

Transparency in Government Act

Representative Mike Quigley

Highlights

According to a recent CNN/Opinion Research Corporation survey, only 26 percent of the public trusts the federal government most of the time or always, and as news of scandals and ethics violations continue to mount, the best remedy to rebuild the public's trust is **transparency**. The best way the government can convince the public of its integrity and mission is to open up its records and make its inner-workings, messy though they may be, available for public scrutiny. As Justice Brandeis said, "Sunlight is the best of disinfectants." The Transparency in Government Act calls for records, votes and disclosure reports from every sector of the government to be made available to the public on the Internet, in an easy to access format, free of charge.

The Transparency in Government Act seeks to:

1. Improve Public Access to Information about Members of Congress by:

- Requiring Members to provide more detailed personal financial information and to post this information online in a timely manner for the public to review.
- Requiring electronic filing of Members' foreign travel reports, gift reports, and earmarks.
- Calling for the creation of a centralized database where all earmarks are available in an easy to access, searchable format, free to the public. The database will require earmarks to be marked as for-profit or not-for-profit.

2. Enhance Public Access to the Work of Committees, Legislation and Votes by:

- Requiring committees post recorded votes, schedules, and amendments online promptly.
- Requiring legislation be publically available 72 hours before consideration.
- Requiring the Clerk to publish recorded votes of all Members online.

3. Improve Public Access to Congressional Research Services by:

- Making certain CRS information, paid for with taxpayer dollars, available online free of charge to the public.

4. Improve Lobbyist Disclosure Requirements by:

- Requiring lobbyists to disclose each executive branch official and each Member of Congress (or Members' name if lobbyist met with staff) with whom they met, rather than simply listing House, Senate or Other, as they currently do.
- Requiring lobbyists to register online within 72 hours of making a lobbying contact or being hired, rather than waiting 45 days to register as they currently do.

5. Increase Transparency in Federal Contracting by:

- Expanding the information posted on USAspending.gov (federal contracting Web site) to include whether a contract was awarded with full competition, information about profit incentives, and whether an award is an earmark.
- Improving data quality of USAspending.gov by allowing the public to report errors, requiring audits of data on the website and of data submitted to the website by agencies.
- Allowing the public to see past performance reviews of all recipients of federal funds.

6. Enhance Executive Branch Transparency by:

- Requiring disclosure of federal sponsorship of all federal advertising.

7. Strengthen the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) by:

- Requiring each agency make all of its completed FOIA requests available online within one month of their completion, and requires a study to investigate ways to reduce response time.