forum has long believed that Americans deserve to have a government that works. To that end, improving federal efficiency and giving people better value for their tax dollars have been recurring themes within our pages. This edition is no different. In addition to focusing on the work of Cutts and González-Colón, this edition also focuses on why the federal bureaucracy needs to be modernized, and how state governments are achieving that goal.

Other essays focus on reforming Congress so it works better, and why common ground must be found on health care and flood insurance. This edition also includes insightful pieces from leading experts on tax reform, securing our electrical grid, and why lawmakers should tread carefully as they respond to Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Making government work better for the American people is clearly not the most exciting topic. But amid all the distrust and sordid headlines, it's an important topic, and hopefully one that some people will find inspiring, as well.

As always, we hope you enjoy this latest edition of the *Forum*, and encourage you to contact us with any questions or comments you might have.

Lou Zickar, Editor
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Common Sense in the Wake of Disaster

It's time to reform the National Flood Insurance Program

by JOHN KENNEDY

This year has offered America a front row seat to understand just why the National Flood Insurance Program is so vital.

We've all watched the powerful and devastating floods impact our communities in the aftermath of hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria over just a few months. The exact cost to repair the damage is still unknown. However, the emotional damage inflicted on communities is immeasurable – lives lost, families displaced, and local economies left underwater.

Unfortunately, Americans rebuilding after these devastating natural disasters often find their hardship compounded by a National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) that overcharges and under-delivers for policyholders and taxpayers. More than five million Americans depend on the NFIP to protect their homes and businesses. From Colorado to New Jersey to South Carolina to the Gulf, the NFIP is no longer just a program for hurricane-prone areas. It is a program for the entire U.S.

That's why I helped introduce the bipartisan Sustainable, Affordable, Fair, and Efficient (SAFE) National Flood Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2017 with five of my colleagues. The system right now is backwards. Under the current structure, FEMA spent more than \$277 billion in disaster aid to rebuild communities after floods from 2005 to 2014. Only a fraction of that went towards efforts to stop or control floodwaters to avert future disasters. Rebuilding communities after a disaster is far more expensive than working proactively to reduce or prevent their devastation in the first place.

Our legislation prioritizes prevention on the front end to address these very issues. It would also provide long-term certainty for all stakeholders by reauthorizing the program for a reasonable period of six years. In addition, it would reduce the current annual premium increase caps to 10 percent, providing financial relief for families, who currently

face 18 percent increases, and businesses, which currently face 25 percent increases each year.

Avoiding unaffordable rate hikes is a crucial component if one wants to shield real estate markets from depressed property values. Local markets won't be thrown into chaos with this bill, and families and small businesses can still afford to pay their premiums.

SAFE authorizes funding for extensive high-tech mapping, also known as LiDAR, and allows for the future use of state-of-the-art technology to better and more accurately identify flood risk. This is an especially important component, because NFIP should help prevent flooding in the first place, not just help clean up afterwards.

It also includes language from another bill I authored – called The NFIP Consultant Accountability Act -- which would give the FEMA Administrator the authority to fire consultants and contractors who engage in conduct detrimental to the mission of the NFIP. This is a simple common-sense reform

that, frankly, should have been in place years ago to protect homeowners from bad actors.

Our bipartisan legislation streamlines the claims process and makes considerable improvements to the customer experience. American families deserve a smiling face and helping hand after a disaster, not some Washington bureaucrat



Americans rebuilding after devastating natural disasters often find their hardship compounded by a National Flood Insurance Program that overcharges and under-delivers for policyholders and taxpayers.

who hands them a stack of paperwork.

SAFE also cuts wasteful program expenses to pay for investments in mitigation. By temporarily freezing interest payments on the program's debt, FEMA can now direct \$400 million annually to invest in proactive mitigation like providing low-interest loans for homeowners to elevate their homes and for communities to fund critical flood protection projects.

Most people do not realize that the NFIP has paid the federal government \$4 billion in interest over the last decade. These payments mean homeowners and businesses are spending more than 10 percent of all of their premiums on interest to the federal government. If invested correctly, we could save at least \$4 for every dollar spent.

The bill would generate additional savings by eliminating waste in FEMA's Write Your Own program, where private insurers selling NFIP policies pocket at least 31 cents of every premium dollar while bearing little to no financial risk. Even with those savings, insurance agents who sell these policies would maintain their current commission rate and

suffer no unintended consequences from this SAFE.

Finally, under the SAFE NFIP Act, we would expand coverage limits to \$500,000 for residences and \$1.5 million for multi-family and business structures. The limits have not changed for decades, and a common sense increase is long overdue.

Going forward, Congress must do a better job urging regulators to ensure those who are required to participate actually purchase coverage. Costs will continue to be high if mandated participation is low, and there are no two ways around that fact.

I want to encourage my colleagues not to play politics with this program, because families and livelihoods all across this country depend on it,

literally. I believe we have a bill that makes sense for the policyholders and the stakeholders, and I hope my Senate colleagues will give it their full consideration. **RF**

John Kennedy represents the State of Louisiana in the United States Senate.

From Colorado to New Jersey to South Carolina to the Gulf, the NFIP is no longer just a program for hurricane-prone areas. It is a program for the entire U.S.



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Partisan Politics is Unhealthy for America

by TOM REED

The continuation of failed efforts in Congress to avert the Obamacare health care crisis in America has put a spotlight on its unhealthiest habit: partisan gridlock.

Even with the destabilization of individual markets looming and access to critical health care on the decline, the post Obamacare debate rages on with no credible solutions emerging from either end of the political spectrum. Call it “failed” or just in need of a fix, but one thing most will agree on is that the health care machine that Obamacare aspired to be is unsustainable.

Why isn’t Congress giving our states the flexibility and authority to protect citizens from the rising costs of health care? Where is their freedom to innovate? States still offer the best chance of creating successful health care systems that are tailored to the needs of the communities they understand and serve. By empowering them to function as the lead arbiter, the health care needs of American citizens would be met more directly and efficiently. Who would not agree that outcomes would improve with increased responsiveness and proximity of provider to patient?

Minor improvements will not go far enough. This is no longer a matter of just not being “able to keep our doctors or insurance.” The most expensive health care system in the world just underwent the most expensive overhaul, and it failed to evolve into improvements on outcomes and quality. In response, Republicans

similarly tried to repeal and replace with absolutely no Democrat support. From years of Obamacare to the recent Graham-Cassidy amendment briefly floated in the Senate, this purely partisan approach has failed America yet again.

Acute partisanship won’t end well for America.

Americans deserve a functioning Congress and the best health care system that we can create. But if we are going to begin the battle against the surging costs and complexities of illness and save lives, we are going to need more members of Congress to see compromise as a win.

We must find a way to work together and to work with our states in order to enact policies that are not only diverse, but are also sound and backed by debate, negotiation, and compromise. The best expression of democracy is when our different ideas find common ground in policy that puts the American people, not stakeholders, first.

In July, 43 members of the Problem Solvers Caucus proposed a set of commonsense health care principles that would lower premiums and stabilize the health insurance marketplace for American families and businesses. It reformed the employer mandate and protected states’ authority and flexibility while still being fully paid for. It also extended Cost Sharing Reduction (CSR) payments and created a state dedicated stability fund to help prevent drastic premium increases and lower premium rates.

That was an important first step toward the current process in the Senate.



Tom Reed and his Co-Chair of the Problem Solvers Caucus, Democratic Rep. Josh Gottheimer.

**If we are going to begin the
battle against the surging costs and
complexities of illness and save lives,
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as a win.**

The current deal recently announced by Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Patty Murray (D-WA) includes four of the six Problem Solvers' principles. It is driven by the best bipartisan and bicameral ideas that will eventually replace the Affordable Care Act and improve the health care system for the American people. If we can stabilize the marketplace and lower premiums, we can begin to do the important work of addressing the underlying cost of illness.

Tort reform and drug pricing are also areas in urgent need of attention. Other changes could include introducing (or expanding) rewards for efficiency and quality to Medicare and Medicaid. Similarly, moving away from the traditional fee for service models toward rewarding outcomes and putting a new focus on end-of-life and palliative care will encourage a more holistic approach to wellness.

If you consider the vast number of options we have to choose from to improve health care, as well as all

the chances we have missed to work together to implement them for the American people, the case for bipartisanship is already made. Even Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) is now embracing the product of months of our hard work in the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus.

The bold initiative of Alexander and Murray to work this deal in the Senate only proves that the bipartisan approach to health care solutions is the only way forward. Apparently, the pill may not be the easiest to swallow, but compromise and negotiation are the only way we cure America's health care. **RF**

Tom Reed represents the 23rd District of New York in the U.S. House of Representatives. He serves as Co-Chair of the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus.

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What Would Michel Do?

A speculative look at today's appropriations morass through the eyes of a past legislative master

by BILLY PITTS & TOM TAUKE

When former House Republican Leader Bob Michel passed away this past February, America lost a true patriot who dedicated his life to serving the public.

