

## Ars Technica's tech policy "People to Watch" 2009

With a new, tech-savvy US administration in power, Ars Technica and Tech Policy Central team up to profile the top names in tech policy for 2009.

*By Nate Anderson | Last updated February 4, 2009 11:32 PM CT*

With Barack Obama in the White House, the US has a president who understands—and cares directly about—technology policy. Given this interest at the very top of the power pyramid, 2009 looks to be a year in which significant tech policy changes will be considered. More than a few will become reality.

But who will be steering the tech policy train? Though we can't predict exactly where the ride will take us, Ars has partnered with Tech Policy Central to bring you our first-ever guide to the conductors and engineers who will guide us down the track in 2009.

### How we chose

Thanks to everyone who submitted nominations. The tech policy crowd is a small one, as crowds go, but it still contains enough fascinating people to make the selection of a list like this difficult. In finalizing our names, we first sought those most likely to wield influence in 2009. As you might expect, that led to a fair number of Democrats—a reflection of the simple reality of the power in Washington this year.

When it came time to further narrow down the pool of influencers, our next bias was in favor of those doing something new, interesting, or otherwise innovative—the sort of people who can not only influence tech policy but would also be fascinating to sit next to at your next dinner party. These are people like Sascha Meinrath of the New America Foundation, a creative advocate of open networks who has done work on white spaces and the new Google M-Lab program; or Vivek Kundra, the hard-charging CTO of Washington, DC, who brings Silicon Valley's innovation commitment to government IT work.

No list can possibly please or include everyone who might rightfully have a claim on it, but you could do far worse than getting to know the names on our list. These are the people who will be working on smart grids, broadband deployment, IP law, net neutrality, and even doing a bit of corporate lobbying this year; the decisions that they make (and convince others to make) will reverberate through the tubes for years to come.

*A note on selection:* A special Ars thank you goes to Natalie Fonseca of Tech Policy Central, who helped us develop the idea for the list and who accepted and collated the nominations. The final list selection was made entirely by Ars Technica and does not necessarily represent the views of Tech Policy Central. The TPC folks have included an additional 10 names of their own at the end.

### The 2009 People to Watch List



#### **Robert Atkinson, Founder and President, The Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF)**

In less than three years, Robert Atkinson has established the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF) as one of the leading, and most prolific, tech policy think tanks inside the Beltway. And he's showing no signs of slowing down in 2009.

Atkinson, who advised the Obama-Biden transition's NIST agency review and Technology, Innovation, and Government Reform teams, has been working to ensure that IT measures are baked into the economic stimulus plan that the president hopes to sign into law in February. He also co-chairs the US Broadband Coalition's working group on metrics, and he plans to release several research reports on behalf of ITIF in coming months, including a study that will benchmark the US against dozens of other countries on innovation-based competitiveness factors.

With policymakers and regulators hungry for data they can point to when making tough decisions about the economy, Atkinson is in a prime spot to influence broadband and innovation policy in the new administration. Look for him to make his case in the court of public opinion as well; he's frequently cited by the media and has become a contributor to several tech policy blogs.



**Jim Baller, President, Baller Herbst Law Group and Founder, US Broadband Coalition**

Back in December, we wrote about how telecom lawyer James Baller had successfully "midwived" a Call to Action to develop a national broadband strategy among warring factions in the net neutrality debate. Bringing together so many different factions was no small feat, and now that Baller finds himself at the helm of the US Broadband Coalition, the real fun begins.

Congress is contemplating pumping billions of dollars into broadband infrastructure development, and Baller's next task is to keep the Coalition on track to send a clear signal to DC about what a national broadband plan should look like going forward.

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## RIP and good planet hunting, Kepler



## Carnivorous plant has deleted most of its junk DNA



## Powerful winds on giant planets confined to a thin atmospheric layer



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**Rep. Rick Boucher (D-VA), Chairman of House Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet; Member of House Subcommittee on Energy and Environment; Member of House Judiciary Committee**

Rep. Rick Boucher, a Democrat serving his 14th term in Congress, is no stranger to tech policy. More than a decade ago, the Virginia policymaker co-founded the Congressional Internet Caucus, and he's been credited with helping give rise to electronic commerce by introducing legislation in the early '90s that authorized commercial traffic over the Internet.

