

The White House on Transparency

The White House
Office of the Press Secretary
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Statement from the President on Sunshine Week

As Sunshine Week begins, I want to applaud everyone who has worked to increase transparency in government and recommit my administration to be the most open and transparent ever, an effort that will strengthen our democracy and ensure the public's trust in their government. We came to Washington to change the way business was done, and part of that was making ourselves accountable to the American people by opening up our government. We've put our White House visitor records on the Internet for the first time in history; opened up more government information than ever before on [Data.gov](#), [Recovery.gov](#) and [USAspending.gov](#); and issued an [Executive Order fighting unnecessary secrecy](#),¹ to name a few.

We are proud of these accomplishments, but our work is not done. We will continue to work toward an unmatched level of transparency, participation and accountability across the entire Administration.

The White House Blog – Sunshine Over Washington D.C.

Posted by Norm Eisen on March 16, 2010 at 08:00 AM EDT

This Sunshine Week, as we join individuals and organizations across the country in recognizing the vital importance of openness in government, we wanted to look back on the many areas where we have opened government up and let the sunshine in—and also look forward to how we will build on our efforts so far to promote transparency. The White House today issued this [Memorandum from the Chief of Staff and the White House Counsel](#)² taking due note of our successes—and urging the agencies to redouble these efforts in our second year in key areas such as Freedom of Information Act compliance.

While there is much yet to be done, it has been an extraordinary first year. As a result of our overall record on transparency, we received an A grade for our openness work from a [consortium of independent outside government reform groups](#) and have even gotten praise from [those who are sometimes pretty tough on us](#).

We began this work on day one of the Administration, when the President issued a [Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government](#),³ calling for more transparent, participatory, and collaborative government.

Consistent with that approach, the White House this year began [publishing the names of those who visit the White House](#).⁴ Each month, tens of thousands of records of visitors are made available online. This gives the public an unprecedented look at whose voices are being heard in the policymaking process. And in that spirit, we also provided on-line access to [White House staff financial reports](#) and [salaries](#), and a host of other White House information, much of which had never been instantly available by internet before.

To reform a system that too often resulted in unnecessary and costly classification of records, the President also issued an [Executive Order](#) that speeds declassification by balancing the priorities of national security with the public's right to know. The President furthermore [reversed an executive order](#)

[that previously limited access to presidential records](#).⁵ And he issued a [memorandum to begin reform of the government's FOIA system](#),⁶ establishing a clear presumption of openness. The Attorney General affirmed this change when he issued [new FOIA guidelines](#)⁷ for all agencies throughout government. We believe that the first-year Chief FOIA Officer Reports that are forthcoming from the agencies will show progress on FOIA, though an additional year of data (and of hard work!) will be necessary to make a fuller judgment.

We have also adopted a policy of affirmatively disclosing vast amounts of government information. We launched [Data.gov](#) in May, 2009 with 47 data sets but ended the year with over 118,000 all freely available in machine-readable format. By making nutritional information available, the Administration empowered parents to plan smarter meals for their families. By making information on the status and causes of airport delays available, the government enabled travelers to better plan their days. By making workplace safety information available, we helped employers keep America's workers out of harm's way.

Mitigating the risk of fraud, waste, and abuse, the Administration is also tracking how the government uses the money with which the people have entrusted it with easy-to-understand websites like [Recovery.gov](#), [data.gov](#), and [USASpending.gov](#) (the [IT Dashboard](#)). These websites allow American taxpayers to see precisely what entities receive federal money –and how and where the money is spent.

Tying all of these efforts together, in December 2009 OMB issued an historic [Open Government Directive](#)⁸, instructing every agency to take immediate, specific steps to open their operations up to the public. The product of an unprecedented outreach effort to tap the public's ideas, the Directive instructs agencies to place high-value information to the public online in open, accessible, machine-readable formats. It also aims to instill the values of transparency, participation, and collaboration into the culture of every agency by requiring each agency to formulate - in consultation with the American people - an Open Government Plan and website. In April, the agencies will [release Open Government Plans](#)⁹ pursuant to the Directive.

We are proud of our successes, but we of course recognize that much remains to be done, and we intend to redouble our efforts to make government as transparent, collaborative and participatory as possible.

Happy Sunshine Week.

Norm Eisen is Special Counsel to the President for Ethics and Government Reform

¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/executive-order-classified-national-security-information>

² http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/foia_memo_3-16-10.pdf

³ http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Transparency_and_Open_Government/

⁴ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/Opening-up-the-peoples-house>

⁵ http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/ExecutiveOrderPresidentialRecords

⁶ http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Freedom_of_Information_Act

⁷ <http://www.justice.gov/ag/foia-memo-march2009.pdf>

⁸ http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/assets/memoranda_2010/m10-06.pdf

⁹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/02/23/make-your-voice-heard>