Politico called the World War II veteran and 19-term Congressman “the face of decency,” while the Chicago Tribune mourned him as “a congenial lawmaker adept at crafting compromise during a bygone era of bipartisan cooperation.”

Make no mistake – Bob Michel was a gentleman, as these reports and many others pointed out. But he was also a shrewd legislative strategist whose easygoing temperament masked not only an encyclopedic knowledge of the House rules, but a willingness to use these rules for partisan advantage if he thought it was in the best interest of the nation to do so.

In addition to spending 14 years as Republican Leader, Michel was a longtime member of the Appropriations Committee. His instincts as Leader were informed by this experience, and he viewed Appropriations as the most bipartisan Committee on Capitol Hill. In light of today's political gridlock -- and the need for Congress to reassert its role as a coequal branch of government -- one could argue that Michel's experience, insights, and approach to legislating are needed now more than ever to fix what most agree is a broken budget and spending process. So as his former colleague and as his former aide, we decided to ask the question -- what would Michel do?

First, he would remind us of how the modern budget process was created – as a result of the Presidential impoundment of funds and a subsequent debt limit fight. This reinforced the efforts of a Democratic-controlled Congress to develop its own budget, separate and distinct from that

of the President. He'd also point out that the most basic responsibility of elected representatives is to provide funding for the operations of government.

The Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act was enacted in 1974, with the hope that it would enable the legislative branch to set its own economic and budget goals. Ruling the House for several decades, Democrats viewed the “legislative” agenda from a party perspective and the budget process was expected to be no different.

However, it was not until the Reagan administration that the Budget Act was profoundly tested. Bob Michel played a central role in the budget battles of that era -- battles that quickly became partisan rather than institutional.

It was in 1981 that Bob, as the newly elected Minority Leader with 192 members of the House Republican Conference, used the Budget process to enact President Reagan's first spending blueprint.

Using the Act's expedited rescission procedures for the first (and only) time, Bob threatened to bring up the President's proposed spending cuts. Rather than lose control over the floor, the House Democratic leadership agreed to a deadline for action on the President's agenda of spending cuts and tax reform, in exchange for which Republicans

abandoned the use of the expedited rescission procedure.

Reconciliation became the battlefield and has had an outsized impact on budget debates ever since – to the point where it has dominated party strategy. The addition of automatic budget procedures such as “sequester” have only compounded the mess and adversely affected long term planning.



It was in 1981 that Bob, as the newly elected Minority Leader with 192 members of the House Republican Conference, used the Budget process to enact President Reagan's first spending blueprint.

In the last decade, few “congressional” budgets have been finalized, and the basic funding of government through appropriations has become an abysmal failure of Congress. Congress regularly has had to pass both short-term continuing resolutions and finish the fiscal year with omnibus (multi-bill) appropriations. Federal and state governments have had to operate on the principle of planned inefficiencies because of the failure of Congress to do its job.

So, facing this record of congressional budget failure, what would Bob do?

Bob Michel would probably say we first need to turn down the heat of partisan rhetoric and recognize that the timelines of today’s process do not accommodate the realities of today’s political system.

The fiscal year should be fixed to better coincide with the calendar year. For the last decade, this has been essentially the case as most funding decisions have regularly been delayed until December. He would change it to begin on January 1st.

Sequestration should go; it is the ultimate cop-out. The Congress needs to learn how to make choices rather than place critical decisions on automatic pilot.

While focusing first on making the budget process work to improve the economy and meet the needs of all Americans, Bob would strongly support a joint

committee to look at congressional processes as a whole. He’d want Congress to use the committees to develop legislation and then reform the conference committee process to engage the Members with subject expertise in the development of final House-Senate agreements on legislation.

Bob also talked of the House and Senate Budget Committees developing the top line numbers only -- specifically, the amount of revenues, the total budget authority for discretionary and “mandatory” expenditures, and the resulting deficit or surplus. They would also decide whether mandatory programs should be addressed using reconciliation instructions to committees. But it would not be until the conference committee where functional categories would be finalized as part of the conference report. (There is really no purpose for having a defined set of functional categories of spending at the initial stage of considering budget resolutions, as ultimately it is the responsibility of the

Appropriations Committee.)

This “macro” budget approach would facilitate the two houses quickly adopting a budget resolution that initially could also instruct committees on tax reform or changes in mandatory spending. The resolution would also give the appropriations committees a “top line” number to subdivide to meet the individual programmatic needs of government.

By establishing the “top line” numbers on spending at the outset, appropriators would be given more time to outline and prioritize spending in the individual bills. As a

former appropriator, Bob envisioned them having a greater role in finalizing these numbers to strengthen oversight of the details of government programs.

How would he suggest they do this? One suggestion would be to have the two Appropriations committees agree on what the final functional categories for spending should be immediately after a budget conference between the House and Senate is finalized.

As the Congress moves back to adopting 12 individual appropriations bills, President Trump should recognize -- as Bob Michel’s efforts in 1981 highlighted -- that the budget law gives him the authority to propose individual rescissions to reduce spending. That’s the equivalent of a “line

item veto.” Since the Budget Act allows 1/5th of each house to force a vote to act on each rescission the President proposed, this sets the stage for executive-legislative fights over discrete issues, not make-or-break veto ultimatums with the looming threat of government shutdowns.

Congress needs to vote more, not less, so their choices can be made clear to the people who elected them. That is who Bob Michel knew he worked for – a credo that should govern the actions of all legislators. **RF**



President Trump should recognize -- as Michel’s efforts in 1981 highlighted -- that the budget law gives him the authority to propose individual rescissions to reduce spending. That’s the equivalent of a “line item veto.”

Tom Tauke represented the 2nd District of Iowa in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1979 to 1991. He currently serves as Chairman of The Ripon Forum’s Editorial Board. Billy Pitts is a former top aide to the House Republican Leadership and Staff Director of the House Rules Committee. He also serves as a member of the Forum’s Editorial Board.

To Modernize Congress, Strengthen its Ability to Deliberate

by MATT GLASSMAN

As an institution, Congress does not appear very different than it did 200 years ago. It remains a two-chamber legislative body, one apportioned by population and the other by state. Members introduce bills, debate legislation, meet with constituents, cast votes, and enact laws. Business is conducted under rules based on Jefferson's Manual of parliamentary procedure. A visitor from 1790 who wandered into the House gallery would not find the proceeding particularly difficult to follow.

Below the surface, however, the institution has changed dramatically. Membership has grown from 59 Representatives and 26 Senators in the first Congress to the current 435 Representatives and 100 Senators. While 19th century sessions were often as short as three months, contemporary Congresses typically meet year round. And for much of American history, committees had very small staffs, and individual members had no staff support; today, over 20,000 staffers support the legislative process.

Many of these changes have been in response to external changes in society. Geographic expansion, population growth, and technological developments all expanded the range of issues before the nation. An increasingly integrated national economy expanded the role of the federal government, particularly after the Great Depression and World War II. As the volume, scope, and complexity of issues increased, Congress responded by reorganizing and building its own capacity, most notably in the 1946 and 1970 Congressional Reorganizations Acts. These laws reformed committee jurisdiction, increased staff support, and developed non-partisan legislative branch institutions, with the goal of enhancing legislative and oversight capabilities.

Is the contemporary Congress in need of similar reform? There is wide agreement in Washington that Congress is dysfunctional. The legislative process is mired in gridlock. Congress lurches from deadline to deadline, often acting only

when forced by impending government shutdowns or debt defaults. Routine oversight of the executive branch has weakened substantially. And an increasing number of early retiring Members cite these problems as reason for their departure.

Many observers believe the key to modernizing Congress is to remove impediments to quick and decisive action. Following Woodrow Wilson's century-old advice, these critics would eliminate the filibuster, reduce the gatekeeping power of committees, strengthen the influence of chamber leaders over rank-and-file members, and shift policy formulation away from Congress and toward the executive branch. The appeal of these reforms lies in their ability to harness the modern realities of party polarization, and the desire to supplant the messiness and parochialism of the legislative process with the rationality and decisiveness of executive governance. The downside is that they envision a hollowed-out parliamentary-style legislature, in which real policymaking occurs elsewhere.

A better alternative is to enhance Congress's capacity as a transformative institution within the separation of powers system. Instead of accepting polarization as the defining feature of the legislature, reformers should work to attenuate it by enhancing the capacity of individuals and groups of members to develop policy and conduct rigorous oversight.

In this view, modernization would serve to enhance the power and functioning of Congress, not minimize its role, and allow us to retain the unique benefits of legislative government: diversity of representation, public deliberation, and checking executive power.

Two areas of reform that would strengthen Congress are: (1) increased resources for individual members and committees; and (2) rules changes to empower the committee system. Neither would usher in a golden age of congressional



Matt Glassman

In a recent Congressional Management Foundation survey, only 11 percent thought Congress had adequate capacity to “perform its role in democracy.”

power and functionality, but both would begin the process of rebuilding the deliberative and policymaking strength of the institution.

