Research

Voter apathy:

      A representative democracy functions through voter participation. America's democracy, over the last century, has begun to see a decline in voter turnout, with only half of the citizens who are eligible to vote, exercising their right. While reasons for voter apathy vary from laziness to not feeling properly represented, the overall outcome means a weaker democracy.

links discussing voter apathy:
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/july-dec00/brokensystem.html
http://www.govspot.com/features/youngvoterapathy.htm

Research of government websites:

      For our publicness project, we decided to take a look at how the government is represented on the Internet, and how this representation affects the connection to voters. By using the website tracking service Alexa.com, we compiled the different political websites into four categories: Government, Politics, Activism, and News and graphed them regarding traffic rank. (to view data, click on the "research" document) This was done in order to see how political discussions are found on the Internet, such as news, opinion, and activism websites, and compare their online reach to that of the government. websites. It can be seen that the viewer rank for government websites is very low.
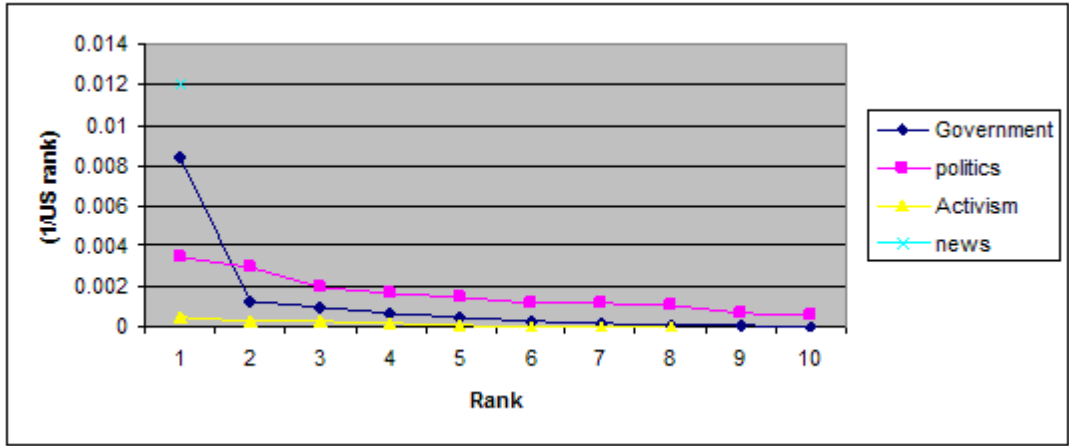
Further analysis examined the top government web site's daily page-views and compared them to that of top political websites. Comparing pageviews of the top two government websites, Whitehouse.gov (rank 993) and usa.gov (rank 2124), to the top two political websites, Slate.com (rank 337) and newsmax.com (rank 285), it can be seen that government websites do not get many frequent users:
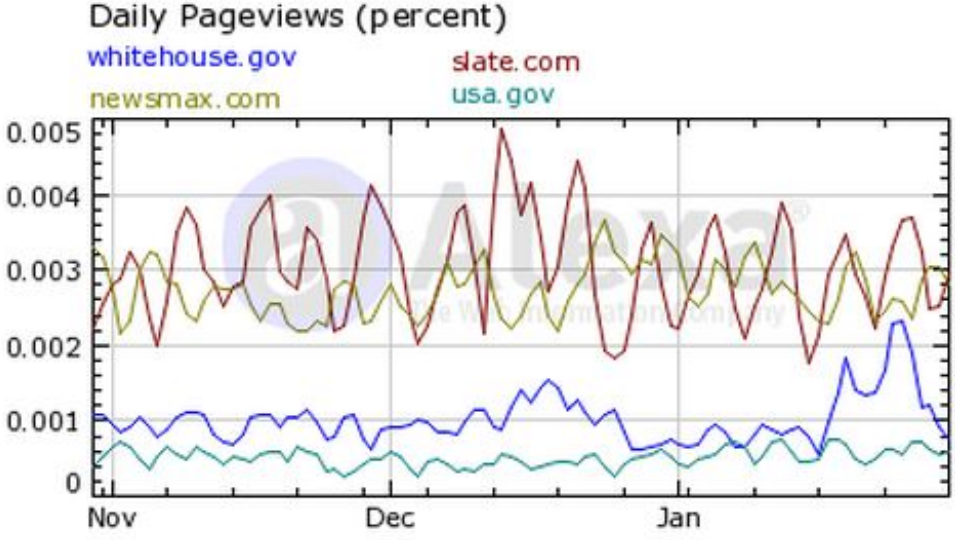
The graph shows a very common sine curve fluctuation for slate.com and newsmax.com. This can be seen to correlate with a steady amount of users during the week, suggesting interaction and viewing the website for information and disscussion during the weekly news cycle. The government websites however, although showing a diminished sine curve, do not have a steady average for pageviews, suggesting that users generally do not frequent the website on a weekly basis.

