We've all been hearing that our president-elect is a power user of technology. But I didn't grasp the full extent until my daughter, taking time off from college to work on Obama's campaign, started forwarding me e-mails and text messages from the battleground states.

The constant stream of electronic communication was impressive, connecting to complex but richly interactive databases, making incessant use of video and making recipients virtual participants in backstage conclaves with the candidate. It made Obama's volunteers feel totally connected and fully empowered.

For the first time, it seems we've elected a president who really gets it — who thoroughly understands the power and potential of technology to shape our nation's future. But how Obama actually uses his tech smarts in order to govern remains to be seen. I'm hoping he'll follow those same instincts that served him so effectively in the campaign, and that he'll do this in full partnership with Silicon Valley, the nation's epicenter for technology.

Here are four things the new president can do immediately to leverage technology for the national interest:

1. Appoint a tech czar. The United States needs a chief technology officer. It's unacceptable, for example, that the 2010 census takers will still be using paper. Obama should appoint and empower an agent who will bring the nation into the 21st century. Where will he find this person? In Silicon Valley, of course. There are a legion of worthies here who would be honored to serve their country.

2. Make electronic medical records the right of every American. Most of the health care reforms Obama seeks will be hard going, and in any case will need to take a back seat to fixing the economy. Electronic medical records, by contrast, are something he can accomplish now.

Support for this is nearly universal — both Obama and John McCain called for it on the campaign trail — but it won't work unless the system is truly national and the providers are regulated, so that they have to share information that they currently regard as proprietary. Yes, there are security and privacy issues, but the solutions already exist. The remaining barriers are not technical in any way, and they will evaporate in the face of vigorous leadership.
Where is the savvy to tap for this project? In Silicon Valley, naturally. If Obama enlists the tech titans in this effort, game over.

3. Make clean, green technologies a national main priority. The global climate crisis is an opportunity to grow the economy like we haven't seen since World War II. Promoting the development of new technologies for alternative energy is more than a strong environmental program. It's the nation's best path to economic recovery because it will create whole new clusters of green-collar occupations.

Who is poised to lead this revolution? Silicon Valley. We fueled the national economy in the 1970s with semiconductors. We led the expansions of the 1980s with the biotechnology revolution. In the 1990s a national recession was ended when we commercialized the Internet. If track record matters, then the smart money is on Silicon Valley to lead this new wave of innovation.

Can this possibly happen soon enough? Obama needs to make it a national priority, like Kennedy did with the moon shot. Set goals. Commit to government-backed research. Reward innovation and stimulate entrepreneurship.

4. Spend time in Silicon Valley. I call on Obama to visit us soon and often, so he can see and feel how the valley sets the tone for America’s economic future. He needs to tap our talent. He needs to bring our can-do mind-set to Washington.

The president-elect saw how technology revolutionized the art of campaigning and propelled him into office. Now he must use it to revolutionize government.

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