

The Power Pendulum Swings Toward Washington

By [Kim Hart](#)

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Silicon Valley and Wall Street are so last year. Now all eyes are on Washington.

That's one of the main themes of this week's [Capital Connection conference](#) put on by the *Mid-Atlantic Venture Association*. It runs tomorrow and Wednesday at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel and brings together a much wider range of technology investors, bloggers, entrepreneurs and new-media junkies than in past years. And this time, policy wonks and government insiders will also be there.

Reed E. Hundt, former *Federal Communications Commission* chairman, and *Tommy G. Thompson*, former *Health and Human Services* secretary, will be speaking, as will [VentureBeat](#) blog author *Matt Marshall* and [GigaOm](#) author *Om Malik*, two well-known technology bloggers. Washington hasn't been a frequent stop for them in the past.

It's just one more sign of the region's growing clout in the business and technology world. This is where stimulus dollars are doled out, where the economic recovery is taking shape, and where regulations -- many of which directly affect businesses -- are being crafted and rewritten. Of course, lawyers and lobbyists are getting a great deal of business helping folks find ways to tap into stimulus money. But Washington's new power role is also good news for local firms.

"For most investors and companies, public policy has been a foreign environment," said *Tom Wheeler*, managing director of [Core Capital Partners](#), a District-based venture capital firm. He was also a member of President Obama's transition team, focusing on science and technology.

"Those that understand this town and the process and who understand the role of public policy can much more easily factor it into their corporate decisions," Wheeler said.

Companies familiar with the Beltway culture are well-positioned to benefit from the government's increased role in nearly every sector. That doesn't necessarily mean that a local company such as Germantown-based *Current Group* has an automatic leg up in getting access to stimulus money earmarked for smart grid technology, for example. But the firm has a head start in deciphering the complicated policymaking process over competitors based elsewhere, Wheeler said.

Current Group chief executive *Tom Casey* will also be speaking at the conference.

The conference, which is open to the public for the first time, demonstrates the growing nexus between the business community and the government, said *Julia Spicer*, MAVA's executive director.

"The spread between the two worlds has tightened a bit," she said. "The economy is the real focal point" of the conference, "and the government has a definite role in that."

Start-Up Job Listings

In the market for a job? How about a gig as a software programmer for *MacroGenics*, a biotech firm in Rockville? Perhaps being a Web developer at Reston-based *Cernium*, a video analytics firm, is more up your alley. Or flexing your business development muscles at cardiac-testing firm *Cardiocre Lab* in Bethesda.

While larger companies downsize to cope with the recession, start-ups have a unique opportunity to hire. Many of them have millions of dollars of venture capital investment to keep them afloat during tough times. Although start-ups are also cutting back on spending, they often have more flexibility to fill positions that can help them win new business once the economy starts to brighten.

"The reality is that these are some of the most exciting careers on the planet," said *Steve Fredrick*, a partner at [Grotech Ventures](#). "But they historically have been difficult to identify" because start-ups often don't list job opportunities on their sites, and "posting on the large job sites got lost in the noise amidst postings for large companies."

Enter *StartUpHire* (at <http://www.startuphire.com>), a site Fredrick started in January that allows chief executives at start-ups to list openings at their firms and lets job seekers search for jobs that fit their skills. The site is available to all venture-backed companies, free of charge. It's supported by sponsorships by such firms as *Comerica Bank*, *Cooley Godward Kronish* and *DLA Piper*.

A Friday search for jobs in the Washington area listed more than 350 jobs at 119 venture-backed companies. The site is open to young firms across the country, and jobs in Virginia, Maryland and the District account for about 6 percent of the more than 10,000 listings. California, Massachusetts, New York and Texas have the highest number of listings.

Last week, *StartUpHire* formed a partnership with the *National Venture Capital Association*, based in Arlington, to help get the word out about the site to investment firms and start-ups around the country. Using the platform, investment firms can add a listings of job openings at their portfolio companies on their Web sites.

While the number of opportunities is reduced from six months ago, Fredrick said the listings can still help fill under-the-radar jobs.

"We've found that folks are routinely forwarding jobs to colleagues and friends," Fredrick said. "The platform will bring visibility to these jobs at exciting new companies and accelerate the hiring of talent, which leads to better economic outcomes, which fuels the venture cycle."