Conclusion:

Government websites have a relatively low user reach and do not have a large amount

of frequent users.

Analysis of Government websites:

To see how government websites interact with users, we analyzed the top government websites:

Senate.gov:

1- Senators are found in alphabetical order, and the links are provided to their individual websites, which vary by design and options. Lacks order.
2- Committees are also linked to individual websites, varying in design and options.
3- Legislation and records allows the ability to look up Bills, however the process is very difficult- not easy for users to find bill, plus numbering of Bills adds another layer of complexity.
4- U.S. History can be found
5- A search for senators.

House.gov:

UNITED STATES
HOUSE *of*
REPRESENTATIVES

FIND YOUR REPR
Enter your zip code
97068   GO

112th Congress, 2nd Session · The House

REPRESENTATIVES   LEADERSHIP   COMMITTEES   LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY   THE HOUSE EXPLAINED

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

Legislative Activity

Schedule   Floor Proceedings   Votes   Bills

Wednesday, February 29, 2012
Watch Most Recent House Floor Activ

Time (EST)	Session
10:00 am	Hearing: Budget Hearing - Depart Health and Human Services, Food Drug Administration - Commissio *Committee on Appropriations: Agricultu Development, Food and Drug Administr Related Agencies*

6

1- link to representative websites, which vary in options and design.
2- provides top representative leaders of the house, and their websites
3- committees can be found, which links to their individual sites, some of which allow
users to interact via a one-way email:

YouComment

The Financial Services Committee's "YouComment" program allows you to submit comments and suggestions on legislation
that has been referred to the Committee.

How it works!

1. See what bills have been referred to the Committee by visiting Thomas
2. Fill out the form below with the bill number and your comments

	Prefix *	First Name *	MI	Last Name *	Suffix (Jr., Sr.)
Name:					

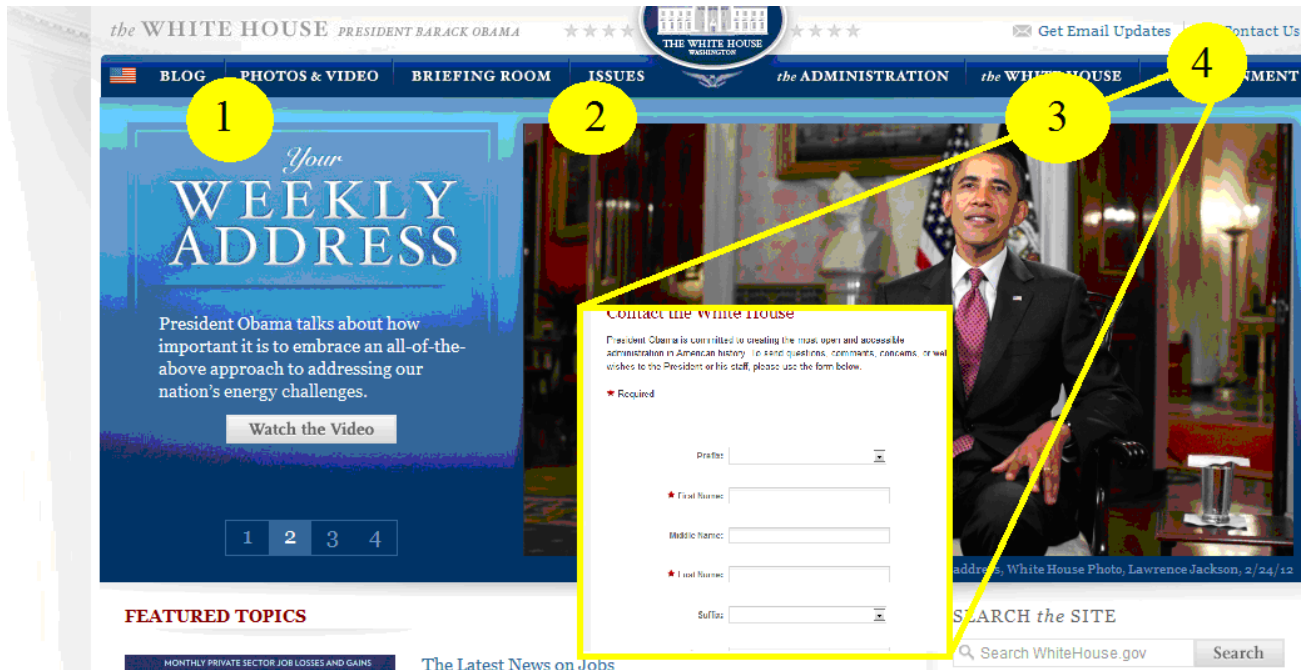* Address:
* City: State: Alabama   Zip:
Phone Number:
* Email:

* Bill Number:

* Your Comments:

4- recent activity
5- education about the political system
6- History of recent events, live coverage, and calendar for future events/hearings.

Whitehouse.gov

1- Listen and read what is going on in the white house regarding legislation and life
2- Issues explained- and the stance of the white house on these issues. Great data
3- Education about the political system and history
4-Contact option, however only goes one-way, no discussions possible.

Conclusion

The government websites are disorganized- when clicking on any link the page layout changes, making navigation hard. The user interaction is very limited, with the only option for communication being email, and not being able to allow any user comments to be seen. The .gov websites can use a makeover to help with the discourse of politics and integrate voter participation.

What makes a website popular?

Taking a look at the top 100 US websites, via statistics from Alexa.com, we were able to categorize them into six types: entertainment, social, search, shop, news, and information.
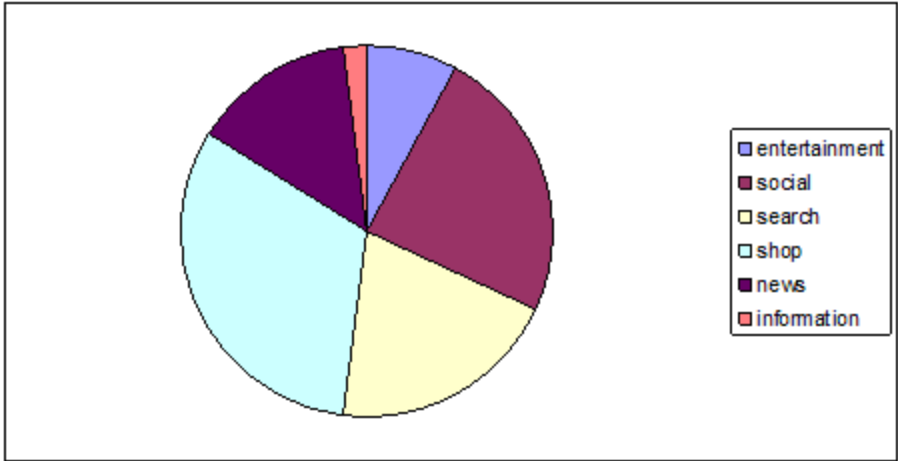
All of these websites share the common characteristic of providing a platform for user generated information and providing a service related to its purpose. Looking at what type of website would best represent the government, our focus was looking into how large social websites are successful. The website that we chose to emulate, due to its successful model, is Reddit.com, Alexa rank nr. 50, which is a massive user content sharing and discussion forum.