In 2009, Boucher is poised to play a pivotal role in tech and telecom policy debates over Universal Service Fund reform, the digital TV transition and net neutrality as co-chair of the Net Caucus and the newly-appointed chairman of the House Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet.

A longtime supporter of improving broadband, he has described high-speed 'Net access as a "defining feature of economic success," and he is expected to be at the forefront of Congressional efforts to spur broadband deployment, particularly in rural communities like those in the southwestern Virginia district.

You can also look for him to weigh in on intellectual property matters like fair use and patent reform as a member of the House Judiciary Committee, and he'll keep a seat on the Energy and Environment Subcommittee that he chaired in the last Congress.



**Steven Chu, United States Secretary of Energy**

What does a Nobel Prize-winning physicist have to do with tech policy? Quite a lot, actually, when that physicist has been named US Energy Secretary. Chu has the ear of an ambitious president who is committed to a "New Energy for America" plan that calls for making energy and cleantech investments a top priority.

With Chu's appointment, President Obama reaffirmed his commitment to elevating the role of science and technology, and Chu is beginning his leadership role at the Department of Energy at a time when the federal government is considering close to \$1 trillion in stimulus spending.

Not only is he an accomplished scientist and researcher, Chu has proven that he can broker tough deals as well. As Director of the Berkeley Laboratory, he was active in helping UC Berkeley win its share of a \$500 million grant from oil giant BP to fund biofuels research at the university, despite criticism and campus protests that claimed the project gave too much power to BP's corporate interests. We expect nothing less than that same tenacity from him as he takes the reins at the DOE.

**Aaron Cooper, Counsel to US Senate Judiciary Committee**  
**Stacey Dansky, Majority Counsel to US House Judiciary Committee**

Rep. John Conyers (D-MI) and Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), chairmen of the US House and Senate Judiciary Committees, respectively, oversee intellectual property matters in Congress, including patent and copyright reform, orphan works legislation, and the battle over performance rights. But behind every member of Congress you'll find hard-working staffers who keep the wheels in motion.

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**Powerful winds on giant planets confined to a thin atmospheric layer**



**Google Maps adds better directions, suggestions, and 3D Earth rendering**

House Judiciary IP counsel Stacey Dansky and her counterpart in the Senate, Aaron Cooper, will have their hands full this year.

Since Rep. Conyers decided to nix the House Subcommittee on Courts, the Internet and Intellectual Property in the 111th Congress, both the House and the Senate will be taking up IP legislation at the full committee level. For Cooper and Dansky, that means their expertise will be even more valuable as they help their bosses try to pass bills that have stalled in previous sessions of Congress.



#### **Michael Copps, Acting Chairman, Federal Communications Commission**

Julius Genachowski may be the president's pick to serve as the next chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), but make no mistake that Acting Chairman Michael Copps is fully prepared to hold down the fort until the Chairman is confirmed.

Copps, who is currently serving his second term at the Commission after 30+ years in public service at the Commerce Department and US Senate, has hit the ground running by implementing a series of changes designed to increase openness and communication within the FCC. He has already told staffers, "If we can't communicate with ourselves, we shouldn't have the word 'Communications' in our title."

He's also adamant about improving how the FCC delivers information to the public and to Congress. Whether his time as Acting Chairman is short-lived or longer than people anticipate, Copps will continue to be a driving force in reforming the agency, completing the digital TV transition, improving broadband, and other areas that he's passionate about.



#### **Susan Crawford, Professor, University of Michigan Law School and Founder, OneWebDay**

Legal expert Susan Crawford has been a persistent supporter of open access and network neutrality principles, taking the Bush administration and incumbent telcos to task and calling on the federal government to make broadband access "a utility" that is available to all Americans. So the fact that she recently co-chaired the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) review team for the Obama-

Biden transition is not insignificant.

It's still too early to say what impact she will have on the Commission's agenda in coming months, but you can be sure that the outspoken Crawford will continue to be vigilant on telecom matters. She is also continuing a grassroots effort to evangelize OneWebDay, her "Earth Day for the Internet" celebration, and it's hard to imagine her not taking a keen interest in Internet governance debates even though she's no longer on the board at ICANN.

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**Alan Davidson, Director of US Public Policy and Government Affairs for Google**

**Richard Whitt, Washington Telecom and Media Counsel for Google**

Alan Davidson opened Google's DC office as a one-man policy shop back in 2005, and the company has since grown its presence in the nation's Capitol as only Google can. Davidson, a computer scientist-turned-lawyer with particular expertise in digital privacy and intellectual property issues, now finds himself

overseeing a policy portfolio that runs the gamut from energy efficiency and Internet filtering to child safety and net neutrality.

