

CTO Aneesh Chopra - A Breath of Fresh Air

by [Jim Dempsey](#) [1]

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Earlier this week, CDT co-hosted an appearance by the nation's new Chief Technology Officer, Aneesh Chopra. Speaking at the Computer History Museum in Silicon Valley, Chopra outlined how he wants to use technology to address the critical issues facing the nation and how he thinks the federal government can best support innovation. The [video of Chopra's remarks](#) [2] is up courtesy of our co-host, the Churchill Club. [Tim O'Reilly explained](#) [3] at length earlier this year why Chopra was such a good choice to shape technology policy in Washington, and it was impossible not to agree after hearing Chopra speak this week. Chopra is an opportunist in the best sense of the word. He has a grand vision of how technology can contribute to issues ranging from health care to education to the environment, but he also understands the value of incremental steps and short-term results. His talk was peppered with examples from his tenure as Virginia's Secretary of Technology and his first months in the White House, where he is already in charge of an overhaul of the case status system for the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, among other projects promising immediate pay-out. CDT is working on many of the issues Chopra mentioned, including health IT, cyber-security, broadband deployment, and, of course, government transparency. At times, we will be pushing the Administration to go further than it might otherwise be inclined to go in terms of openness and privacy, and we will criticize the Administration when it falls short, but we couldn't want a smarter, more receptive official to engage with than Aneesh Chopra. If I had one criticism of Chopra's remarks, it would be his repeated emphasis on accomplishing things without changing the underlying laws. On the one hand, working within existing frameworks is consistent with his attractive opportunism. However, it is clear that some laws need to be updated to ensure deep, government-wide change. One example is the Privacy Act, which applies to federal databases; [CDT has a major project](#) [4] underway to bring this 1974 law into the 21st century. Getting legislation passed will require White House leadership, and we hope that Chopra, while developing practical tools to make government more transparent and participatory, will also lend his credibility to improving the legislative framework for privacy in government systems. Update: Here are the slides Aneesh Chopra used in his August 4, 2009 presentation in Silicon Valley. [[pdf](#)] [5]

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