Information is vital to the legislative process. Members of Congress must gather and analyze policy information in order to make informed votes, present alternative policy positions, and craft political arguments to defend their positions. Without the resources to hire their own staff, members become reliant on others for legislative information. By and large, current members do not believe they have the necessary staff; in a recent Congressional Management Foundation survey, only 6% of senior staff reported being “very satisfied” that Members had adequate time and resources to understand and consider legislation. Only 11% thought Congress had adequate capacity to “perform its role in democracy.”

Modern pressures are exacerbating this capacity problem. First, austerity budgets have caused members’ financial resources to decline in real dollars over the last decade. This not only prevents the hiring of enough staff, but also constrains staff salaries. Staff who develop significant expertise often leave the Hill for more lucrative opportunities. Simultaneously, technology has increased the demands of constituent communications on Member offices, leaving fewer staff to handle policy. Finally, easy availability of policy information has enlarged the sphere of knowledge necessary to develop true expertise. With less money and fewer staff chasing more information, members invariably rely on outside groups and, in particular, party leadership to guide their thinking. This has fueled partisanship and reduced the ability of members to engage in substantive deliberation.

Similarly, committee staffing in Congress has never recovered from cuts made two decades ago. While committees are largely insulated from increased constituent communications, they struggle even more than personal offices with staff retention. Providing extra funding for committees to conduct oversight might also encourage them to not only engage in greater levels of oversight, but also to invest in the development of the necessary staff expertise to rigorously monitor the executive branch. An immediate increase in the resources of members and committees would serve to devolve power away from the leadership, encourage informed deliberation, and create a broader expertise in both

policymaking and oversight.

Resources alone, however, would be of limited value toward restoring genuine deliberation in Congress without corresponding reform of the process. While numerous process reforms could strengthen policymaking, the lowest-hanging fruit would be to strengthen the role of committees. In recent decades, an increasing proportion of major legislation has been crafted outside the committee system, with leadership taking the lead in partnership with allied committee chairs, and the rank-and-file mostly left out. Such bills are now routinely brought to the House floor under highly restrictive rules, and floor amendments in the Senate have plummeted. This subverts genuine deliberation, discourages rank-and-file members from participating in policymaking or developing expertise, and exposes Congress to greater executive influence.



While numerous process reforms could strengthen policymaking, the lowest-hanging fruit would be to strengthen the role of committees.

Reversing these trends requires majority party rank-and-file members to demand more committee autonomy and refuse to consent to tightly structured rules for floor debate. There are, however, specific rules changes that would increase committee power. In particular, Republicans should dispense with term limits for committee chairs. This limit has reduced both the ability of chairs to become true experts in their jurisdiction, and given them less incentive to defend committee power against leadership encroachment. Likewise, party rules could be amended to reduce

leadership power over committee assignments.

Neither of these reforms – strengthening the committee system or increasing member resources – will be easy to institute. And the Wilsonian impulse to further streamline Congress into a vessel for rapid approval of administration or party policy is ever-present. But the long-term health of Congress as an independent institution within our separation of powers system depends on reforming Congress in a way that strengthens, rather than bypasses, its deliberative features.

RF

Matt Glassman is a senior fellow at the Government Affairs Institute at Georgetown University. He previously worked for the Congressional Research Service, where his portfolio included congressional operations, separation of powers, appropriations, judicial administration, agency design, and congressional history.

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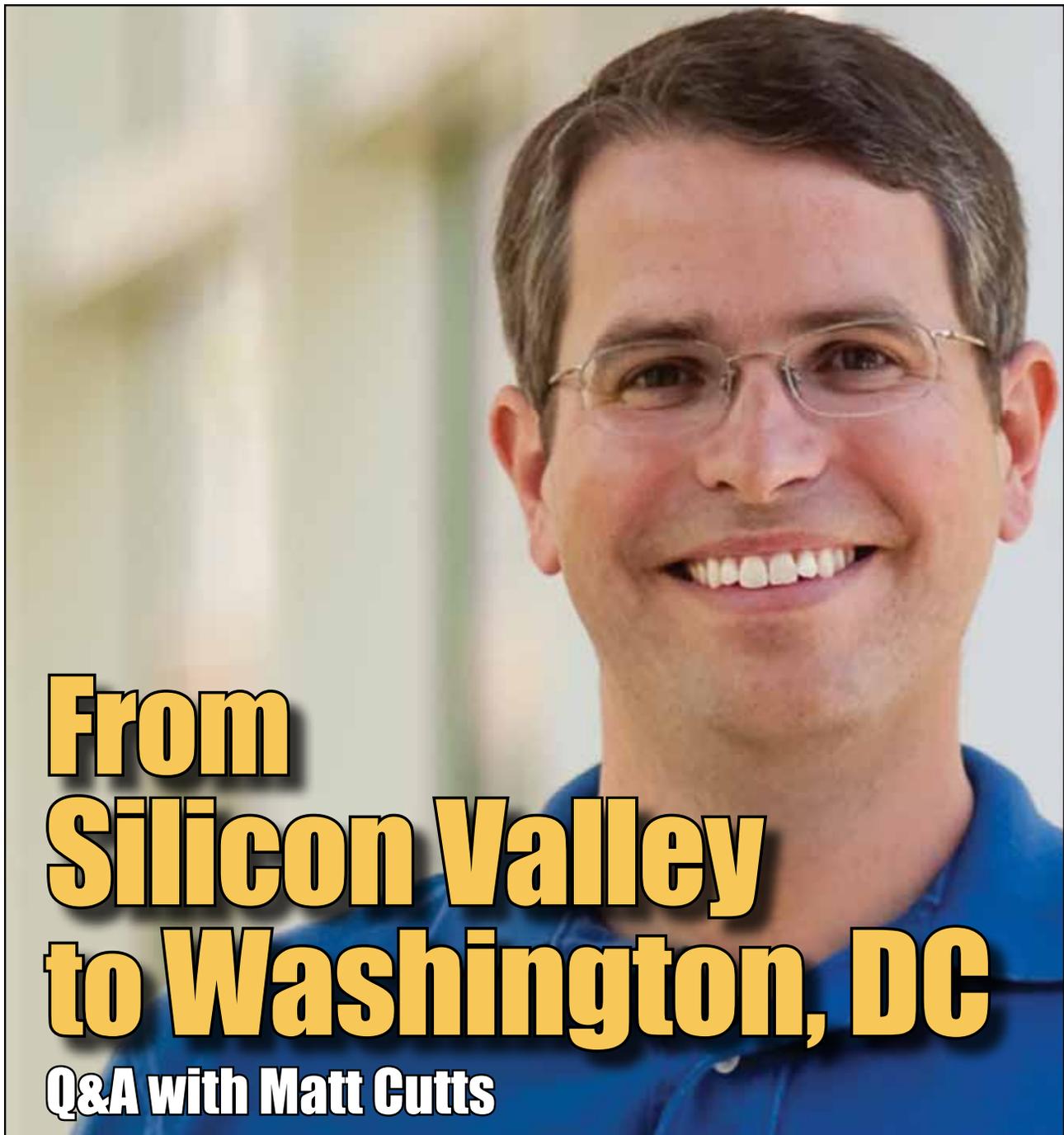
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For the better part of the past 17 years, Matt Cutts worked in Silicon Valley as a software engineer for Google. A graduate of the University of North Carolina with a PhD in computer graphics, he joined the company just over a year after it was founded, in January of 2000. He eventually rose to become head of its Webspam team. As Google grew in influence, so did Cutts.

In 2006, the Wall Street Journal said Cutts “is to search results what Alan Greenspan was to interest rates.” A 2008 profile of him in Wired Magazine put his influence this way: “Among search geeks and online marketers, Matt Cutts is like an internet god ... He’s enough of a corporate icon that he got his own cereal box on the Google campus and his obsessive fan base seems to grow all the time: Groupies can even make their own Matt Cutts paper doll.” Today, Cutts has over a half million followers on Twitter.

Given his reputation in Silicon Valley and stature online, it therefore came as something of a surprise when Cutts announced in July of 2016 that he was taking a leave of absence from Google to do a stint with the fledgling

U.S. Digital Service in Washington, DC. It was even more of a surprise when he announced on December 31st that he had formally resigned his position with Google to become USDS's director of engineering. He currently serves as Acting Administrator.

The USDS was created in 2014 in the wake of the HealthCare.gov fiasco to help bring the federal bureaucracy into the 21st century. According to a recent USDS report, over 200 individuals have been hired to help achieve this goal. These individuals range from Silicon Valley engineers from more than 50 top technology companies to professional "bureaucracy hackers" from within the government.

Working out of a 19th century brownstone just across from the White House, the USDS engineers and hackers now play a key role in the effort that Senior Presidential Advisor Jared Kushner is spearheading to modernize the federal government and deliver better value for the American taxpayer.

The Forum recently asked Cutts about this effort, the mission of the USDS, and why, at a time when the federal government is so unpopular, he decided to leave Silicon Valley for Washington, DC.

RF: Most Americans probably have not heard of the U.S. Digital Service. Could you talk for a moment about the mission of the organization?