On telecom matters, Davidson has the help of heavy hitters like former MCI exec Richard Whitt, who joined the company a couple of years ago—just in time to take on the FCC and his former telco colleagues in high-profile battles over the 700 MHz spectrum auction and the white spaces.



Those victories notwithstanding, Google's policy team has plenty of work ahead of it, as evidenced by its laundry list of 2009 priorities: protecting an open Internet, promoting broadband competition and access, increasing H-1B visas, and accelerating the deployment of smart electric grids.

(Davidson photo by Sasha Aslanian)



**Jim Dempsey, VP for Public Policy for the Center for Democracy & Technology**

One of the original warriors in the fight to protect online privacy and civil liberties, Jim Dempsey heads the Center for Democracy and Technology's (CDT) West Coast office in San Francisco where he focuses on digital privacy, security, and government surveillance issues.

Along with CDT's president and CEO Leslie Harris, Dempsey regularly serves as an advocate and spokesperson for the organization on its many policy initiatives. Currently, he's focused on rewriting and updating the Electronic Communications Privacy Act, an undertaking that could have far-reaching implications given the amount of personal data now being stored digitally.



**Ed Felten, Professor of Computer Science and Public Affairs and Founding Director of the Center for Information Technology Policy, Princeton University**

While the jury is still out on who will be named as the nation's first chief technology officer (CTO), there are strong supporters in Ed Felten's camp who believe his blend of tech savvy and policy expertise are just what the job requires.

For example, along with his colleagues at Princeton, he's made a compelling

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argument for greater government transparency. But instead of encouraging the Feds to simply publish more data on their Web sites, he has called on the government to make the underlying data accessible for reuse and sharing via mash-ups and other apps.

It's that kind of out-of-the-box thinking—along with his pragmatic approach to policy challenges—that makes Felten interesting to watch. So, even if he isn't the president's pick for CTO, Felten's fans can take comfort in the fact that he'll continue to be a key contributor to the tech policy community in the year ahead.

(Photo by Joseph Lorenzo Hall)



**Julius Genachowski, Co-founder, LaunchBox Digital and Rock Creek Ventures (expected to be Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission )**

He hasn't officially been named yet as the next chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, but Julius Genachowski is still on everyone's list these days as someone to watch in the Obama administration. And for good reason.

Following his days at Harvard Law School, Genachowski went on to clerk at the Supreme Court, work as a Congressional staffer, and serve as general counsel for FCC chairman Reed Hundt—all before launching a successful career as a tech executive and venture capitalist.

A longtime friend of the president's, he helped craft Obama's technology and innovation agenda during the presidential campaign and stepped in to co-chair the transition team's Technology, Innovation, and Government Reform group. His work on both helped establish much of the groundwork for what can be expected from the administration in the first term. It also points to how he might act as chairman of the FCC, where it's expected he would be a strong backer of increasing broadband access and protecting network neutrality.



**Jim Harper, Director of Information Policy Studies, Cato Institute and Founder, WashingtonWatch.com**

If you feel like someone is tracking every move you make, don't blame Jim Harper. A scholar at the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute, Harper has been on a crusade to prevent the US from implementing a national identification card system, something he describes as a "profound threat to American liberty."

During the Bush administration, Harper was outspoken about the dangers of allowing the government to monitor citizens via electronic identification programs like REAL ID. With a new administration and Congress, we'll be watching to see what approach they take to these issues—and how Harper responds. There's already talk in Congress of expanding use of the E-verify program to check the employment eligibility of US workers, so we may not have long to wait.



**John Holdren, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology, Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and Co-Chair of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST)**

Described by President Obama as one of the "most passionate and persistent voices of our time about the growing threat of climate change," John Holdren will bring a new perspective to the top spot at the Office of Science and Technology Policy. He's an accomplished researcher who shares the president's commitment to scientific inquiry and, along with his two co-chairs, he will be tasked with remaking the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology.

Still, the fact that Holdren isn't the only physicist on this year's tech policy People to Watch list hasn't gone unnoticed by us (see Steven Chu). He's primarily been focused on energy and climate issues in recent years, and it is expected that those matters will be atop his agenda at OSTP and PCAST as well.



