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INTERVIEW -
Cyberproducts

Moving @ the speed of government

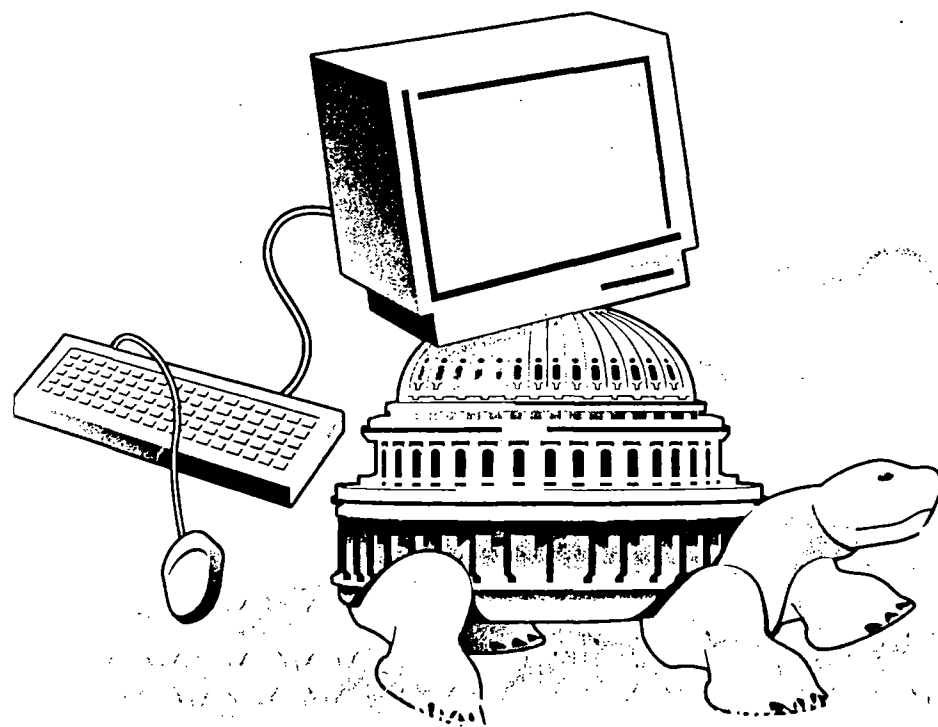
By Martin I. Cole
and Stephen J. Rohleder

Armed with electronic "smart cards," citizens of Spain are tapping into their unemployment and disability benefits through the Internet. In Belgium, small companies are registering for business licenses on line. On the other side of the globe, Singaporeans access electronic government services ranging from getting a marriage license to applying for citizenship, while would-be college students are required to apply to college on the Web.

Yet in Silicon Valley, hot-house for the world's most technologically sophisticated nation, we still stand in line at the California Department of Motor Vehicles to obtain our driver's licenses.

While the business world "dot coms" itself to offer customers more choices and instant satisfaction in the form of round-the-clock information, shopping, service and connectivity, government in the United States continues to move at, well, the speed of government.

The private sector is furiously repositioning — and, as the marketing folks are wont to say, "moving at Net speed" — to keep up with customers double-clicking \$700 billion a year in global electronic commerce transactions by 2002.



By Marcy Mullins, USA TODAY

As the economy undergoes radical transformation, government has a fresh opportunity to re-evaluate its core mission and thereby develop a plan to use technology to do a much better job.

To paraphrase Microsoft's Bill Gates, government needs

to move at the speed of business.

A study by The Economist Intelligence Unit done in collaboration with Andersen Consulting shows the industrial world's governments all heading in roughly the same direction: a smaller, leaner organiza-

tional model. Within this framework, the Internet holds enormous, but mostly unlocked, potential to connect citizens, streamline administration and redirect scarce resources toward important government functions such as social welfare, diplomacy, edu-

cation and policing.

By harnessing the Web, government can deliver better services without raising taxes, because electronic government is cheaper. Moreover, by connecting citizens with government, the Web is the ultimate antidote to bureaucracy. By automating clerical processes, technology can change government employees from gatekeepers and clerks to real customer service representatives and problem-solvers.

Surely, to realize the Internet's promise will take vision, practicality and true leadership. And, in fact, some in government are beginning to act more like

21st-century entrepreneurs than 19th-century bureaucrats.