MC: USDS's mission is to deliver better services to the American people through technology and design. Every day millions of people turn to the government for important things like small business loans or searching for student financial aid. Unfortunately these interactions can be frustrating. So, we recruit top talent, then deploy these folks across government to improve outdated tools and systems and make citizen-facing services a better experience.

Recently, USDS worked with Veterans Affairs to launch Vets.gov a simple, user-friendly site for veterans to access their benefits easily online. Prior to this, an estimated 70 percent of veterans attempting to apply for benefits were jammed by error messages.

Since the redesign, Vets.gov can now streamline the application process automatically within 10 minutes, and to date, there have been over 250,000 successful applications.

RF: You worked at Google prior to joining the USDS. Why did you leave a very successful career in Silicon Valley at a time when working for the government gets such a bad rap?

MC: When I joined, I only planned to stay for a few months. But after seeing the positive impact USDS had on improving American lives, I decided to extend my tour of duty. Many days were hard and frustrating, but having the opportunity to work on projects with this amazingly talented team outweighed any pay or free lunch considerations.

RF: Some might compare working at the USDS in 2017 to working at NASA in the 1960s. To the extent that NASA had two main goals back then – put a man in space, and then put a man on the moon – what are the main goals of the USDS today?

MC: We are proud of the perspective we bring to government. The USDS approach is to apply business strategies like user-centered design and modern software development practices to deliver technical solutions. But USDS will never be able to tackle all the technical and design problems facing government.

Luckily we are not alone in our efforts. Our partners at the Office of the Federal Chief Information Officer and the General Service Administration's 18F are all committed to building an ecosystem of innovation focused on bringing industry best practices to government. As we work on solving specific challenges, we also know we're helping to lead an effort in modernizing government.

RF: Do you need the digital equivalent of an Apollo mission to attract top talent? Or is the promise of

public service enough to convince young people that their time would be better spent – and their country would be better served – working for the federal government? How do you attract top talent?

MC: On paper we can never compete with what Silicon Valley has to offer. But what we can offer is the opportunity to impact the lives of the American people in a variety of areas. If you were to ask the many engineers, designers and product managers who joined USDS, they'd tell you that their work is



THE U.S. DIGITAL SERVICE

**We recruit top talent, then
deploy these folks across
government to improve
outdated tools and systems
and make citizen-facing
services a better experience.**

unbelievably important and they're honored to be a part of it.

We've adopted values that resonate with individuals looking for meaningful and exciting work. We are a diverse and talented team made up of individuals devoted to the work and people we're serving. And while there are challenges and roadblocks, people have the chance to become leaders and influence the future of government.

The work is hard but it's definitely rewarding. It doesn't hurt that the work often features really challenging issues as well. So it's not just that the work is important or impactful; it's also a challenge for people who like to solve big problems.

RF: Can you tell us about some of the main challenges the USDS is working on right now?

MC: Our work is focused on making government systems work better for the American people and we are doing this in a variety of ways. At the Department of Defense, USDS helped to launch the first "bug bounty" program in the history of the federal government. Bug bounties are a common private sector practice that invite security researchers to try to hack systems and report flaws in exchange for monetary rewards. The program was highly successful at a budget of \$150,000, compared to the \$1 million it would have cost for an outside firm to run a security audit.

USDS also partnered with 18F to build a secure, common identity-platform called Login.gov. With many public-facing federal websites, users are required to create separate accounts for access. Login.gov was built to remedy that problem by allowing users to sign in to multiple government agencies by using one account. The Department of Homeland Security became the first agency to use Login.gov with the Trusted Traveler Program. Since its launch in April, there are over 500,000 Login.gov accounts with plans to complete more integrations in the future.

The crazy part is that's just scratching the surface. We're working with agency partners at Veterans Affairs, the Department of Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, the Department of Defense, and more.

RF: Talk for a moment about the disastrous rollout of healthcare.gov in 2014. As you see it,

how did that happen, and what are you doing to make sure something like that never happens again?

MC: USDS was created in the aftermath of Healthcare.gov so our mission and approach are a direct product of the lessons learned from that experience. Healthcare.gov was an example of what happens when government does not apply industry best practices.

In addition to engaging with agencies on technical projects, we also have procurement experts who train, assist, and advise on improving contracts and making the Federal government a better buyer. It has been encouraging to see many agencies adopt better practices like agile development, moving to the cloud, and better monitoring.



Recently, USDS worked with Veterans Affairs to launch Vets.gov. Prior to this, an estimated 70 percent of veterans attempting to apply for benefits were jammed by error messages.

practices – we greatly enhance the ability of systems to adapt to security threats and deploy security fixes quickly and effectively.

RF: Finally, a personal question – when you see your old colleagues in Silicon Valley and they ask how you like working for the government, what do you tell them?

MC: Like most jobs, some days can be frustrating. But at the end of the day, the opportunity we have at USDS impacts the lives of Americans every day, and potentially for years to come.

The work may be hard but it's definitely rewarding. So if you're looking for a new challenge, come join us! **RF**

Why Federal IT Systems need to be Brought Into the 21st Century.

by TREY HODGKINS

There is a joke that went viral on the internet of a kid seeing a floppy disk and saying, “Oh, you 3-D printed the Save Icon.” Although a joke on the internet, the use of this archaic technology is a reality in the government. The U.S. federal government is one of the last bastions for information technology that was built in a bygone century – some of it approaching 50 years old.

Now, more than ever, the time is ripe to bring the federal government into the digital era and modernize information technologies that enable government operations. The reasons, as well as the improved outcomes for government missions, citizen services, and for the taxpayer, are vast, which is why it can no longer be overlooked.

The top reason why we should modernize government IT is that government can no longer protect the information and data about citizens in its networks without modernizing. The Office of Personal Management breach of over 21 million individual records exposed just how weak the protections are on some government networks.

Since that time, there has been a widespread realization that change is a necessity and many of the efforts undertaken by the government are focused on improving IT. President Trump acknowledged the urgency of addressing these cyber weaknesses and threats by making IT modernization a priority and acknowledging that it is a means to achieving a more secure technology state in the federal government.

This focus is a centerpiece of the recent Report to the President on Federal IT Modernization, which starts the departmental and agency modernization effort with a focus on enhancing cybersecurity and migrating government data and IT capabilities to cloud computing.

In addition, we can no longer afford to pay for the legacy systems we have in place today. The government spends over \$90 billion dollars each year that can be directly

linked to information technology. Sadly, the Government Accountability Office has found that around 80 percent of those funds are spent just operating and maintaining the systems we already have in place. This leaves little funding for improving security, leveraging the vast data sets the government possesses, reforming business processes for better citizen outcomes, or securing our nation and homeland with more modern technology with greater capability.

The dysfunctional Congressional appropriations process has contributed to this state of government IT in an outsized way, as well, failing to appropriate dollars in a timely fashion and locking agencies in a perpetual cycle of only operating and maintaining those systems they already own. As a result, developments in information technology have left government behind because there has been insufficient funding stability and flexibility to keep up with the pace of innovation.

Fortunately, in the last few years we’ve seen a noticeable increase in interest shown by members of Congress in the topic, and there appears to be a shift in thinking to find new ways to incentivize and enable agency abilities to modernize IT. The most prominent of these efforts is the Modernizing Government Technology (MGT) Act. The innovative proposal allows for the creation of new working capital accounts that are funded by the efficiencies and savings the agency generates in any given year. In other words, when an agency innovates and saves money, the savings can be kept in the agency and used for modernization and upgrading cybersecurity.

More so, improving citizen services and the outcomes those enable is an important driver for modernizing IT in the government. Have you ever stopped to compare the experience you have interacting in a digital way in your daily life with the experience people have interacting with



Trey Hodgkins

The government spends over \$90 billion each year that can be directly linked to information technology. Sadly, the GAO has found that around 80 percent of those funds are spent just operating and maintaining the systems we already have in place.

their government? Think about the digital experience people enjoy today with their financial institution, where they can access information about their financial status on a real-time basis, apply for a loan, transfer money, deposit a check or pay bills instantly. Now think about the last time someone you know had to apply for a student loan or other benefits with the federal government. The experiences are worlds apart.

Expectations are changing and, frankly, government must modernize to keep up with the demands of citizens for a better taxpayer experience. We should identify new requirements for government IT, such as real-time mobile access to data or services, and then move to modernize government IT to meet those expectations. These kinds of changes will be some of the hardest, as it will involve examining how agencies provide the services they offer and bringing about improvements to the way they are offered. All this means asking people to change. But, the possibilities for

improved outcomes far outweigh any reasons we may find for adhering to paper-based processes and the limited, unsatisfying outcomes they can offer.

IT modernization in the federal government is the pathway to better cybersecurity, more efficient investment and use of taxpayer dollars, and better citizen services outcomes. It is the foundation for technological advances that deliver better, more efficient, health care, improving transportation and energy consumption while driving improved conservation and environmental sustainability, and delivering better education and employment opportunities to all corners of America. For all these reasons, and the possibilities they offer, the time for government IT modernization is now. **RF**

The dysfunctional Congressional appropriations process has contributed to this state of government IT, failing to appropriate dollars in a timely fashion and locking agencies in a perpetual cycle of only operating and maintaining those systems they already own.