**Fred Humphries, Managing Director of Federal Affairs, Microsoft Corporation**

Though not without its missteps, Microsoft can be credited with blazing a trail for tech companies that followed its path to Washington. Even today, more than a decade after the Justice Department filed its landmark antitrust case against the software company, Microsoft finds itself on the front lines of key legislative battles involving the tech industry.

Fred Humphries is leading that charge now as the company's new policy chief. Humphries, who recently moved from Redmond to DC to replace legendary lobbyist Jack Krumholtz, will draw upon his vast network and his years of local and state government affairs experience to advance Microsoft's policy priorities, which include promoting health IT, protecting intellectual property, and increasing H-1B visas.

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### Vivek Kundra, Chief Technology Officer, District of Columbia Government

Vivek Kundra is the chief technology officer (CTO) for the District of Columbia, where he's responsible for meeting the technology needs of 86 government agencies that serve over 600,000 residents, along with scores of commuters and visitors who descend upon the nation's Capitol each day.

DC's CTO since 2007, Kundra has earned accolades for cutting costs and rethinking the way technology is used by government—a prime example is his successful [Apps for Democracy](#) contest that challenged developers to build new applications for sharing city data with citizens, at a fraction of what it would have cost to farm out the work.

As a member of President Obama's transition team, he has talked about the need to drive change within the federal government by focusing on innovation and outcomes instead of compliance and process. Such an approach would represent a radical departure from how many federal agencies currently operate, and Kundra just may get the chance to effect that change as the country's first national CTO. Even if he doesn't, his example in DC will be closely watched by government IT administrators around the country.



### Sascha Meinrath, Research Director, Wireless Future Program, New America Foundation

Before joining New America Foundation in 2007, Sascha Meinrath previously worked as a policy analyst, telecom consultant, and community organizer. The skills he developed in those three different roles undoubtedly have influenced his current work as research director at New America's Wireless Future program where he and Michael Calabrese are striving to reform US telecommunications policy, particularly spectrum access, one challenging step at a time.

In addition to his research on municipal broadband networks and net neutrality, Meinrath is heading up a new Open Technology Initiative (OTI) on behalf of New America, and he helped produce the [new network metrics site M-Lab](#). OTI's charter is to advocate policy and regulatory changes that support open architectures, technologies, and communications networks.



### Ellen Miller, Co-founder and Executive Director, Sunlight Foundation

As executive director of the Sunlight Foundation, Ellen Miller is working to open up Washington DC politics so that the public is aware of what happens behind closed doors (and in broad daylight).

She's leading the effort to increase government transparency and accountability using the power of the Internet and, under her direction, Sunlight has already liberated gigabytes of important political data and made it available to bloggers, journalists, and other citizens—in effect creating a new generation of DC watchdogs.

Miller co-founded Sunlight during the last half of Bush's second term, and her work will be sure to evolve during the Obama administration, which has vowed to promote greater transparency.

### Jon M. Peha, Chief Technologist, Federal Communications Commission

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### Carnivorous plant has deleted most of its junk DNA



### Powerful winds on giant planets confined to a thin atmospheric layer



### Google Maps adds better directions, suggestions, and 3D Earth rendering



Before being named chief technologist for the Federal Communications Commission last October, Jon Peha worked as an engineering professor at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) where he was also associate director of the Center for Wireless and Broadband Networking. A CTO with startup experience, Peha's research interests while at CMU included spectrum policy reform, network neutrality, and public safety communications.

As recently as last April, Peha testified before the FCC at its hearing on Comcast's network management practices, criticizing the cable company while urging the Commissioners to be "cautious about adopting broad restrictions." Though not everyone agreed with his testimony then, now—as the FCC's senior advisor on technology issues—Peha finds himself in a unique position to influence the Commission's decisions more directly.



**Eric Schmidt, Chairman and CEO, Google and Chairman of New America Foundation**

One of the perks of being chairman and CEO of a company as pervasive as Google is that Eric Schmidt needs no introduction. What wasn't obvious a mere year ago was how involved he would become in presidential politics and policy. Since publicly endorsing Barack Obama's candidacy in late October, Schmidt has become a frequent spokesman for Obama's innovation and economic policies, a

role that was made official when he was named as a member of the transition team's economic advisory board.

