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Remarks: Open Government Summit, National Press Club
March 19, 2014

Good evening! It's a pleasure to be here.

My thanks to the Open Government Coalition for inviting me to speak.

In honor of the now 25 years and one week since the birth of the Internet, this picture is just a friendly reminder of yesteryear… After all, if it were not for the Internet, there would be no talk of open data.

If you are old enough to get why this is funny, you likely have: 1) Never given much thought to open data; 2) Are wondering what the heck JSON is and whether Rosetta Stone sells it; or if PYTHON is a snake or an acronym; and, if you are not old enough, you are an open data, open source disciple and wondering why more people aren't jumping on the band wagon.

As recently as a year ago I had no idea what open data was; but the more I learned, the more I became convinced that the city must embrace it.

When I attended Open Data Day last month, I cannot tell you how often I kept apologizing for being an open data *newbie*. In just about every conversation I kept saying, "what does that mean?" or "can you break it down for me? Talk to me like I am a six year old." And, I might add, there were some kids not too much older than six at Open Data Day, and each one was perched in front of a laptop!

I guarantee you that those kids know a heck of a lot more about open data, open source and developer-speak than I do. I'd like to think it is because their minds are young and nimble and they have no idea that once upon a time there was no YouTube. Just a window and a VCR!

But I am not deterred! Nor am I intimidated by youth! And I stand before you a proud open data/open source convert.

So for those of you who are not so sure, or who are sitting on the fence, hopefully after tonight's summit, you too will be an open data convert – and maybe leave here tonight knowing what JSON and PYTHON stand for. Justin and Leah can correct me if I am wrong, but I am pretty sure that Rosetta Stone has nothing to do with it.

Open Data is the way of the world now. And government in many respects is playing catch up – including right here in D.C. So, before I go any further, let me pause here just a moment and explain to you why I'm standing here today.

When I took this job nearly a year ago, the only budget that existed was the budget for my salary. There was no structure; no mission; only the authority to advise agencies and the public on FOIA; and to enforce the Open Meetings Act.

I quickly discovered that I had to think more broadly than FOIA and the Open Meetings Act. Each is a tool of a transparent government, allowing the public to pull back the curtain on government operations. The same is also true for open data. The availability of data in open formats is critical if we are to advance government transparency. The data generated by agencies is where the rubber hits the road.

Data, although not the entire picture of a government's operations, gives the public a pretty good idea of the effectiveness of an agency, and where it can do better. The availability of data holds government accountable.

And guess what? When cities open the doors to their data, great things happen: citizens engage with their government. Meaning they not only review the data, but put it to good use to improve, or supplement city services. And even better -- show the way for better governance overall.

Cities like Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Kansas City have made open data the rule rather than the exception. In each instance, the use of the data has lead to greater civic engagement. Residents are not only tuned in, but also plugged into their government real-time.

In full disclosure, the District has contemplated open data before. In 2006, the District was among the first cities in the country to release agency data sets.

Eight years ago, the standard was for agencies to release data in PDF, Excel or RSS -- if you were lucky. But the city's progressiveness in this regard has long since fallen behind the strides that many other jurisdictions have made in not only releasing data, but making certain that data sets are maintained and firmly supported by legislation mandating when, where, and how that data is updated.

The District currently has a catalog of nearly 500 datasets from multiple agencies, but much of the data is not regularly updated, and is often static. There are some encouraging datasets like *Fix My City* and *Crime Mapping* and the city is working on policies that will address data formats.

It is my hope that this administration will adopt open data as a standard practice among all agencies as part of its promised Open Government and Transparency Initiative.

But despite the District's lag, there is a steady movement afoot in D.C. Some agency data is more forward facing. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education just released a slew of data in open formats. Everything from boundary participating rates, to feeder patterns and student mobility data.

The recent release by OSSE is an example of the open data, open source movement in DC. Organizations like Code for DC, which Leah and Justin are a big part of, the Sunlight Foundation, and the OpenGov Hub, are tackling data one project at a time. They are hackers, developers, and transparency devotees who are lending their time and talent to improve government and make it work better for all of us. They are providing a public service, and on behalf of the residents of the District including myself, I thank you for it.

In fact, my office links to a Code for DC project: ANC Finder – which brings information about advisory neighborhood commissions into one place. All you do is enter an address and voila! You can find out who is representing your ANC, what committees have been formed, and the demographics of that particular District. This is an excellent example of how data can be parsed, and turned into easy-to-access, easy-to-use tools with engaging visual displays. It benefits every District resident, and the city must do more to highlight these efforts.

The commitment to transparency will amount to nothing more than a noble intention if we do not focus on accessibility. Now, I am not talking about just providing access to coders, I'm talking about the outcomes of what coders are doing with the data. If for example, the public is not able to easily navigate sites like ANC Finder, or easily access and search their laws in a way that is clear and easy to understand, then we will fail.

My office announced just today a partnership with the OpenGov Foundation's AmericaDecoded.ORG and StateDecoded.ORG. The Office of Open Government now offers the public access to DCdecoded which will allow anyone the ability to access and explore District laws. The public may browse, find laws by topic, and scroll over definitions – to eliminate the frustrating legalese that we all encounter. Most importantly, it's all open source.

I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to thank Dave Zyvenyach, general counsel to the Council. The OpenGov Foundation's access to the DC Code would not have been possible without Dave. Thank you Dave.

As you listen to the discussion tonight, keep this in mind: Transparency, and any policies around transparency must always consider every sector of our city and the ways in which residents are accessing information. If transparency is done the right way, it will bridge the gap between those who have full access to technology in its many forms, and those whose access is limited, or non-existent.

The goal of transparency must always be to engage everyone in the civic order. If one is left behind, then we all are left behind. And that, my friends is a true disservice to our democracy.

Thank you!