Trey Hodgkins is the Senior Vice President for Public Sector of the Information Technology Industry Council, which represents the biggest technology companies across the globe.

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Data-Driven Government:

How states are tapping emerging technologies to drive efficiency and improve performance

by SCOTT PATTISON

America's governors and the states they run are using evidence-based techniques such as big data, business intelligence, cloud platforms, and predictive analysis to solve public policy problems.

What were once primarily used by Fortune 500 companies and innovative start-ups are now being adopted by state governments. It's all part of an increased drive to modernize agency operations, realize efficiencies and improve customer service for state residents.

Data is at the center of many states' efforts to foster more informed policy decisions. For example, Mississippi LifeTracks is an interoperable, statewide information system designed to spur data-driven solutions to better match education choices with career-readiness and economic development outcomes. Extensive information has been made publicly accessible online, facilitating researchers' efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of abstinence programs or look into the labor market effects of a particular math and science magnet school.

Rhode Island is taking a similar approach to the opioid crisis with a new web-based overdose-prevention dashboard. A website itself may not sound revolutionary, but the amount of timely, local data offered and the site's ability to connect users to resources within their communities make it a standout. A mobile version is in development and will soon put a wealth of important information in the pockets of any Rhode Islander with a smartphone – key for times when immediate action can save a life.

Also using data to combat the opioid epidemic, Ohio has upgraded its prescription drug monitoring program to include scoring to calculate a patient's risk of addiction and overdose. Governors are directing their state governments to look to systems like these to

identify drug-seeking behavior and pill mills, as well as link individuals with treatment.

In case study after case study, words like “link” and “connect” dominate, as state policymakers work to address citizens' frustrations with the complexity and inaccessibility of their government. Enabling cross-agency and interdepartmental cooperation are key goals to reduce redundancies and waste and facilitate integrated service delivery.

Perhaps most ambitious is the recently unveiled Maryland MD THINK project. This initiative, which earned the state a grant of nearly \$200 million, uses a scalable, cloud-based data analytics platform to streamline government operations and increase agency productivity. Caseworkers are provided tablet devices to provide service in the field. Still in phase one, MD THINK is currently focused on sharing information among child welfare and juvenile services programs, where there is significant overlap in target audiences, but broader implementation is planned.

In some of the most exciting cases, new technologies are being paired with new workplace methods. For instance, the Virginia Datathon unleashed

Silicon Valley-style creativity from teams from various state agencies. Charged with creating apps to use state data as they saw fit, there were few limits on the teams' originality. Dozens of helpful results emerged, ranging from telemedicine solutions and mobile tax-payment applications to community crime maps and on-demand training offerings.

As states undertake enterprise technology projects, they are also facing the same challenges as their corporate counterparts. Security and privacy must remain top of mind. MD THINK, for instance, has role-based data access to enable staff members to obtain the information



Scott Pattison

Data is at the center of many states' efforts to foster more informed policy decisions.

they need, while preventing the sharing of unnecessary personal details. Privacy concerns may limit adoption of similar technologies at the federal level, where citizens could be more squeamish about the Big Brother–type amalgamation of their information.

Policymakers will also need to be cognizant of the pitfalls of predictive analytics. Governors seek top-quality data. Poor-quality data can skew insights gleaned from business intelligence and neural networking systems in unexpected ways. For example, crime-forecasting technologies have empowered local law enforcement to allocate resources to high-risk areas identified by software. Some communities have, however, expressed concerns about the use of historical data exacerbating racially biased policing.

States are experiencing a significant level of success navigating these and other issues as they apply emerging technologies to diverse challenges. The results indicate that modernization holds great promise for driving

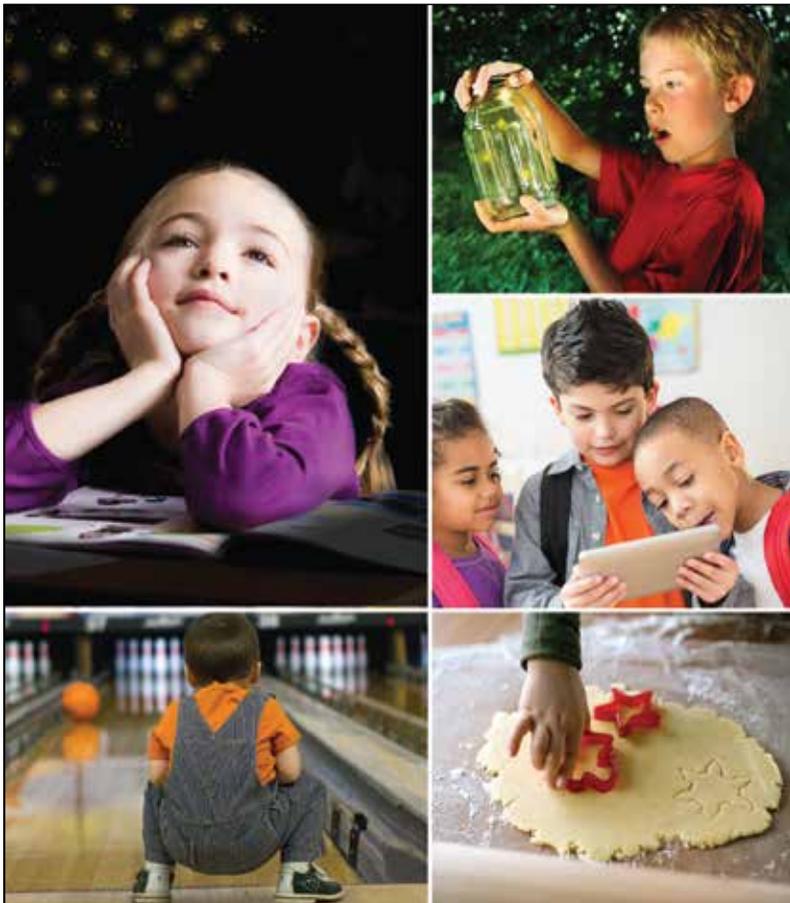
efficiency and cost-savings while improving performance and productivity. In particular, data-focused initiatives have enhanced results-tracking and enabled agencies to better monitor and achieve the outcomes intended for their programs.

Confidence in our federal government is still hovering near historic lows, according to the Pew Research Center. It’s high time national leaders look to the states for how to apply technologies to increase government effectiveness and regain the trust of the American people. After all, recent surveys indicate a higher level of trust for governors,

who are already making impressive strides by tackling tough policy problems with developing technologies. **RF**

Scott Pattison is the executive director and CEO of the National Governors Association, the collective voice of the 55 governors of America’s states, commonwealths and territories.

Perhaps most ambitious is the recently unveiled Maryland MD THINK project, which uses a scalable, cloud-based data analytics platform to streamline government operations and increase agency productivity.



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Reactions & Regulation in the Age of Computational Propaganda

by NICK MONACO & SAMUEL WOOLLEY

Washington's scrutiny of Silicon Valley's biggest tech firms has reached its peak in recent weeks, as various committees work to discern the ways social media platforms were used to manipulate public opinion during the 2016 U.S. Election.

Facebook and Twitter have revealed the extent to which the Internet Research Agency, a contracted arm of the Russian government, penetrated and exploited social networks during the contest. The platforms have disclosed hundreds of thousands of dollars in online advertising and 671 accounts and pages linked directly to the Agency, which has been disseminating disinformation online with varying degrees of success since at least 2014.

In response to repeated requests from lawmakers and expert researchers, Facebook and Twitter have announced they will take measures aimed at curbing the influence of disinformation on their networks. These efforts include promoting transparency in online political advertising on both platforms. While these moves are steps in the right direction, more still needs to be done to illuminate how American citizens are being politically coerced, harassed, and silenced on social media. Specifically, how does manipulation of public news algorithms happen, and how is computational propaganda effected at scale? Regulation against certain uses of disinformation tools, such as bots, would be a welcome development. Legislation targeting digital tools themselves, however, could be detrimental to the internet and free speech.

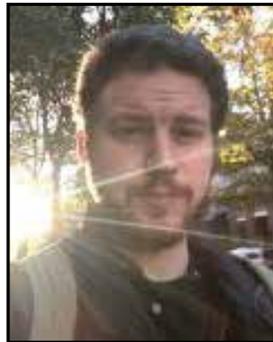
The use of social media bots has been at the forefront of congressional inquiries into Russian manipulation in 2016. Bots are computer programs built to carry out automated tasks online. These software entities can be programmed to

interact with users, promote messages online, or perform more mundane tasks such as manage permissions in a chatroom. Recent media coverage has focused on social bots – iterations of this automated technology that pose as humans or interact with humans online. Some of the more unscrupulous social bots on sites like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube promote political messages and game social media algorithms to drive online trends. They have the effect of manufacturing political consensus online — they create artificial trends or manipulate news feeds on social media, making particular information or people appear as if they are supported by real human traffic.

