

February 24, 2009

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House
The Honorable David Obey, Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Madam Speaker and Mr. Chairman:

The undersigned non-partisan transparency and good government advocates write to urge you to place the upcoming omnibus spending legislation, and the 2010 appropriations bills, online, in a machine-readable format. We appreciate your putting the omnibus spending legislation up on Monday, February 23, 2009, as pdf documents, giving the public an opportunity to review their contents before they are voted on. We urge you to take the next step and put them up in machine-readable format.

The regular appropriations process is an important source of government transparency. Each step in the process is a point at which the public can observe the decision-making process of government and the officials they have elected. These steps include the issuance of the President's budget; debate on and passage of the House and Senate budget resolutions; issuance of 302(b) allocations; introduction and publication of subcommittee bills; hearings on those bills in both the House and Senate; full committee consideration of appropriations bills in both the House and Senate; floor consideration in both the House and Senate; and floor consideration of conference reports.

Several times in the last few years, these processes were sharply abbreviated. Last year, several House appropriations bills were either not introduced or were introduced well after the passage of the Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act, which funded most of the government until March 6, 2009.

As that deadline nears, another omnibus bill looms, and we are concerned that another sharply abbreviated process will curtail the ability of the American people to observe some of the most important work done by the Congress. It is essential that you maximize transparency so that the public can be confident that you are being good stewards of government programs and taxpayer funds. Posting the omnibus bill online at least 72 hours before it is brought up for consideration, especially in a machine-readable format, would help create that transparency.

For the fiscal year 2010 appropriations process, we hope that you will follow the regular schedule and process and separately consider each of the appropriations bills. We urge you to make all the appropriations bills available in machine-readable, xml-based formats.

In light of your commitment to openness to the public, we urge you to take these important opportunities to provide the timely and easily-accessible disclosure of all details surrounding the appropriations bills the public wants and deserves.

Thank you. If you have any questions, please contact Patrice McDermott, Director of OpenTheGovernment.org, at 202-332-6736.

Sincerely,

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Bill of Rights Defense Committee

Californians Aware

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

The E-Accountability Foundation

Essential Information

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OMB Watch

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Taxpayers for Common Sense

Steve Raymond, Santa Monica, CA

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Michael Stern, Point of Order

Adam Stone, Policy Analyst