The U.S. Commerce Department, for example, is planning for electronic applications for export licenses. Dade County, Fla. — home of the nation's fourth-largest traffic court system — schedules cases and delivers documents electronically

to attorneys and judges. Missouri's courts are being networked to allow citizens to monitor cases via the Internet. An electronic job network in Ohio is helping match job seekers and employers.

Working at Net speed isn't for the faint of heart. In both the private and public sectors, it's understandable why some wait to embrace its power fully, because the Web changes every assumption underpinning current operating models.

In the new economy, every business risks irrelevance until it can create a winning value proposition in cyberspace. Similarly, in the public sector, the status quo is no longer acceptable. Taxpayers accustomed to the service and convenience offered by Web merchants are becoming intolerant of the off-line service being offered by government. They are beginning to ask, "Why can't ...?" when frustrated by slow-moving and unresponsive bureaucracy. In the new millennium, they will not fund inadequacy and also will vote accordingly.

The challenges government faces in transforming itself

aren't about servers, routers and firewalls. The issues are more strategic than technical. Government must decide what it wants to accomplish to serve

citizens best and then chart and take the path to get there quickly. Technology allows government to create its future. It's up to today's elected officials to decide what they want tomorrow to be.

In a land of online day traders and frenzied Internet auctions, electronic communication is rocking the corpo-

rate world.

Government must follow the business world's rush into cyberspace, where it can boldly step up to wipe out bureaucracy and truly put itself in the hands of people.

With an electronic government, nothing short of a revolution is possible. And, after all, isn't that what our forefathers had in mind?

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What's morality got to do with it?

What does morality have to do with sexual behavior ("Schools see lesson in arrest of two teachers at sex club," News, Friday)?

How can anyone say that an act between consenting adults that hurts no one is immoral? I frequently hear people denounce certain sexual behaviors as immoral; I don't get it.

Webster's defines *moral* as "relating to principles of right or wrong." How can a consensual sexual act be damaging to "a principle of right"?

Morality is helping others at your own expense. It is sharing when you have more than you need. It is standing up for what and whom you believe in, despite the possibility of endangering yourself or your own standing. Morality is about not taking ad-

vantage of someone else when you have the opportunity and no one will ever find out. It is about being honest with yourself and with others.

Morality is about justice, about being fair and about granting civic equality to everyone. It is about tolerance and respect for all people and animals with which we share the world.

Morality has absolutely nothing to do with what, if any, God you believe in, what ethnicity you are, whether you drink or smoke, how old you are, whom you love or what turns you on sexually.

If a person chooses to make a meager living educating our nation's children — despite the option of making more money doing much easier work in corporate

America — chances are that the teacher is a moral individual, dedicated to making a difference and giving strength to our youth, the people who need it the most.

Our public school teachers are professionals and, as professionals, keep their personal lives separate and away from their work. What sort of consensual sexual behavior a teacher prefers makes no difference to me and indeed should not make a difference to anyone.

Instead of worrying so much about sex, why don't we focus on why so many high school students can't read and write, or why violence has become so prevalent among youth and in schools?

Nicole Nielsen
Salt Lake City, Utah

Why waste on a few?

Columnist Star Parker, founder and president of the Coalition on Urban Renewal and Education, asserts that "just as white segregationists wouldn't allow black children into their schools, white liberals block the doors for low-income children who want to escape awful schools." As a white liberal, I take great offense at that statement ("Time for next steps in welfare reform," The Forum, Friday).

I want all schools to be better, especially those that may now be awful. Vouchers are not the answer; they are but a thinly veiled plan to destroy public schools. Where will low-income children go then?

Vouchers are a cruel hoax. Their proponents offer a false promise to a chosen few. In so doing, they successfully divide low-income parents and pit them against each other. They do the same with low-income education advocates.

Many ask, why not give a few a chance at the best schools? Instead, we should ask, why waste the money on a few students in a few schools?

Why not make all schools better for all students?

Why not concentrate the money on those "awful" schools?

This seems much wiser than wasting money on a foolish program that is unconstitutional and certainly will harm the public school system.

Garry Sisco
Lancaster, Pa.

Tests spoil joy of books

As a teacher and a reader, I was gratified to read the Forum article on summer reading lists for high school students ("Summertime reading lists: What about joy of reading?" Aug. 5).