In and of themselves, however, bots are not inherently good or bad – they are merely an infrastructural part of the internet. In fact, bots make up slightly over half of all internet traffic. Tools that everyday users of the internet know and love -- such as search engines, Wikipedia, and chatrooms -- would not be possible without the use of these automated agents. It is for that reason that any policy concerning bots should be targeted against specific, malevolent uses of

them – against driving political messages or rendering protest hashtags irrelevant, for example – instead of taking the form of a blanket ban on bots altogether. Social bots can be used to hide the identity of those behind political manipulation and massively amplify digital attacks. They can, however, also be used as a social prosthesis for democracy — allowing journalists and civil society groups to scour large datasets and automate aspects of reporting and political communication that would otherwise have to be done manually.

Some argue that private companies alone should be the ultimate arbiters of what is regulated on their networks.



Nick Monaco



Samuel Woolley

Regulation against certain uses of disinformation tools, such as bots, would be a welcome development. Legislation targeting digital tools themselves, however, could be detrimental to the internet and free speech.

While there is merit to this view, especially in terms of preserving the rights of users to freedom of expression, there are also important caveats that cannot be ignored. Indeed, the past records of these companies suggest that self-regulation is not sufficient to counter the fact that big tech's conflicts of interest tend to go unchecked until it is too late. The tough truth is that, left to their own devices, it is tenuous at best to claim that tech giants will curb computational propaganda on their networks. With Google and Facebook representing 77% of digital ad revenue in the States and nearly all of that market's new growth, the abstraction of democratically-oriented software design is plainly secondary to concrete profits.

A litany of events over the past year alone has made this evident: Mark Zuckerberg dismissed out-of-hand the idea that online disinformation may have influenced the 2016 election as "pretty crazy"; Google stifled criticism in the U.S. of its business practices abroad; and, Twitter deleted data critical to understanding exploitation of its platform. This was mere days after the platform publicly criticized third-party research based on data limits the company itself is responsible for. A fundamentalist defense of purely private regulation also ignores the very real danger of regulatory capture: tech giants have spent over \$150 million in lobbying in the past decade, with a vast increase in the past five years.

Civil society groups and expert researchers -- such as the Alliance for Securing Democracy, the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensics Lab, Bellingcat, and ComProp -- have all made significant contributions to illuminating the dark underbelly of online disinformation, even as tech giants have been coy about their knowledge or critical of such research. They've revealed that there's no marketplace of ideas when bots can amplify or dampen any message. Only after sufficient outcry from legislators, researchers, and the public have private companies even begun to openly acknowledge these problems. Even after Facebook admitted the presence of Russian disinformation on its network, for instance, Columbia Professor Jonathan Albright was quick to point out that it had vastly underestimated the number of users the propaganda had reached. Bots and false amplifiers

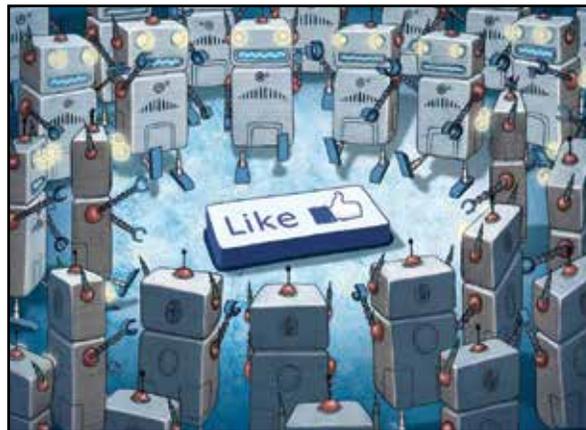
can even be said to represent a new form of censorship -- one based on content amplification rather than content suppression. Legal experts have astutely observed that our current legal framework is ill-equipped to handle such challenges.

It is plain that all sides have their blind spots: scholars and researchers grasp technology's impacts on democracy without an access to the data, computing power, or business savvy of the private sector; business interests can be naïve and myopic about the political and social harm their platforms can inflict on democracy; policymakers can lack the technological literacy to craft effective policy.

What is needed is more cooperation between experts, private industry and policymakers to craft both public and private policies that will preserve the inviolate American principle of free speech, while also limiting the insidious harm that abuse of online networks can incur. Private self-regulation, uninformed, heavy-handed public policy (such as those currently being proposed in Brazil and Germany), or maintaining the anarchic status-quo are all undesirable options. A blue-ribbon commission composed of members from all parties would be a proper initial step in the right direction, and have the highest probability of benefitting all members and ensuring that the internet continues to be a positive-sum game for everyone involved.

Malicious uses of technologies, explained by those academic experts who best understand them, can be prohibited by law by informed legislators. This in turn would provide private companies with necessary latitude in the management of their proprietary software, while also preventing regulatory capture. As Tim Wu writes, "If we believe in liberty, it must be freedom from both private and public coercion." **RF**

Samuel Woolley is the Director of Research of the Computational Propaganda Project at the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford. He is also a fellow at Alphabet's think-tank and technology incubator, Jigsaw. Nick Monaco is a research associate on the Computational Propaganda Project. He is also a research associate at Jigsaw.



Social bots can be used to hide the identity of those behind political manipulation and massively amplify digital attacks. They can, however, also be used as a social prosthesis for democracy.

The EMP Threat Facing the United States

It's time for Trump to channel Churchill

by TOMMY WALLER

Shortly after his inauguration, President Trump moved a bust of former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (which was removed by President Obama in 2009) back into the Oval Office, giving many Americans hope that he would channel this courageous leader in the face of so many daunting national security nightmares plaguing America today. For those able to execute an unconstrained analysis of today's threat environment, the single most urgent concern for America is what threatens her electric grid. Without electricity, the America we know today ceases to exist – and our enemies know this. Elites in the U.S. government know this too, but most have chosen to ignore these threats and to ridicule, silence, and stymie anyone willing to speak the truth about them.

America's 16 Critical Infrastructures range from Water & Wastewater Systems to Food & Agriculture to Nuclear Reactors, Materials & Waste – and all of them depend upon electricity. America's need for electricity creates the ideal conditions by which an adversary can take advantage of Sun Tzu's "*Supreme art of war*," which is "*to subdue your enemy without fighting*." In 1999, with full recognition of this reality and enraged with American policy in the Balkans, Vladimir Lukin (the head of the Russian State Duma's Foreign Affairs Committee) threatened a U.S. Congressional delegation by stating: "*If we really wanted to hurt you with no fear of retaliation, we would launch a Submarine-launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM), [and] we would detonate a nuclear weapon high above your country and shut down your power grid.*"

That Congressional delegation included former Representatives Curt Weldon (R-PA) and Roscoe Bartlett (R-MD). These men took this threat seriously. They authored legislation that was signed into law in October 2000 and established the "Commission to

Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack. The Commission's goal was to identify steps to protect the United States military and civilian systems from an EMP attack. The EMP Commission served as the free world's foremost expert on threats to the grid until this past September 30th, when it was dismantled by the current Congress. The Commission's 2004 and 2008 reports, which warned that up to 90 percent of America's population could be wiped out by an EMP-induced prolonged blackout, have been almost entirely ignored by the federal government and the regulatory bodies that oversee the nation's electric utilities. Meanwhile, adversaries of the United States, especially North Korea, continue developing and testing methods to attack the grid and telegraphing their



Tommy Waller

Adversaries of the United States continue developing and testing methods to attack the grid and telegraphing their intent to do so – especially North Korea.

intent to do so.

On October 12, 2017, when Congress held a hearing on the threat from North Korea, EMP Commission Chairman Dr. William Graham and Chief of Staff Dr. Peter Vincent Pry testified about the extraordinary hazards posed by the regime, submitting 14 pages of incredibly insightful analysis and thoughtful recommendations for corrective action. One excerpt alone is worth highlighting:

After massive intelligence failures grossly

underestimating North Korea's long-range missile capabilities, number of nuclear weapons, warhead miniaturization, and proximity to an H-Bomb, the biggest North Korean threat to the U.S. remains unacknowledged—nuclear EMP attack.

North Korea confirmed the EMP Commission's assessment by testing an H-Bomb that could make a devastating EMP attack, and in its official public statement: "The H-Bomb, the explosive power of which is adjustable from tens of kilotons to hundreds of kilotons, is a multi-functional thermonuclear weapon with great destructive power which can be detonated even at high altitudes for super-powerful EMP attack according to strategic goals."

This testimony was the EMP Commission's best method of informing the nation's leadership (and the public) since their latest report remains buried in the governmental review process, ready to be ignored yet again by the same "elites" who recently disbanded the Commission. In an article preceding the Commission's demise, its original sponsor, Congressman Weldon, observed: "Only Washington bureaucrats could be so stupid they would terminate the Congressional EMP Commission — just when North Korea threatened to attack the United States with EMP."