He has repeatedly denied that he's interested in a more permanent spot in the President's Cabinet, say as the national CTO. That doesn't mean he won't have a seat at the table, though. As skeptics have been quick to point out, Schmidt and Google seem to have more than a few hooks into the new administration and you can be sure that he'll continue to be a power player throughout 2009. He has also stepped up his involvement in New America Foundation, a nonprofit think tank he has been affiliated with for a number of years.

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### Ben Scott, Policy Director, Free Press

As the chief DC lobbyist for Free Press, the advocacy group behind the Save the Internet and Stop Big Media campaigns, Ben Scott keeps a watchful eye on the country's telecom and media giants—and he's ready to react when he disagrees with them.

He helped reignite the net neutrality debate last year by leading the Free Press offensive against Comcast, energizing legions of grassroots net neutrality supporters in the process. Even those who dislike Free Press's in-your-face tactics have lauded Scott for his know-how and grit, both of which we expect to see more of in 2009.



### Gigi Sohn, Co-founder and President, Public Knowledge

A perennial presence on the tech policy scene, Gigi Sohn is a force to be reckoned with. She is the face—and voice—of Public Knowledge, the nonprofit interest group she co-founded in 2001. If there's a policy debate involving consumers' digital rights, you can bet Sohn will be involved to make sure PK's concerns are heard.

Already, Sohn has participated in a number of meetings with President Obama's transition team; several PK advisors served on the transition. She has also known Julius Genachowski for years, which makes her latest project to reform the Federal Communications Commission all the more compelling.



### Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA), Chairman, US House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. Henry Waxman became chairman of the House of Representative's powerful Committee on Energy and Commerce after making a bold move to unseat his Democratic colleague John Dingell, who had long held the committee chairmanship. The California politician, whose district encompasses parts of Los Angeles, has proven that he's ready to take on tough challenges, even if it means making waves within his own party.

Along with the Judiciary, the Energy and Commerce committee is one of the most important for technology policy. Rep. Waxman's purview will include critical issues like network neutrality, FCC oversight and the digital TV transition. While it's widely believed that he will focus first on energy policy, we'll be watching to see what he does in regards to other areas like intellectual property and broadcast regulation as well.

### Joe Waz, Senior Vice President, External Affairs and Public Policy Counsel, Comcast Corporation

After spending much of last year in the hot seat defending its network management practices before the FCC and critics like Free Press, what will 2009 hold for Comcast? One person likely to shape the answer to that question is the cable company's policy chief, Joe Waz.

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In a parting shot before his departure last week, former FCC chairman Kevin Martin raised questions about Comcast's handling of VoIP calls, and the company is moving ahead with its appeal of last year's FCC decision against its throttling of BitTorrent users even though it has since changed how it manages its network. Chances are that Comcast, and Waz, will need to keep defending their practices as the FCC changes hands and net neutrality supporters gear up for another fight.



**Phil Weiser, Professor of Law, Associate Dean for Research and Executive Director of Silicon Flatirons Center, University of Colorado Law School**

Boulder, Colorado still may not be the first place that comes to mind when you think of tech policy, but professor Phil Weiser has done a great deal to raise the profile of the University of Colorado's Silicon Flatirons Center. As the Center's executive

director, he's created an innovative environment for research in telecom and information policy law.

A former attorney for the Justice Department's antitrust division, Weiser co-chaired the Federal Trade Commission review team during the Obama-Biden transition. He also recently launched a project to promote reform of the Federal Communications Commission, along with Public Knowledge president Gigi Sohn.

### Tech Policy Central's names to watch

Our partners at Tech Policy Central, who helped oversee the nomination process for the People to Watch list, had a few additional picks of their own that we'd like to share with you. Here are 10 more people to look for in '09:

- Lawyer Christine Varney
- Commerce Secretary designate Judd Gregg
- Dean Garfield of the Information Technology Innovation Council
- Link Hoewing of Verizon
- Tom Kalil of UC Berkeley
- Law professor Beth Noveck
- Jules Polonetsky of the Future of Privacy Forum
- Telecom analyst Blair Levin
- Congressman Rush Holt of New Jersey
- Fred von Lohmann of EFF

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**Nate Anderson** / Nate is the deputy editor at Ars Technica, where he oversees long-form feature content and writes about technology law and policy. He's currently at work on a book about Internet policing.

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