

WASHINGTON, DC – It is official. It is the fastest the mouse in the West...and the Midwest, and the East too. At the very least, it's the most effective mouse in the 110th Congress –figuratively speaking.

In a nod to its commitment to transparency and accessibility to government, the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) conferred on the office of Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA) the Gold Mouse Award for its use of its congressional website. The Honda website out-moused all the other House of Representative offices with 130 points and secured its spot as the best site ever among 618 in the entire U.S. Congress with three gold and one silver under its mouse-pad, err belt. The prize has been awarded four times since 2002.

“Congressman Mike Honda’s site explores the limits of what a congressional office can do on the Web,” CMF reported. “It includes all the content expected of a top quality site and includes innovations that few other offices have utilized.”

CMF, a non-partisan and non-profit organization that tracks Congress’s overall effectiveness, announced the award in a 115-page report it released on the use of internet resources by congressional offices.

“The reason we keep receiving this award is our team approach,” said Honda, who represents Silicon Valley. “One of my core beliefs is that my constituents have the right to know what I am working on, and why I am working on it.”

Honda’s site uses RSS feeds, YouTube and other Internet tools to make content easier for constituents to access. The content in the site is also updated regularly and each member of the staff is responsible for a section, which helps keep the site fresh. Also, a blog allows constituents to engage in a dialogue with Honda on his legislative positions.

The main criteria CMF used to give its awards were: legislative content, design, constituent services, layout, press resources, state/district information and communication tools. The criteria were evaluated with both quantitative and qualitative data and the data was then evaluated with help from researchers at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government; the University of California-Riverside; and Ohio State University.

According to the CMF report, only 18 percent of all congressional offices –including Senate and committee offices— scored high enough to get bronze, silver or gold. In contrast, the report criticized more than 41 percent of the offices that received failing grades of “D” and “F,” when 70 percent of American adults are online. Also, between 1996 and 2006 electronic correspondence to Congress grew 3,000 percent, underscoring the transformation of Congressional websites from glitz to necessity.

Because he represents the cradle of the internet industry, Honda said his website has to live up to a high standard.

“If an employee in any of those companies wants to know about education policy, or Iraq, we want them to be able to find their information with a quick click of the mouse,” Honda said. “But more than image, we want our constituents to be well-informed. At the end of the day democracy is about voters having a say in what matters to them.”