While government and corporate elites trod in the footsteps of Chamberlain and prefer to ignore and explain away the threat of a nuclear-armed North Korea and with the federal government so profoundly dysfunctional in addressing the threat from EMP, President Trump must recognize that today's "Rhineland" moment is much more severe than that of Europe's in 1936. Hitler seized the Rhineland to test the political will of the Allies and was appeased. The Axis powers, though, still had to build major military and industrial might to wage their worldwide destruction. Today, for the first time in human history, a hermit kingdom, rogue nation, or even non-state actor (such as a group

of Islamic jihadis armed with a single nuclear weapon and the missile or balloon needed to loft it into the exo-atmosphere) can destroy the strongest, most prosperous, and most sophisticated civilization on earth.

Winston Churchill once said, "*History will be kind to me for I intend to write it.*" The surest way for history to be kind to President Trump is for him to write it, by being the first leader to truly address the existential threat of EMP. The first and foremost thing he must write is an Executive Order establishing his own EMP Commission in the White House – a Task Force that draws from the experience of the previous EMP Commission. The champion of this Task Force must be an Executive Agent – a Cabinet Secretary designated by the President – with the authority, accountability, and resources, to manage the defense against EMP and other threats to the electric grid. This "Critical Infrastructure Protection Task Force" must undergo an effort equal to that of the Manhattan Project, truly putting the owners and operators of our critical infrastructure on a defensive "war footing."

The Manhattan Project ended a war that cost the world 60 million human lives; a war ushered in by the 1930s appeasement of the Axis. After this generation's Chamberlains have ushered in the prospect of our nation losing 290 million human lives in less than a single year, the time is NOW for

President Trump to channel Churchill. We call upon the President to immediately create his Task Force and begin its tasking with the words of that iconic British leader: "It's not enough that we do our best; sometimes we have to do what's required." **RF**

Tommy Waller serves as Director, Special Projects at the Center for Security Policy and helps administer the Secure The Grid Coalition. He is a U.S. Marine and combat veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, husband, and father of four. Learn more about Tommy and the Secure The Grid Coalition at <http://securethegrid.com/>.



With the federal government so profoundly dysfunctional in addressing the threat from EMP, President Trump must recognize that today's "Rhineland" moment is much more severe than that of Europe's in 1936.

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How Tax Reform can Boost Competitiveness

(Hint: Focus on innovation, not individuals)

by JOE KENNEDY

Republicans have long been the party of tax cuts. But lately they have been joined by a broader coalition concerned about the impact of high corporate tax rates on national competitiveness and economic growth. The outline of a possible bipartisan compromise emerged last year with a series of positive bipartisan reports from the Senate Finance Committee. However, rather than pursue the possibility of a bipartisan bill centered on cutting the corporate tax rate and encouraging investment, Republicans seem determined to pass a partisan bill that gives large tax breaks to wealthier Americans. They are likely to fail.

There is strong evidence that high corporate tax rates deter investment. This is especially worrisome because the United States has the highest tax rate among OECD countries. Unlike most countries, it also applies this rate to foreign profits. The result is that U.S. companies are less competitive in foreign markets. In addition to lower rates, incentives for investment such as the R&D tax credit, faster depreciation, and even lower rates from profits derived from intellectual property would all increase growth. Many Democrats recognize this problem and opportunity and are willing to make U.S. tax law more competitive.

The Republican plan addresses many of these challenges. But these corporate reforms have been overshadowed by large tax cuts to the wealthy and small businesses. Although Republicans claim that these cuts will also spur investment, the link between individual tax rates and growth is much weaker. That is partly because the total tax burden on corporations is much higher than it is for individual owners of a partnership or sole-proprietorship. It is also because fewer

businesses compete globally or require large investments. There is no Democratic support for individual tax cuts for the wealthy. In fact, growing concern over inequality and rising federal deficits will make this a tough sell even to the Republican base.

What could Republicans do to increase the chances of passing a good bill? They could focus principally on reforming the corporate tax code. The Information Technology and Innovation Foundation has listed five imperatives for corporate tax reform. The first of these is a statutory corporate rate somewhere between 20 and 25 percent. Lower rates are possible in a revenue neutral bill if Congress is willing to raise tax rates on individuals (or institute a carbon tax), but, given the current stalemate, anything lower than 25 percent should be counted a great success. This should be accompanied by a 15 percent tax on foreign earnings with no deferral, for which companies would get a credit for any foreign tax they pay.

The other three imperatives are all aimed at encouraging more investment and research in the country and would automatically be available to pass-throughs. Academic studies show that each of these is effective at boosting economic activity. The first involves raising the simplified version of the research and development tax credit by six percentage points, to 20 percent of qualified research expenditures. The second is to copy other nations and implement an “innovation box”

that taxes profits from intellectual property at a rate close to 15 percent. Finally, investment incentives should be increased by allowing every company immediately to write off the first \$500,000 plus 50 percent of any remaining investment.



Joe Kennedy

There is strong evidence that high corporate tax rates deter investment. This is especially worrisome because the United States has the highest tax rate among OECD countries.

The Republican plan comes close (it does not raise the R&D credit or institute an “innovation box”). But it also includes a large amount of tax cuts on individuals and small businesses. These cuts are unlikely to produce much economic growth. By their nature they benefit the wealthiest individuals. The low rates on small businesses also add to the incentives to characterize wages as business income. These tax cuts also worsen the federal deficit, necessitating future cuts in middle-class spending programs or future tax increases. Finally, no Democrat is likely to vote for them.

Many Republicans believe that it is politically impossible to pass a bill that does not include tax cuts for individuals and small businesses. They are about to discover that it is impossible to pass a bill that does. Small businesses are not harmed by corporate tax cuts because corporations pay two levels of tax whereas most small businesses only pay one, and pass-throughs are already subsidized through the tax code to a tune of

almost \$180 billion per year. Moreover, more competitive U.S. corporations would mean increased sales for small businesses. And small businesses would benefit from the added incentives to invest and conduct research.

Our system is built on compromise. Parties that use narrow majorities to push through legislation tend to exceed their political support and find themselves on the defensive. Leadership consists of accomplishing what is possible, not arguing for the impossible. A bipartisan bill that increases America’s competitiveness and boosts incentives to invest here is possible. One that lowers taxes on the wealthy in exchange for a promise of future growth is not. **RF**

In addition to lower rates, incentives for investment such as the R&D tax credit, faster depreciation, and even lower rates from profits derived from intellectual property would all increase growth.

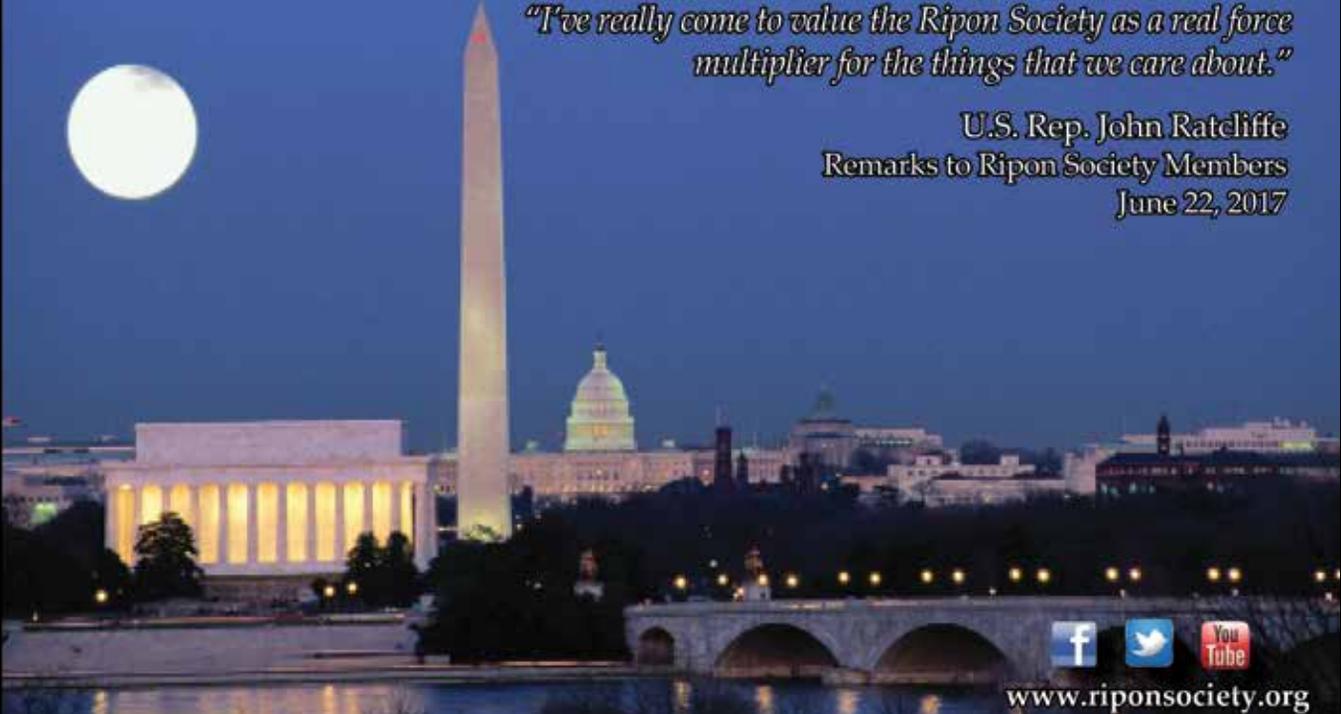
Joe Kennedy (@JV_Kennedy) is a senior fellow at the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, a leading science and tech-policy think tank, where he focuses on tax and regulatory policy.



