

April 5, 2011

Representative Darrell Issa
Chairman
House Oversight and Government Reform
Committee
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Elijah Cummings
Ranking Member
House Oversight and Government Reform
Committee
B350A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Issa and Ranking Member Cummings:

We are writing to ask you to quickly reintroduce legislation to authorize and promote the public distribution of reports that are published by the Congressional Research Service (CRS).

As you know, CRS products are a valuable, non-partisan resource for informing discussion of nearly every topic of legislative activity, from agricultural subsidies to the space program. These reports play a critical role in our legislative process, and, when made available, inform the public debate about our nation's policies. In the last two years alone, major newspapers cited the Congressional Research Service 779 times, with 70 mentions in the **Washington Post** and 65 in the **New York Times**. The U.S. Supreme Court has cited CRS 34 times and the circuit court made 112 citations, with 130 judicial citations in the last decade. We strongly believe, as we think you do, that improving public access to CRS reports would help to enrich public discourse and to promote informed citizen engagement in the political process.

We respect the confidentiality of CRS support to Members of Congress, and we have no wish to infringe upon it. We are seeking public access only to those "published" reports that are broadly available to any Member or staff person through the CRS intranet, and not to any private communications between CRS and an individual Member or office.

American taxpayers spend over \$100 million a year to fund the CRS, yet current distribution of these reports is haphazard and often expensive. Several private companies now sell copies of these reports for a price, meaning these reports are readily available to lobbyists, executives and others who can afford to pay. Meanwhile, the vast majority of people lack the information necessary to even request reports from their Members of Congress. And the reports that are publicly available are often out-of-date. The public deserves a consistent and official way to access the non-classified, non-biased information CRS provides.

We urge you to act soon to help lead a formal revision of CRS publication policy in favor of public distribution of non-confidential reports. We will strongly support your efforts.

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 Daniel Schuman, Policy Counsel, Sunlight Foundation (dschuman@sunlightfoundation.com or 202-742-1520 x 273), at your convenience.

Sincerely,

American Association of Law Libraries

Association of Research Libraries

American Association of University Professors

Bill of Rights Defense Committee

American Library Association

Center for Fiscal Accountability

American Society of News Editors

Center for Investigative Journalism- Puerto Rico

Center for Media and Democracy

Center for Responsive Politics

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in
Washington – CREW

Colgate University Libraries

Defending Dissent Foundation

Electronic Frontier Foundation

Essential Information

Federation of American Scientists

Free Government Information

Government Accountability Project – GAP

Investigative Reporters and Editors

iSolon.org

Liberty Coalition

National Coalition for History

National Security Counselors

Northern California Association of Law Libraries

OMB Watch

OpenTheGovernment.org

Point of Order

Progressive Librarians Guild

Project On Government Oversight – POGO

Public Citizen

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

Society of Professional Journalists

Special Libraries Association

Sunlight Foundation

Union of Concerned Scientists

Washington Coalition for Open Government

Western Carolina University Libraries

WildEarth Guardians