Reddit.com-
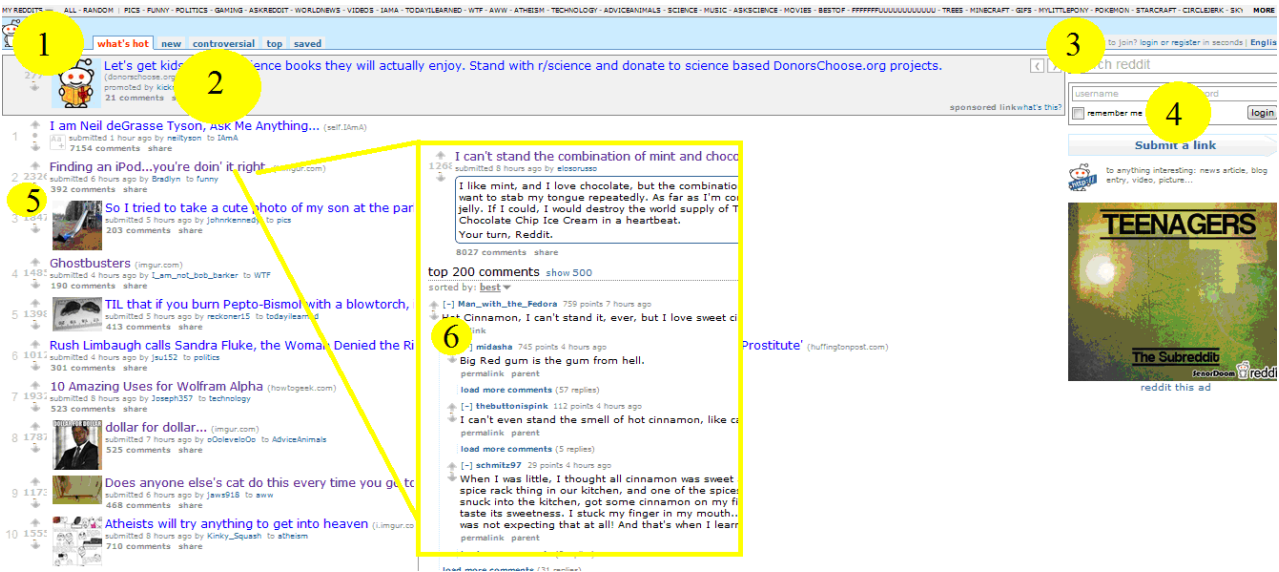
1-list of different subcategories, each of which are a list of top, most recent, and new discussion links and threads.
2-"whats hot", popularity by votes is decided
3- A Google like search for any term and where it came up, with the option to look only in particular sections
4- Ability to have an account, and use this account to comment.
5- Discussions are voted upon

6- Comments are voted upon, seen by everyone, but only commented by users signed in. Replies to comments are seen below the comment to the left to allow discussion and voting on replies to continue. Discussions can be minimized and maximized.

Conclusion:
The success of these websites is due to having a large amount of users frequently visit to post, discuss, and receive information and/or service from other users.

Website Blueprint

Project Problem Statement:
Our research concludes that the top websites in America are websites creating a platform for user contribution, allowing a large frequent user base. This is absent in government websites, which have a small user reach and poor ability for communication.

Project Case Statement:
To create a "blueprint" for a government website that will allow greater transparency, voter communication, and representation through facilitating interaction and communication between the government and its public.

Make everything relate to how this affects EDUCATION , COMMUNICATION, and/or, TRANSPARENCY!!!

Features:

Voting system-
The voting system in this site is designed to further user involvement and communication, giving users yet another medium by which they can voice their opinions. Polls would be integrated into various other content on the site (forums, bills, representative pages, etc.) with the intent of taking data with regards to general user opinions and reactions. For example, polls would be used to measure overall approval

rates for congressmen and bills or to measure approval of revisions made to bills. These polls would all be linked back through a central polling page where users could search for polls on various subjects or through different sorting and filters in addition to being able to generate new polls as they would like.

In addition, users would have the ability to up or down vote every opinion or comment posted to the website would. In this way, comments that made the best points or the worst would be highlighted and either engaged further by users or disregarded as inaccurate, without basis, or even if the user base simply dislikes such an opinion.

Monitoring and Enforcement of Code of Conduct

For the most part, the site would be user moderated, with the greater user population reporting incidents or infractions to the admins and moderators. In this way, the user base is harnessed to help maintain the integrity of the site and it puts most of the power in the hands of the user base as to what is deemed acceptable and what is not (within reason of course).

Moderators for the site would even be chosen from amongst the ranks of the user base if they show a clean track record and good behavior after a given amount of time. In addition to removing illicit content, moderators would also be responsible for checking in on new users and making sure that they are using the site properly (referred to as Period of New User Trial or P-NUT). Such check ins would only be temporary and would likely end after a month or two of showing proper behavior on the site.

