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Wandering the Web -- Portals & Politics: Federal Government Gateways

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Wandering the Web — Portals & Politics: Federal Government Gateways

by **Rosemary L. Meszaros** (Coordinator, Government Information & Law, Western Kentucky University)

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What's this? Has the federal government become **Google-ized**, **YAHOO!-like**? In a word, yes! The government megasearch engine of them all is **FirstGov.gov**. Launched in 2000, **FirstGov.gov** works with federal agencies to encourage them to create portals organized around customer groups and topics, instead of agency names. It is much better organized and complete than a later White House initiative, the disappointing, **E-gov.gov** <http://www.egov.gov>. With **FirstGov.gov's** nudge, federal government portals have proliferated. You can see some of your federal tax dollars at work by visiting these gateways to government information. The best point about the "official government Websites" is that they are official. That is, the information comes right from the spigot. Here are a few of the best.

Matthew Lesko, watch out!

FirstGov.gov: <http://firstgov.gov/> — The megasearch engine of them all, **FirstGov.gov** seems to fly in the face of the **USA Patriot Act** by styling itself as "the official U.S. gateway to all government information. . . transcend[ing] the traditional boundaries of government. . . vision is global — connecting the world to all U.S. government information and services." Searches federal, local, tribal, state, the District of Columbia, and U. S. territorial governments' Websites.

FedStats: <http://www.fedstats.gov/> — Gateway to statistics from over 100 U.S. Federal agencies plus all of the states. Search by topic, keyword, or state. **FedStats** also includes links to statistical collections like Statistical Abstract of the United States, State and Metropolitan Area Data Book, National Transportation Statistics, and Health, United States.

FedWorld: <http://www.fedworld.gov/> — Find a federal job — updated daily. Search by geography, adjacency search a position by keywords; you can exclude military jobs.

GovBenefits.gov: <http://govbenefits.gov/index.jsp> — This is a free, confidential tool that

searches for government benefits. It does not require name, phone number, Social Security number, or any other identifying information. A series of questions narrows the retrievals to pertinent federal or state government benefit programs along with information about how to apply.

Grants.gov: <http://www.grants.gov> — Unearth and apply for competitive grants in 900 programs from 26 major Federal grant-making agencies.

Medicare.Gov: <http://medicare.gov/> — In English, Spanish and Chinese, this Website features drug pricing comparisons and other up to the minute information on Medicare.

Regulations.gov: <http://www.regulations.gov/> — Locate, review, and submit comments on federal regulations that are open for comment and published in the *Federal Register*, the Government's legal newspaper. As a member of the public, you can submit comments about these regulations, and have the Government take your views into account.

Recreation.gov: <http://www.recreation.gov/> — Auto touring, biking, hiking, boating, camping, fishing, lodging, water sports, winter sports, and more for every state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. For those of us who, like **Daniel Boone**, never really get lost but may become confused, there are maps and maps and maps, from simple outlines to ones with complicated overlays.

And, finally, a megaportal to search:

Cross-Agency Portals: http://firstgov.gov/Topics/Cross_Agency_Portals.shtml — Gateways that bring together federal information and services from multiple agencies about a particular topic or for a particular customer group. An alpha index navigates the page. A click on College Students brings you to <http://www.students.gov>. There are links to testing sites (GED, ACT, GRE, TOEFL, CLEP and others), preparing for college, choosing a school, details on financing an education, a parents' guide, and much more. Click on Seniors <http://firstgov.gov/Topics/Seniors.shtml> and an array of services

for Seniors appears, everything from Consumer Protection to Education, Volunteerism to Retirement & Money to Travel & Leisure. Interested in After School Programs? Click on it and connect to **Afterschool.gov** <http://www.afterschool.gov> for sites for kids, planning activities, and how to get money.

Cross-Agency Portals is an innovative site which draws together government resources and reveals a new way to research the treasury of government Websites.

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eral Motors to implant tags during manufacturing process to help them recover stolen cars — that data could be misused.

- Governments in search of terrorists could search for everyone.
- Insurance companies could place sensors near cancer treatment, AIDS clinics, hospitals, pharmacies, etc. to gather data and run it against the records of those seeking new policies.
- Libraries/publishers place tags in books and all sorts of bad people and organizations collect the information on the readers and use it for their purposes. (I'd like to know what books **GWB** reads — if any).

Give yourself a few minutes; I'm sure you, like me, have sufficient paranoia/malicious intent in you to think of a few more fearsome scenarios.

But as with everything, one person's problem is another's pot of gold. **Karen Dearn** in the 6 April 2004 edition of *The Australian* reports on a new product being developed by **RSA Security**. The product is seen as useful to both individuals and companies who don't want to be spied upon. Presumably people will one day be able to carry blocker devices around with them to prevent close by or remote scanners from reporting on them.

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