

Facebook to help Congress expand online reach

November 17 2011



US House Minority Whip Representative Steny Hoyer, pictured in March 2011. Leaders of the Republican and Democratic parties in the US Congress are reaching out to Facebook to help develop online tools to connect with their constituents.

Leaders of the Republican and Democratic parties in the US Congress are reaching out to Facebook to help develop online tools to connect with their constituents.

They announced plans on Thursday to host a "hackathon" next month featuring members of Congress, their staffers, [Facebook](#) developers and others.

The first-ever "Congressional Facebook Developer Hackathon," to be held on December 7, will "explore the potential connections between

legislative data, constituent correspondence, and social media," the Republican and Democratic leaders of the House of Representatives said in a statement.

"Americans have a right to petition government, and new online technologies are giving that right exciting new possibilities," said Steny Hoyer, leader of the Democratic minority in the House.

"[Members of Congress](#) have a duty to embrace these technologies to make the legislative process as open and accessible as possible," Hoyer said. "We welcome the help and advice of industry leaders like Facebook, as well as individuals and academics who have innovative ideas on how to do so."

Eric Cantor, leader of the Republican majority in the House, said with social media playing a larger role, "it is essential that Congress fully incorporate these platforms into its daily operations.

"[Software developers](#), designers and program engineers have a unique opportunity to help us improve the legislative process resulting in more citizen engagement," Cantor said. "We are very excited about working together and getting started."

The use of social media by the US Congress has exploded over the past few years and most members now have Facebook, [Twitter](#) or [YouTube](#) accounts in addition to websites.

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Citation: Facebook to help Congress expand online reach (2011, November 17) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-11-facebook-congress-online.html>

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