Discipline would amount to increasing degrees of muting (removal of posting privileges) and account suspension with repeated infractions. If infractions were numerous or an infraction was particularly destructive, it could be grounds for permanent bans with regards to the penalties listed above.

Home I Top Pages I Leadership I Representatives I Officers I Organizations I Senators I Bills I Republican Party I Democrat Party I News I Whitehouse I MORE... I

Sign In I New user I Your State   Search: GO

Sign Up

First Name:	
Surname:	
Your Email:	
Re-enter Email:	
New Password:	
I am:	Select Gender: ▼
Birthday:	Day: ▼ Month: ▼ Year: ▼

Why do I need to provide my date of birth?

Sign in page: Jordan
- not too much info
- more info on their profile page.
- introduction video showing ethics of the website and how to navigate it.
- have to at least say what city and state you are from so the website can show the things that pertain to that person.
We do not want to overwhelm the person with asking for a lot of information. This site is supposed to reach out to as many people as possible including people that usually do not go on the Internet. Just a simple way to ask the least amount of questions to get their account set up as easily as possible.

UNITED STATES
of

Home I Top Pages I Leadership I Representati...   ...rat Party I News I Whitehouse I MORE... I
Sign In I New user I Your State   Search: [   ] [GO]

I am: Select Gender: [▼]

Birthday: Day: [▼] Month: [▼] Year: [▼]
Why do I need to provide my date of birth?
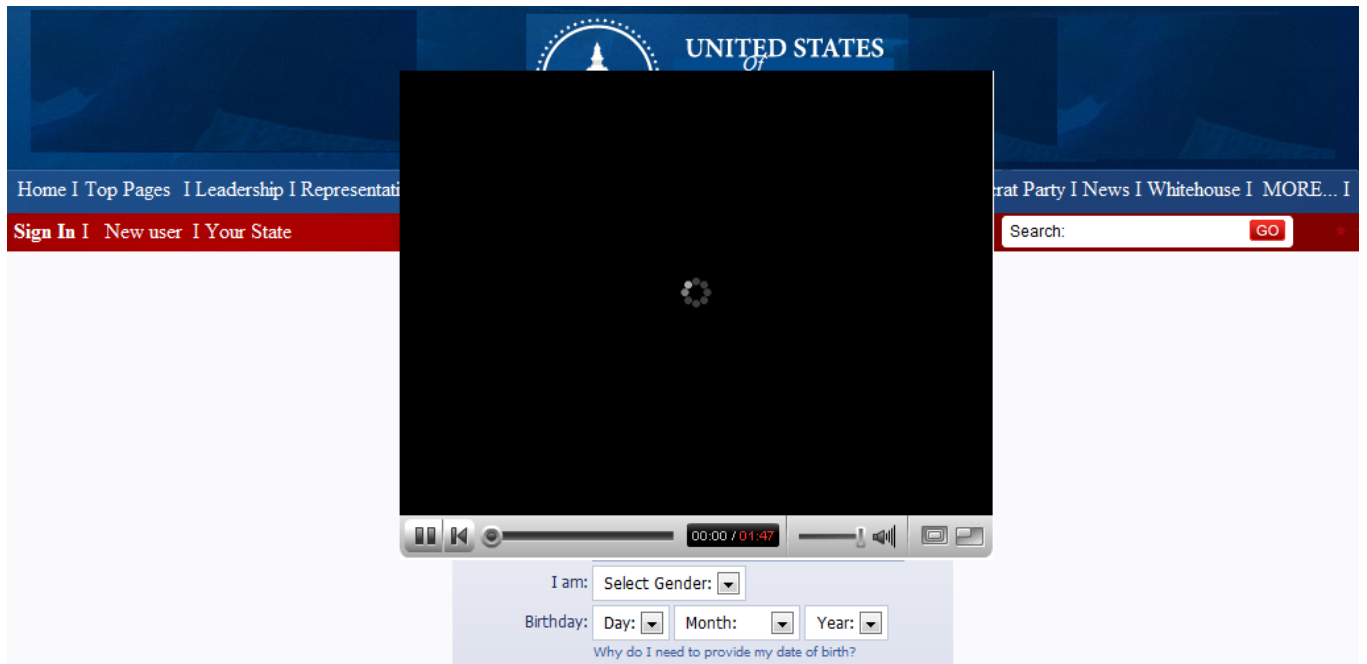
Code of conduct page: Zach