The column wisely encourages school systems to allow students to read for pleasure during summer months, the way adult readers do.

What a shame to read that Jennifer Wardell, the 14-year-old honor student cited in the column, would force herself to read *Billy Budd* this summer in order to pass a test in the fall. Too bad Jennifer will miss out on the pleasure of reading the book with her class during the school year.

Conversing with friends about challenging books brings new perspectives and insights to all readers and could perhaps change Jennifer's mind about the value of this novel.

I wonder how many readers would join Oprah Winfrey's book club if she announced there would be a multiple-choice test at the end of each month. Tests of this kind give only a small, incomplete view of reading ability.

Participation in class conversations allows students to demonstrate and extend their appreciation of the books they read.

Lee Heffernan
Bloomington, Ind.

Reading ploy worked

It is unfortunate that many students never discover the enjoyment of reading. I must thank my junior-year English teacher, Ms. J.A. Rehder, for opening the doors to the wonderful world of literature.

Every nine-week grading period, as an incentive to get her students to read, she would raise your grade provided that you read and reported on three books from her reading list.

Initially, I read the books only to improve my grade-point average. However, I soon discovered how much fun reading could be, and it's a habit I've continued into middle age.

Thank you, Ms. Rehder, wherever you are. Your little reading ploy had a tremendous impact on my life.

Robert Bondlow
Cincinnati, Ohio

Charges against first lady overlook the facts

Your editorial attempts to breathe new life into outdated, disproven allegations involving Hillary Rodham Clinton ("Infidelity talk gives Hillary Clinton a boost," Friday).

Every single subject that you cite has been exhaustively investigated over a period of many years and at a taxpayer cost of millions of dollars.

Not one of those investigations has turned up evidence of wrongdoing. What's missing in every one of the charges against the first lady are the facts.

► **Take Whitewater.** It was investigated for more than five years by two independent counsels, committees of Congress, the Resolution Trust Corp. (RTC) and innumerable journalists. More than \$50 million was spent; more than 50,000 pages of documents were examined. As a 1995 RTC report (prepared by a Republican-leaning law firm) concluded, "the conspiracy theory is hopelessly flawed."

► **Castle Grande and Seth Ward.** The editorial says that Hillary Clinton did "hours of work on option contracts." In fact, it was two hours — on one option contract. And the same RTC report found no wrongdoing on her part.

► **The billing records.** No one knows how the billing records were misplaced, but no one alleges that the first lady is responsible. In fact, the records support her testimony about her minimal representation of Madison Guaranty. The records show that she billed about 60 hours over 15 months. That averages out to less than an hour per week.

► **The travel office.** Hillary Clinton was concerned about financial mismanagement at the travel office — concerns that were supported by an independent financial audit. But she did not order the firing of any of the employees. Her testimony to that effect was backed up by former White House chief of staff Mack McLarty. There have been no fewer than seven inquiries into the travel-office matter, including congressional hearings as well as an investigation by the independent counsel. No wrongdoing by the first lady was found.

► **Commodities trading.** Clinton's

trades were examined by an internationally recognized expert on commodities markets, Leo Melamed, a former chairman of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. He concluded that Hillary Clinton was "a relatively modest trader. Ms. Clinton's profit, while substantial in everyday life, was minuscule when measured against the background of that market era." Melamed concluded that "she violated no rules in the course of these transactions."

The most partisan members of Congress, the most tenacious journalists in America and the most intrusive independent counsel in history, Ken Starr, have looked into these issues ad infinitum and ad nauseam. And they add up to nothing: no wrongdoing, no case, nothing.

This will not deter the haters for whom the facts will not suffice. They will keep on asking those questions, despite the fact that they have all been answered.

In the meantime, the vast majority of the American people already have decided what matters to them, and they like what the president and first lady have done for America over the past 6½ years in the White House.

Abner J. Mikva
Former White House counsel
Chicago, Ill.

Who's paying for tours?

Now that Hillary Rodham Clinton has declared her intentions of extending her New York "listening tour" well into the fall, isn't it time for someone to ask at whose expense these enjoyable trips are being taken?

Other political candidates must raise money to cover their expenses, and it runs into lots of money. Secret Service protection and other perks for Hillary Clinton's wanderings must be costing taxpayers millions by now.

Is this just one more "first" for the Clintons, or will anyone demand an accounting for Hillary's "noncampaign" trips?

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