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WhiteHouse.gov's Misplaced Speeches

BY ALIYA STERNSTEIN 05/22/09 04:32 pm ET

As the Beltway transparency movement cheers on President Obama's [open government initiative](#), some Washington watchdogs say the arguably admirable feat overlooks important aspects of public disclosure.

On Thursday, the White House Web site unveiled plans for involving Internet users in crafting a directive to create a more transparent and participatory government, but, at the same time, citizens were unable to find that morning's national security speech on the site.

The open government project is "part of a good thing, but I've been concerned-slash-annoyed that the administration is kind of falling down on Gov 1.0," said Jim Harper, director of information policy studies at the conservative Cato Institute. He and Nextgov were among the Web users on Thursday who checked the White House site's "Speeches" section for a transcript of remarks that Obama delivered at the National Archives Building.

Harper found four speeches - the most recent being Feb. 27 comments on responsibly ending the war in Iraq.

"That's basic Web site malpractice . . . to have a section for speeches where the speeches can't be found," he said. The [transcript](#) is available on the site's blog, instead.

Also, the White House site does not include a space for all bills awaiting the president's signature - or even all signed legislation.

"Just the fact of putting bills up in a consistent place would draw average Americans to the Web site so they could see what's going on," said Harper, who runs the legislative-tracking site WashingtonWatch.com.

"I'd hate to be the killjoy" of the open government initiative, but "my concern with the transparency community is that they are kind of distracted with the fancy [Web applications] . . . not changing how policymaking works."

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