I'm thinking that this would just be a video that would start up after a user completes the sign up process. It would probably lay over the top of the basic home page and most importantly, users would not be able to click out or close the video. The video would briefly demonstrate the various functions and tabs on the website and general navigation components, including how to filter bills, how to use the reference system, how to comment, and how to contact representatives. In addition, the User Code of Conduct would be told explicitly to users along with consequences for reported infractions (temporary comment authoring removal, account bans for increasing amount of time until finally account is banned entirely). After the video was over, users would have free access to use website, but also have ability to view further instructions or tutorials if they would like.

1. Right to free, uncensored speech in line with First Amendment Rights, including the ability to post essays or opinions without censorship.
2. All posts will maintain a formal or semi-formal tone (i.e. proper grammar and sentence structure). In addition, all posts will be respectful in nature, refraining from racial, gender, sexual orientation, or any other form of discrimination.
3. All posts will be subject to reader commentary and critique. However, criticism should be done with respect to the right of fellow users to their own beliefs and vice versa. And under no circumstance will trolling be permitted in forums.
4. Users will be given the right to propose revisions to any drafts of legislative bills posted to the website. These revisions will be voted in favor of or against by fellow users and the results will be taken into account by legislators as such.
5. It will be the responsibility of users to report any incidences of infraction by other users.
There will be admins looking for incidents, but ultimate responsibility falls on the users.

User page:

The user page allows a user to create an identity to use for posting on the website. The advantage of having profiles lies in allowing users to communicate, see each other's comment and point history, and allow the user to add information about themselves. The user profile also acts as a way to make more users want to return to the website, as they have an identity which they "invested in".

-The Profile section allows the ability to enter information about location, sex, politics, etc. Furthermore, the user can add an image to represent themselves, and link up their profile to social networking sites to the likes of face book and twitter.

-The comment history is an easy way to keep up with discussions which the user started or responded to.

-The statistics section allows the user to see information about their "points" acquired, statistics about which sections are frequented, and information about time on site.

Front page:
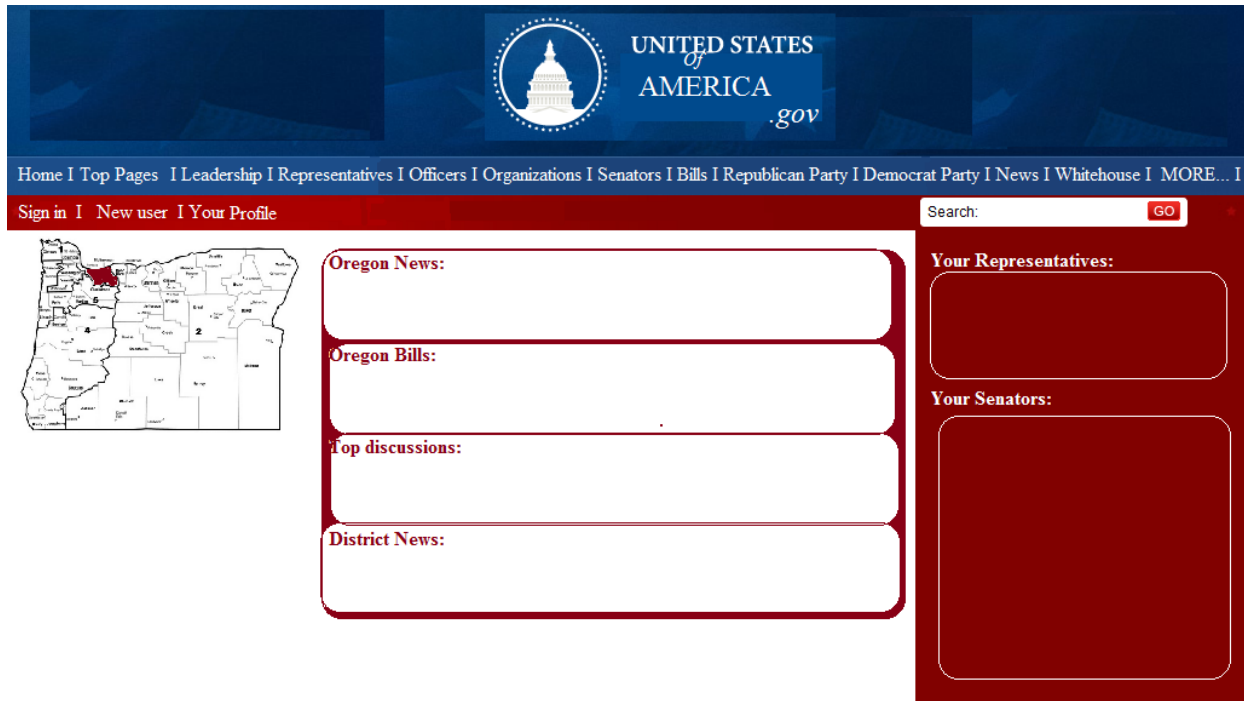
The front page, once logged in, will first focus on the user's home state. The advantage of this is that it will give access to the user's representatives, news, and state bills which have the greatest influence on that particular user. Because state representatives are the way the user communicates to the larger government, the user can communicate their desires directly to the representatives by always being able to click on the representative's name- which will go to the representative's page that allows to comment and see user comments.

