

February 25, 2010

James H. Billington
Librarian of Congress
The Library of Congress
101 Independence Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20540

Dear Dr. Billington:

We the undersigned organizations concerned with government openness and accountability are writing to urge you to appoint a Director of the Congressional Research Service (CRS) who will work with Congress to provide online free public access to the unclassified, non-confidential, taxpayer-funded reports produced by CRS.

The public needs access to these non-confidential CRS reports in order to discharge their civic duties. American taxpayers spend over \$100 million a year to fund the CRS, which generates detailed reports relevant to current political events for lawmakers. But while the reports are non-classified, and play a critical role in our legislative process, they have never been made available in a consistent and official way to members of the public.

Predictably, to fill the public void left by the CRS, several private companies now sell copies of these reports at a price. This means that non-confidential CRS 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.

In 1822, James Madison explained why citizens must have government information: "A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives." In the spirit of Madison, we ask you to appoint a Director of CRS who will help advance the goal of online free public access to CRS reports.

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 Amy Bennett, Program Associate, OpenTheGovernment.org (afuller@openthegovernment.org or 202-332-6736), at your convenience.

Sincerely,

AhEeCOSH

American Association of Law Libraries

American Library Association

American Society of News Editors

Association of Research Libraries

Bill of Rights Defense Committee

CAUS

Center for Democracy and Technology

Center for Media and Democracy

Center for Responsive Politics

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

Defending Dissent Foundation

DownsizeDC.org, Inc.

Essential Information

Federation of American Scientists

Free Government Information

Government Accountability Project (GAP)

iSolon.org

Knowledge Ecology International

Liberty Coalition

MapLight.org

National Coalition Against Censorship

National Freedom of Information Coalition

National Security Counselors

No More Guantanamos

OMB Watch

OpenTheGovernment.org

Point of Order

Project On Government Oversight (POGO)

Public Citizen

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

RS&S INTERNATIONAL, LLC

Society of Academic Law Library Directors

Society of Professional Journalists

Special Libraries Association

Sunlight Foundation

University of Missouri Freedom of Information Center

Washington Coalition for Open Government