

Promises of transparency blocked in Washington D.C.; few differences between Bush, Obama administrations when it comes to open records

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By **Mark Lisher**



Washington D.C. is where good intentions go to die.

Entrenched institutional routine in departments and agencies has blocked the promise of transparency in the federal government promised by President Obama just after his election in 2008, according to a [perceptive story](#) by the Washington Times.

Government agencies like the [Office of Management and Budget](#) and the [Defense Department](#) have produced hundreds of thousands of pages of documents and have larded web sites with data sets that good government groups complain have little practical use for the public. [Recovery.gov](#), the website for the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is a labyrinthine nightmare.

Jim Harper, director of information-policy studies at the [Cato Institute](#), a libertarian think tank, says the Defense Department's posting of military voting numbers are typical of the sort of information that doesn't tell the public how its government works. "That's important to someone somewhere, but it's not the kind of stuff we're looking for," Harper says. "The good intentions have been there all along, but change is hard, and so the talk of change has started to ring fairly empty here at the midpoint."

And then there is the good, old-fashioned art of stonewalling. The Justice Department has thwarted all sorts of Freedom of Information Act requests made by [Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington](#) pertaining to officials in the Bush Administration and lobbying scandals, executive director Melanie Sloan tells the Times.

"At least with the Bush administration, they told you there was a presumption of secrecy," Sloan says. "The Obama administration is claiming a presumption of openness and yet everything [the Justice Department does is in opposition to that.]"

Those quoted in the story are pretty uniform in praise of the intention of Obama to bring light to the federal government. Midway through his term, this intention has not been realized, they say.

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