"tool bar":

This page also already has the "tool bar" which will always be present regardless of what page is visited on the website. This tool bar allows the user to link to the top discussions of any category, and allows the other options the websites allows to be accessed. The empty blue area, left and right of the logo, is also ideal to put up urgent news, links to video feed, or updates to keep everyone informed regardless of what page they visit.

Bill page:

1 2428 **S.2118 A bill to remove unelected, unaccountable bureaucrats from senior's personal health...**
submitted 12 hours ago by networkdeskpeon
1796 comments share

2 1210 **S.2130 A bill to direct the Secratary of Interior to establish a veterans conservation corps, and for other purposes.**
submitted 11 hours ago by attaboyclarence
264 comments share

3 939 **S.2129 A bill to provide for reforming and consolidating agencies of the Federal Government to improve efficiency and effectiveness**
submitted 10 hours ago by Geaux
240 comments share

4 267 **S.2123 A bill to amend the title V of the social security act to extend funding for families**
submitted 3 hours ago by noirmatrix
63 comments share

5 1698 **H.R.4064 To amend the internal Revenue Code for 1986 to repeal certain tax increases**
submitted 15 hours ago by maxwellhill
1479 comments share

6 114 **H.R.4055 To count revenues from military and veteran education programs toward the limit on Federal revenues that certain proprietary institutions**
submitted 3 hours ago by casebastian321
12 comments share

7 939 **S.2129 A bill to provide for reforming and consolidating agencies of the Federal Government to improve efficiency and effectiveness**
submitted 10 hours ago by Geaux
240 comments share

8 267 **S.2123 A bill to amend the title V of the social security act to extend funding for families**
submitted 3 hours ago by noirmatrix
63 comments share

The Bill page, when clicked, will add another row in the 'toolbar' to allow a selection for specific bill types. The page first seen will be the most popular, where bills can be voted on and are links for further discussion about the Bill. Because the Bills each are given a number, a brief explanation is also part of the title. It should be noted that an algorithm would be necessary to decide what comes on the first page for "popular bills" as there is a trade off between how many votes a Bill has and how old it is. Therefore, bills which would be most popular, but not of recent nature, can be seen when organizing them by 'most popular of all time'. By allowing Bills to be on the most

popular site to only be of recent nature, and then not be shown later, the content on the "Bill" section will have a faster cycle, making users want to revisit the page to look for updates and new information.

When clicking on a 'Bill' link, a comment section will pop up with further options. Clicking on the Bill again would link to the actual Bill document. The options here are taken from opencongress.org, which allows a similar discussion for Bills. First, a Bill summary, that has the most votes, will be displayed in the 'Bill summary' section. Clicking on this section will open up a page where summaries can be debated and voted on. Secondly, the top voted 'Democratic' and 'Republican' stance on the bill will be shown. Again, clicking on those will allow the voting on summaries. The 'other parties' allows for any party- no matter what- to make their own summary for a Bill. The main comments

page would be a forum to debate the Bill, and issues relating it. The column on the right will display similar Bills, who wrote it, representatives who support it, and what organizations support the Bill.

