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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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March 4, 2009

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Chairman - Committee on Rules and Administration
305 Russell Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Schumer:

Congratulations on becoming Chairman of the Committee on Rules and Administration. I look forward to working with you in this capacity, particularly given the leading role the Committee takes on many issues that we both care deeply about. One of those issues is the public availability of Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports. As you know, CRS produces reports that inform Members of Congress and their staffs on key issues of the day. Members have long shared these reports with their constituents, providing them expert analysis on the complex issues this nation faces.

Given their value to constituents, I strongly believe that we need a system that ensures widespread public access to CRS reports. Last Congress, I introduced S. Res. 401 along with Senators McCain, Collins, Cornyn, Feingold, Harkin, Leahy, Lugar, and McCaskill, to create such a system. A few months after the introduction of our bill, the Rules Committee authorized the Director of CRS to develop a system that would allow Senators to place individual CRS reports on their official website and would have them automatically updated. I was pleased by this development, but it does not go far enough.

I believe a more effective system would provide constituents with tools similar to those used by Congressional staff, with material presented by topic and the capability to search across all reports and issue briefs. Unfortunately, the present system does not allow this basic level of functionality. A robust system would also help restore the equity of access that is sorely needed. For years, CRS reports have been sold by companies to those who can afford to pay. Non-profit groups have also begun posting these reports for free on their websites. Earlier this month, thousands of reports – representing several years' worth of work by CRS analysts – were placed on the wikileaks.org site. These ad hoc efforts allow more reports to enter the public domain, but they do not ensure the dissemination of the most accurate and up-to-date information. Nor are they likely to be discovered by all those who might desire the reports.

These developments only highlight the need for an officially-sanctioned system such as the one I have proposed. By establishing a clearinghouse that would offer all

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reports and would be automatically updated, we could ensure that those with power and those without have equal access to this important resource.

I hope that in your new role as Chairman of the Rules Committee you carefully review this issue and consider recommending the creation of a more comprehensive system so that CRS reports can be easily accessed by the taxpayers who pay for them.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,



Joseph I. Lieberman
Chairman