

# The Environment

The development of FirstGov.gov introduced a number of changes in the way the federal government operates. First, the project had visible and formal support from the Clinton Administration. On June 24, 2000 President Bill Clinton, in the first presidential Internet address to the public, called for the development of a federal government portal, or single point of entry, that would provide easy and open access to the online services and information available to the public<sup>(3)</sup>. This initiative, FirstGov.gov, was seen as transformational to the conduct of government.

This attention from the Executive Office of the President was one of the critical success factors which enabled the portal to be "open for business" in such a short period of time.

The political environment was also predisposed to support a project such as FirstGov.gov. At a hearing before the House Subcommittee on Government Management, Information, and Technology (October 2, 2000) Senator Horn (R-CA) called for government to be up-to-date in its information management, be well organized for information retrieval and be accessible to the public. In his comments, the Congressman stated that "FirstGov is an important step in making Government information and services available to the public 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. FirstGov -- and electronic government, in general -- offer the potential to revolutionize the way citizens and businesses interact with their Government. The benefits of this instant communication are plentiful, but the challenges are equally profound."<sup>(4)</sup> In her testimony to the same House Subcommittee Sally Katzen, Deputy Director for Management, Office of Management and Budget, praised the early efforts already seen in the opening of the FirstGov.gov website. She made reference to the quarter of a million users that visited the site in its first four days of business. She further reinforced the idea the FirstGov.gov should be made intuitive to citizens, access to it being organized by information or service need, and not by the agency which provides the information or services.

Another business change FirstGov.gov engendered was the speed with which the project was conceived, developed, and implemented. From the December 17, 1999 Presidential Memo on "Electronic Government," to the first presidential Internet address to the public in June 2000, to the launch of the portal on September 2000, we saw the U.S. federal government do what it had never done before - implement a major new technology project in nine months. This shortened project timeline created an aura of urgency, and with Presidential support, enabled the project team to circumvent many of the usual barriers to procurement and acquisition. And while there were many "bumps in the road" to the implementation, the project team as a whole felt satisfied with what they had achieved.

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(3) Remarks by the President in the First Internet Webcast; June 24, 2000.  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/new/html/internet2000-02-24-text.html> (accessed October 10, 2000).

(4) Congressman Stephen Horn,. Opening statement. **FirstGov: Is it a good idea?** October 2, 2000. Accessed September 12, 2001 on the World Wide Web at <http://www.house.gov/reform/gmit/hearings/2000hearings/001002.FirstGov/001002sh.htm>