

I Like What You're Doing, Mr. President...

7:39 PM PST, February 12, 2009

This week, in his first press conference, President Obama spoke to the opportunities that information technologies offer to the health care community and I couldn't agree more with the need and the level of attention he gave it. The Department of Veterans Affairs has been actively dealing with the use of electronic medical records to reduce error rates and long-term health care costs for three decades, and more recently with patient outreach activities, telehealth programs and issues of information security and privacy. There is both a track record [see [Best Care Anywhere: Why VA Health Care is Better Than Yours](#)]



[Why VA Health Care is Better Than Yours](#)] and an existing pool of talent that can be called upon to contribute to such initiatives. While some reporters expressed dismay that the President hadn't resolved our economic crisis during the hour, if they were truly listening he had said a lot... and he also had gently reminded us again that things won't happen overnight.

The President also told us that his 'national security team is currently reviewing our existing Iran policy, looking at areas where we can have constructive dialogue, where we can directly engage with them.' He indicated that 'in the coming months we will be looking for openings that can be created where we can start sitting across the table, face to face, diplomatic overtures that will allow us to move our policy in a new direction' anticipating that 'there's the possibility at least of a relationship of mutual respect and progress.' That at least would bring us back to where we were before the invasion of Iraq, when Iran was cooperating with us in our pursuit of al Qaeda and the Taliban.

Also, The Wall Street Journal reported on Sunday that Melissa Hathaway, a former executive in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and prior Booz Allen Hamilton consultant, will lead a review of the government's efforts to secure our next-generation networks against spies, terrorists and economic criminals for the White House, which is another area of emphasis whose time has come. She sees stronger international alliances sharing the responsibility for securing cyberspace and [the need for a fundamental rethinking of our government's traditional relationship with the private sector.](#) It is time for us to own up to the fact that a large part of our critical information infrastructure is privately owned and that the industry needs to know what Government knows about our adversaries' targets and of their methods of operation.

In the interest of full disclosure, I must confess...

- *that I still work for the Department of Veterans Affairs*
- *that I wrote a story in 2005 about a man who feared for his personal security from Internet threats, lobbied for industry and the Government to upgrade the security of the Internet for the greater good of everyone, to stop politicizing the Iraq war and to stop any expansion of the war into Iran*
- *and that the story's hero was a brilliant junior Senator, who spoke out against the war and traditional 'one-size-fits-all' policies and advocated 'outside-the-box' thinking, who might make a good presidential candidate.*

Bob