This allows the voters to not just "hear" about Bills, but take an active role in debating, understanding, and seeing politics in action. The ability to see who supports the bill, what interests are part of the bill, and what is being debated part of the Bill, also allows greater transparency through not allowing Bills to simply go through congress without the public's knowledge.

committee page: Alex

subcategories

The committee section is where the website gets into some in-depth sub group areas that keep a running track of bills that correspond to that groups identity. This will be accessible at nearly any window of the website and allow users to subscribe to certain groups that they would like to follow. There will be a groups window that consists of a list of each committees in alphabetical order with the ability to search by first letter or keywords. I really like the concept of the committee page that was originally submitted above this paragraph. I would possibly like to see the committee names in a larger more presenting font, rather then the smaller list style of font that it reads on the page. Maybe the top committee section of the page can be personalized by either the certain state

that you are following, or other committees from users who already are following some of the same representatives. The overall make up of the website should follow the same color scemes through out to stay patriotic and pro-government. This committee section would create a community for people with like views to instill knowledge to each other and all others who view the committees page.

+looks great!

congress member account page: Jordan

-has updates

Congress members will have to ability to also interact on the site. They will have the same access to the site as everyone else. They can view bills, comment on them, and indicate whether or not they support bills. This page will promote more people to get to know their representative as well as have a better opportunity to talk to them.

Live feed page: Alex

center for digital government- live forums

This page was a great idea given to us by Jordan that will allow people to physically view the proposal of bills and discussions of bills in a governmental setting. The video would be treated as a forum hub where comments about examples or issues could arise as soon as they are verbally heard. There would also be a section to the

right of the video that would have a related news and social media hub of information being said about the bill in real time. The focus of this live feed page is to be exactly that, a live look into the reaction people receive from the proposal of a bill. Below the video stream there will be a comment section in the same format as YouTube, allowing for equal represntation to be possible but the comments that people could agree with would go to the top of the page for others to agree on or question. This section of the website promotes viewing governmental videos and gives users fast and reliable information about bills directly from the representatives proposing it in government.

General polling page: Zach

My thought is that the Poll page would provide a general newsfeed of polls from across the website that could then be filtered down depending on subject, party affiliation, state, bill type, etc. In addition, there would be a link that would allow users to generate polls themselves. An algorithm would be used to filter the general newsfeed and which polls are selected by a combination of total hits generated, responses, and how "hot" a poll is (hits in the last hour, day, week, month, etc).

Political discussion page: Zach

I'm thinking this should be a pretty standard forum setup. The tab to the page would have a series of subcategories (political party forums, specific issues based ones, recent news, etc.). Once on the page, forums would be listed by most recently commented with options to order using created date, number of comments, or possibly

even highest rated based on user ratings(?). In addition, there would be a search bar where users could input specific tag words or phrases to see what comes up in the results. For the actual, individual forums, users would be able to post responses to existing comments in addition to up and down voting comments they found insightful or irrelevant and incomprehensible.

Organization/Club page: Alex
        join clubs, they get a page, and see what they are updating
This organization/club page gives users the ability to follow the activities of clubs within the website that they wish to follow. Users would be able to follow any club or organization to replicate governmental transparency through out the entire website.
I think it would be most beneficial if this part of the website was formatted the same as Reddit, allowing each individual group or organization to be able to vote if a bill is important for their interests or not. The more important the higher up on the feed/ comment line and inversely, the least important will find their way down the list of overall restiveness toward the group. A search and filter system would allow users to search by just certain groups or by multiple groups to compare the reactions of bills.

Having followers on the website: Jordan
- One can follow people that have similar views so they can see more bills
People will have the ability to follow others that share and disagree with their own views to get a more well rounded opinion. Users will also have a separate feed in which shows their followers activity.

Encyclopedia for political terms and figures: Jordan

Since one of our themes we are addressing is education, a website encyclopedia would help people better understand political terms and figures. For example, when users click on a bill they want to look at, a search bar will appear on the side that will allow unfamiliar words to be entered in. These words do not have to be purely words from a dictionary, they can be places, people, laws, codes, etc. In addition, the search will keep track of the words most searched by people and they will become highlighted in the actual bill where users can simply click on the word and get the definition.