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Remarks to Ripon Society Members
June 22, 2017



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Doris Kearns Goodwin Delivers Keynote Remarks at 2017 Roosevelt Leadership Awards

Blackburn, Bucshon, Larson, Lucas, Meehan, Pascrell, Renacci & Rice are this year's honorees

WASHINGTON, DC – At a dinner on October 19 in Garden City, NY, The Ripon Society and Franklin Center honored eight members of Congress with the 2017 Roosevelt Leadership Award, an honor that is given in the spirit of America's 26th and 32nd Presidents and one that is intended to recognize leaders who today embody some of the same qualities that Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin Roosevelt displayed throughout their lives.

"Franklin Roosevelt once said that there is no indispensable man," stated Jim Conzelman, the President & CEO of The Ripon Society and Franklin Center, in remarks to open the awards dinner. "And he is right. But there are men and women in Washington who are working to make a difference in the life of our nation every day. With trust in government at an all-time low, we believe it is important that Americans learn about these individuals and the work they are doing."

To that end, Conzelman said, the Roosevelt Leadership Award honors those leaders:

Who have a sense of duty and service driven by a love of country;

Who possess a desire to do what is in the best interests of the American people – regardless of party, and regardless of who gets the credit; and,

Who embody the qualities that Theodore Roosevelt spoke of when he said: 'The credit belongs to those who are actually in the arena, who strive valiantly; who know the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spend themselves in a worthy cause; who at best know the triumph of high achievement; and who, at worst, if they fail, fail while daring greatly,

so that their place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.'

"The men and women being honored embody these qualities and more," Conzelman declared. "Between them, they have over 170 years of service at every level of government. Individually, they have made their mark in many important ways." This year's Roosevelt Award honorees include: U.S. Rep.



Pulitzer Prize winning author and historian Doris Kearns Goodwin delivered an address entitled, "*TR, FDR and the Politics of Today*" at the 3rd Annual Roosevelt Awards Celebration.

Marsha Blackburn (R-TN); U.S. Rep. Larry Bucshon (R-IN); U.S. Rep. John Larson (D-CT); U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas (R-OK); U.S. Rep. Pat Meehan (R-PA); U.S. Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-NJ); U.S. Rep. Kathleen Rice (D-NY); and, U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci (R-OH), who was unable to attend the event.

In addition to the Roosevelt Leadership Awards dinner, Conzelman noted that this year's awards celebration also featured a visit on Thursday to Theodore Roosevelt's historic estate, Sagamore Hill, in Oyster Bay, NY, and a visit on Friday to Franklin Roosevelt's home and Presidential library in Hyde Park. Conzelman added that the awards celebration concluded with

a dinner on Friday evening that featured Pulitzer Prize winning author and historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, who delivered a keynote speech entitled, "*TR, FDR, and the Politics of Today*."

This is the third year the Roosevelt Leadership Awards have been presented. Last year's awards dinner was held at the George W. Bush Presidential Center in Dallas, Texas, while the 2015 Roosevelt Awards were held at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California, and included a visit to President Reagan's historic ranch northwest of Santa Barbara.

The Ripon Society is a public policy organization that was founded in 1962 and takes its name from the town where the Republican Party was born in 1854 – Ripon, Wisconsin. One of the main goals of The Ripon Society is to promote the ideas and principles that have made America great and contributed to the GOP's success. These ideas include keeping our nation secure,

keeping taxes low and having a federal government that is smaller, smarter and more accountable to the people.

Founded in 1978, The Franklin Center for Global Policy Exchange is a non-partisan, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization committed to enhancing global understanding of important international issues. Through regular conferences and events where leading international opinion leaders share ideas, the Franklin Center promotes enlightened, balanced, and unbiased international policy discussion on major international issues.

Photos of the 2017 Roosevelt Leadership Award Honorees can be found on the next page. **RF**

2017 ROOSEVELT LEADERSHIP AWARD HONOREES



Marsha Blackburn



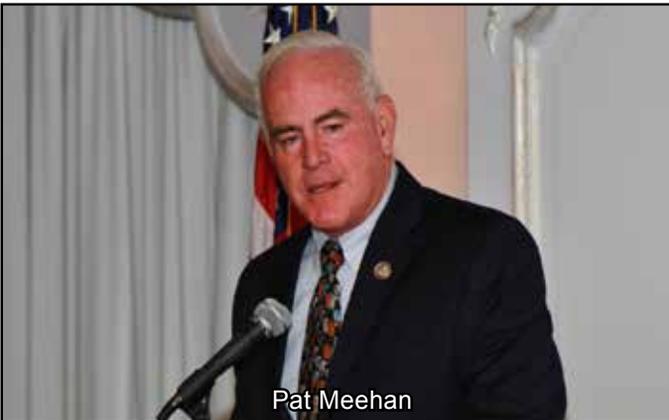
Larry Bucshon



John Larson



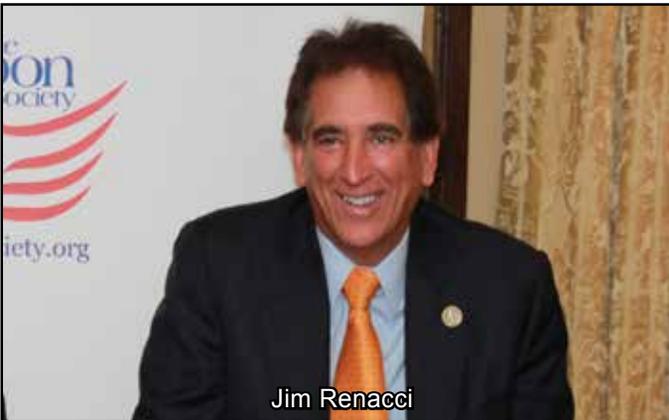
Frank Lucas



Pat Meehan



Bill Pascrell



Jim Renacci



Kathleen Rice

Ripon Profile

Jennifer A. González-Colón

Occupation: Lawyer by training,
Legislator and Public Servant by calling

It's been over a month since Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico. How are the people that you represent doing? My 3.4 million constituents are still struggling from the unprecedented catastrophic impact of both Irma and Maria. At the beginning of November, we were still 70% without electricity; 20% without water service; half the road network still needing clearing and over 20 bridges were either gone or closed for major repairs; only around 150 of the over 1,300 public schools had resumed classes.

How about the economy. What was the impact of the storm on Puerto Rican businesses, and what is going to be needed to help them get back on their feet? The destruction of the utilities and transportation infrastructure and of the supply chain of goods and services paralyzed the economy. Industry could not receive raw materials, run machinery, ship out their products; workers cannot reach their places of employment. This has a huge impact on manufacturing which is 42% of our economy, mainly in pharmaceuticals and medical devices, representing 70% of the island's exports, a 15-billion-dollar market. This is causing national disruptions in supply of everything from cutting edge biologicals, cancer and HIV drugs, some of them only produced in Puerto Rico, to things as basic as IV bags. Closer to Main Street, the Retail Association projects losses of over a billion dollars in business and the potential closing of up to five thousand businesses. Agriculture was devastated with a loss of production of over 80% and recovery times that may extend for years. This is leading government agencies to project at least a 43% loss in revenues due to the lack of economic activity.

What is your top priority now as their Representative in Washington – what would you like to see Congress and the President do, both in the short term and long term, to help Puerto Rico recover? We need to ensure that both short term relief AND long-term rebuilding are addressed. We must make sure the Congress and Administration focus on the real needs of 3.4 million American citizens. We must avoid being distracted by media-driven controversies. There will be more emergency relief appropriations and we need to make sure the agencies are given the flexibility to target the funds where they will do the best job. Legislatively, for FEMA, FHWA and other programs where there are cost sharing or fund matching requirements for rebuilding we need these to be waived or suspended. Housing subsidy requirements need to be flexible to consider the lack of a functioning power grid. Longer term, we need to give the different agencies the mandate to not just patch up what was there, but rebuild to standards of resiliency. Addressing Puerto Rico's Medicaid funding cliff, the Island's inclusion in national tax reform, and addressing the government's liquidity problem will also be priorities. Most importantly, however, we will need to address the issue of Puerto Rico's political status, which is the main culprit of many of the Island's long-standing struggles.

What about individuals. If the American people want to help Puerto Rico, what's the best way for them to do so at this point in time? Contact your most trusted charities and see if they are engaging in Puerto Rico relief efforts. If wishing to make donations directly, Unidos por Puerto Rico is the locally established 503(c) clearinghouse for donations from citizens: <http://unidosporpuertorico.com/en>. Call upon your Representatives and Senators, and upon your professional associations and business organizations, and ask them to work together with me to support measures to make sure that the recovery effort is sustained and responds to the real needs of Puerto Rico. And last but not most important, keep us in your thoughts and prayers.



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