NEWS / PROFESSION

# Your Tax Dollars at Work: Government and Government-Related Websites, Part II

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In our last issue, we reviewed a number of websites that dealt with the political, legislative and military areas of government. In this issue, we've decided to branch out and give a more diverse view of what the federal government is providing its citizens via the internet.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation

In 1908, what is now known as the Federal Bureau of Investigation was founded when Attorney General Charles Bonaparte appointed a select group of special agents to be the investigative force behind the Department of Justice. More than 90 years later, the FBI stands as the principal investigative arm of the Department of Justice, with 56 field offices, nearly 28,000 employees and an annual budget of almost three billion dollars. Only a tiny fraction of that three million dollars is spent maintaining and upgrading their website, but judging from its content and ease of use, it's money well spent.

The FBI's site is divided into 11 sections. Looking for a job? Visit the Employment section and fill out an application for becoming a special agent. If you're interested in national crime statistics, stop by the Uniform Crime Reports section, where you can print out reports on crimes committed in the U.S. from 1995 to the present. If you need some background information on the FBI, go to the Your FBI section, which details the Bureau's history, mission and organization.

The FBI's site also contains a search engine and a sitemap. There's a User Tips page for people visiting the site for the first time, and a statement of the FBI's core values from current director Louis Freeh. You can access the FBI's site at www.fbi.gov .

Consumer Information Center

Remember those old television commercials for dozens of free, informative government publications? All a viewer had to do was send in a self-addressed stamped envelope to a mysterious place called the Consumer Information Center in Pueblo, Colorado. Today, you can simply access the CIC's site and download hundreds of publications for free.

The CIC's electronic catalog is divided into 12 categories: Cars; Children; Education; Employment; Federal Programs; Food; Health; Housing; Money; Small Business; Travel & Hobbies; and And More. Clicking on a category brings you to a listing of each publication the CIC offers in that category.

The sheer number of publications that can be downloaded or ordered on line is staggering. The Health section, for instance, offers more than 75 different booklets and pamphlets alone that address such topics as weight loss, osteoporosis and exercise. More than half of the publications available on line are free; other items cost as little as 50 cents or a dollar to download.

Besides the items available electronically, users can also order printed versions of the Consumer Information Catalog and the Consumer's Resource Handbook. Like most government sites, the CIC also has a built-in search engine and links for the latest news and updates to the site. Users can access the Consumer Information Center on line at www.pueblo.gsa.gov .

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THOMAS: Legislative Information on the Net

Named after Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States and the author of the *Declaration of Independence,* THOMAS (http://thomas.loc.gov ) is a free service provided by the Library of Congress. By accessing this site, users can find out about any piece of legislation that has passed or is being considered in the U.S. Congress.

At the top of the site's front page, the THOMAS banner contains schedules for the Senate and the House of Representatives. Clicking on a particular link will display what actions are scheduled to occur in the House for the coming week; any activities currently taking place on the House floor; and a monthly schedule for all Senate meetings and hearings. Immediately below the banner is a search engine for users seeking information on a particular bill. The search can be done by a bill's number or by a keyword describing the bill (such as "chiropractic" or "alternative").

The lower portion of THOMAS is divided into three columns: Legislation, Congressional Record and Committee Information. The Legislation column provides links to the full text and status of each bill being considered by the current Congress, including public laws and other major legislation. The Congressional Record column lists the daily activities in the House and Senate, including the bills introduced and passed, and an "extension of remarks" section which lists the comments made by members of Congress during the course of that day's legislative sessions. Committee Information offers links to the standing, special and select committees of the House and Senate, including a list of the members for each committee; schedules from committee hearings; transcripts from hearings; and oversight plans for each committee.

But THOMAS offers more than just information on current legislation. The far left-hand column of the site also contains links to other government organizations and services such as the Library of Congress, the Congressional Budget Office and the Architect of the Capitol. The site even contains copies of other historical documents such as the *Federalist Papers* and the *Journals of the Continental Congress.*

You won't find flashy graphics and eye-popping animations on THOMAS, but if you're interested in the U.S. legislative process you probably won't find a better site on the web. The amount of information contained in one location, combined with an easy-to-navigate layout and quick download times, makes THOMAS an ideal starting point for people interested in the American political system and how bills become law.

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Other Government Websites

There are several other government websites worth visiting:

• Advanced Technology Program: www.atp.nist.gov

• Environmental Protection Agency: www.epa.gov

- Federal Communication Commission: www.fcc.gov

- Federal Emergency Management Association: www.fema.gov

- Government Printing Office: www.gpo.gov

- National Archives and Records Administration: www.nara.gov

- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA): www.nasa.gov

- National Institutes of Health: www.nih.gov

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: www.noaa.gov

- National Science Foundation: www.nsf.gov

- Peace Corps: www.peacecorps.gov

- Small Business Administration: www.sba.gov

- Social Security Administration: www.ssa.gov

- The United States Mint: www.usmint.gov

- U.S. Department of Agriculture: www.usda.gov

- U.S. Department of Commerce: www.doc.gov

- U.S. Department of Education: www.ed.gov

- U.S. Department of Energy: www.doe.gov

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: www.hhs.gov

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: www.hud.gov

- U.S. Department of Labor: www.dol.gov

- U.S. Department of State: http://travel.state.gov

- U.S. Department of Transportation: www.dot.gov

- U.S. Department of Treasury: www.ustreas.gov

- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: www.va.gov

As always, we welcome your comments.