

October 7, 2010, 5:44 PM ET

The Makings Of A 'National Cyber Leap'

America's chief technology officer, Aneesh Chopra, [vowed last year](#) that the country would experience a "national cyber leap-year," where new technologies would be applied to many of the country's toughest challenges.

While the country may not have leapt away from its problems, it has made significant jumps forward, Chopra said Wednesday to a group of investors and entrepreneurs at a health-care information-technology summit in San Francisco hosted by venture firms Morgenthaler Ventures and Venrock and financial services firm Silicon Valley Bank.

The Obama administration has launched short- and long-term initiatives that will make government data more freely available, digitize the country's medical records and speed the time to market for cloud-computing companies. Additionally, government departments have been offering prizes and other incentives to independent software developers who build applications that streamline their work.

"By opening up government data, we believe we have opened up a new channel of public participation," he said, adding that the Department of Agriculture recently handed out a prize for a developer who turned newly available government data on food into an application that functions as a sort of nutrition calculator.

"This notion, of prizes and competition policy as a channel for entrepreneurs, is something we have hard-wired into every level of government," he said.

Additionally, the Veterans' Administration – besieged by complaints that much of its data is too unwieldy for veterans to navigate – will announce the "blue button initiative," a technological tweak to its Web site by independent developers that makes health records easier to find and download, Chopra said.

That agency alone has set aside \$80 million for new technologies, he added.

The administration also has longer-range plans that will make the country more tech-savvy and give developers more of a platform to showcase their technologies.

Besides working out a 10-year plan to double the amount of available wireless spectrum – which could be a boon for the country's technology industry – the government is working to speed the development of cloud computing, Chopra said.

He cited the example of Rich Wolski, a University of California-Santa Barbara professor who in 2007 admired the cloud-based system built by Amazon.com Inc., and wanted to build a similar system for computer-science research documents.

After getting an exploratory grant from the government, Wolski and others founded Eucalyptus Systems Inc., a company that builds private, cloud-based systems, Chopra said.

Since the Obama administration has a keen eye out for emerging technology players, they got wind of Eucalyptus Systems, and steered NASA to become the company's first customer, he said. In July the company landed \$20 million in a second round of funding led by New Enterprise Associates. Benchmark Capital and BV Capital are also investors.

Using Eucalyptus' platform, NASA built a facility to manage cloud services at Moffett Air Field, Chopra said, and the White House now operates [USASpending.gov](#) – a site devoted to transparency in government spending – out of the facility in Moffett Field.

"This is about decreasing the cycle time between the university ecosystem to the commercial marketplace," Chopra said.

Rebecca Lynn, a partner at Morgenthaler Ventures, said her firm has been impressed by the amount of data that the government has made available and will seek to invest in start-ups that can build new applications on top of the data.

Lynn, a former Procter & Gamble executive with a background in engineering, consumer finance, and brand and online marketing, in May was promoted from principal to partner at Morgenthaler as part of the firm's increasing focus on consumer Internet, mobile and cloud start-ups.