

High court to adopt electronic filing of cases

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The Supreme Court is belatedly developing an electronic filing system similar to those used in courts around the country, Chief Justice John Roberts said Wednesday in his annual end-of-year report.

Roberts devoted his 10th report as chief justice to discussing the [court's](#) wary embrace of [information technology](#) over the years, which he attributed in part to the judiciary's role as neutral arbiters of a justice system that must be open to all.

Roberts said that "courts will always be prudent whenever it comes to embracing the 'next big thing.'"

The chief justice talked about the pneumatic tubes that were on the cutting edge of [technology](#) in the late 1800s, but not used by the court until its new building opened in 1935. Roberts did not once mention cameras, which are barred from the court's proceedings.

The court's new filing system could be up and running as soon as 2016, although parties in the court's cases will continue to be required to submit paper copies of every brief, Roberts said.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, the Vermont Democrat who is the outgoing chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the court should be doing more to allow the public to have meaningful access to the justices' work. "Not mentioned in his report, however, is the failure of the Supreme Court to allow even old technology, like photographs of the Supreme Court in session or live streaming of its oral arguments online,"

Leahy said.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, the Iowa Republican who is about to become chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the court needs to do more to make its activities accessible to the public.

"In his year-end report, Chief Justice Roberts rightly promotes how the courts have embraced new technology," he said. "Unfortunately, though, the courts have yet to embrace the one technology that the founders would likely have advocated for—cameras in the courtroom. The founders intended for trials to be held in front of all people who wished to attend."

Grassley has previously introduced legislation to allow cameras in federal courtrooms and plans to do so again.

Under current plans, the court's website will be modified to allow the public free, clickable access to all documents. The private online legal publication Scotusblog already offers that service at no charge.

The environmental benefits of the change were unclear. Lawyers must submit up to 40 paper copies of every brief, and it was unclear from the report whether that number—as well as the massive amount of paper that moves through the marble courthouse—will be reduced eventually.

Roberts said the rest of the federal judiciary, which already relies on electronic case filing, also is developing a more advanced system.

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