Sunlight Foundation Proposal for Changes to the House Rules in the 112th Congress

After an election, each new Congress rewrites the House Rules, which regulate all activities of the House of Representatives. This moment provides a singular opportunity to make Congress more transparent, ethical and responsive to the public.

The Sunlight Foundation proposes dozens of rules changes that should be enacted by House leadership in the next Congress. These changes fall into four broad categories: Legislative Activity, Ethics, Access and Preservation. Below are some key recommendations.

Legislative Activity: The House must make legislative work more transparent and open to the public.

- *Require all bills and conference reports to be posted online at least 72 hours prior to consideration.*
- *Create a comprehensive online database of all earmarks (including earmark requests).*
- *Open committees by requiring them to report votes in XML, post official transcripts, publish committee reports and rules, and post hearing schedules, and witness disclosures.*
- *Open legislative data by creating bulk access to legislative data in the THOMAS system.*
- *Create a centralized, public-available online database of all "Dear Colleague" letters.*

Ethics: The House must fulfill its responsibility to be ethical and accountable to the public.

- *Strengthen the Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE) by doubling its budget.*
- *Require meetings of the House Ethics Committee to be open to the public unless the subject matter pertains to allegations against a specific member.*
- *Post all ethics documents—personal financial disclosures, travel reports, recusals, negotiations for future employment—online in a structured format.*
- *Close loopholes in gift, financial disclosure, and travel rules.*

Access: The House must increase online access to public materials and meetings.

- *Video record and publish online in real time all publicly accessible congressional activities, whether occurring on the floor of the House or in committee hearings.*
- *All Congressional Research Service (CRS) Reports should be publicly available online for free.*
- *Make the structured data of the Constitution Annotated (CONAN) available online for free.*
- *Provide and increase access to Congress for individuals using electronic media as their sole means of reporting news.*
- *Lift restrictions on the use of House video.*

Preservation: The House must properly preserve and archive their digital history.

- *Archive all member and committee sites after each Congress.*

Please visit http://sunlightfoundation.com/policy/documents/house-rules-proposals-112th-congress for the full list of recommendations. If you have questions, contact Policy Director John Wo10nderlich at jwonderlich@sunlightfoundation.com or 202-742-1520 ext 234