

MAY 03 2011



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cc: K. Boyd
M. Stephenson

The Honorable Elijah Cummings
United States House of Representatives
2235 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Darrell Issa
United States House of Representatives
2347 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

April 18, 2011

Dear Chairman Issa and Ranking Member Cummings,

Our undersigned groups strongly support HR 1144, which we believe will make the government operate with more transparency and accountability. H.R. 1144, "The Transparency and Openness in Government Act," will enhance the effectiveness of federal advisory panels, provide more access to presidential records, secure electronic messages generated by Administration officials, ensure donations to presidential libraries are part of the public record, and give the Government Accountability Office more teeth.

The reforms in H.R. 1144 are ripe for bipartisan action and support, since they are commonsense, noncontroversial measures, all of which passed the House of Representatives in the 111th Congress with substantial bipartisan support.

Title 1 of this bill, the Federal Advisory Committee Act Amendments Act, was approved by a bipartisan House vote of 250 to 124 in July 2010. It addresses weaknesses in the advisory committee process raised by the Government Accountability Office in 2004. The GAO thoroughly examined the FACA process and raised serious concerns about the ways agencies select and designate members, too frequently wrongly designating experts as representative stakeholders not subject to conflict of interest reviews. The GAO also recommended greater transparency for the member selection process such as "providing information on how the members of the committees are identified and screened, and indicating whether the committee members are providing independent or stakeholder advice."

This title will give the public more information about any conflicts of interest among advisory panel members and how the agency addresses them, make all meetings available on the agency's web site, and achieve a breakthrough for public participation allowing public comments for panel members and other openness.

Title II of this bill, Presidential Records Act Amendments, was sponsored in the 111th Congress by Rep. Edolphus Towns (D-NY), with Republican co-sponsors Reps. Issa (CA) and Dan Burton (IN). It passed the House by a vote of 359 to 58.