

May 14, 2009

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Senate Committee on Rules  
305 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Bennett  
Senate Committee on Rules  
305 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Schumer and Senator Bennett:

We the undersigned members of the OpenTheGovernment.org coalition and others, in cooperation with the Center for Democracy and Technology, are writing to urge you to hold public hearings on open government issues and to mark-up and pass Senate Resolution 118.

S.R. 118 would allow Senators to officially provide public Internet access to all non-confidential Congressional Research Service (CRS) products, some of the best research conducted by the federal government. Making the full catalog of non-confidential reports readily available over the Internet will make access easier and help produce a better-informed electorate. This resolution is an inexpensive and simple way to improve our democracy.

Citizens need access to these non-confidential CRS reports in order to discharge their civic duties. For years, academics, journalists, open government advocates and other concerned citizens have urged Congress to provide free, public access to the unclassified, non-confidential, taxpayer-funded reports produced by the Congressional Research Service through the Internet. American taxpayers spend over \$100 million a year to fund the CRS, which generates detailed reports relevant to current political events for lawmakers. But while the reports are non-classified, and play a critical role in our legislative process, they have never been made available in a consistent and official way to members of the public.

Predictably, to fill the public void left by the CRS, several private companies now sell copies of these reports at a price. This means that non-confidential CRS reports are readily available to lobbyists, executives and others who can afford to pay. Meanwhile, the vast majority of your constituents lack the information necessary to even request reports. Your committee has the opportunity to act in order to fix this unfair and untenable policy.

S.R. 118 requires the Senate Sergeant-at-Arms to provide public access to all the capabilities of the CRS website that are already accessible to all Congressional staff. S.R. 118 provides the public with full access to these reports and gives Senators and Senate committees the tools they need to share reports with the public using an internal Web site that already exists.

We also commend you for releasing important information about Senate activities in the form of the XML Senate voting record. This information will better allow the

public to utilize technology to hold their Senators accountable.

In 1822, James Madison explained why citizens must have government information: "A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives." In the spirit of Madison, we ask you to allow these efforts to move forward with your support and congratulate you on the release of Senate voting records. As President Obama noted in his Day One Executive Order, "Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government."

Representatives from the undersigned organizations would be happy to meet with you or your staff at any time to discuss this important issue. Please contact Ari Schwartz at the Center for Democracy and Technology (202-637-9800) or Patrice McDermott at [OpenTheGovernment.org](http://OpenTheGovernment.org) (202-332-6736) at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Center for Democracy and Technology

Federation of American Scientists

[OpenTheGovernment.org](http://OpenTheGovernment.org)

Gateway to Gov, Inc.

Action LA

Indiana Coalition for Open  
Government

All Things Reform

Liberty Coalition

American Association of Law Libraries

Mine Safety and Health News

American Association of University  
Professors

Minnesota Coalition on Government  
Information

American Library Association

National Coalition Against Censorship

American Society of News Editors

National Coalition for History

Association of Research Libraries

National Federation of Press Women

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics  
in Washington

National Freedom of Information  
Coalition

Citizens for Sunshine

National Security Archive

Delaware Press Association

OMB Watch

Essential Information

Progressive Librarians Guild

Special Libraries Association

Project on Government Oversight

Sunlight Foundation

Public Citizen

UC Hastings Law Library

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