

Coburn Amendment #1756 — To Require All Reports in Authorized in the Bill to be Publicized and Accessible to the Public Once Completed

- **Each Appropriation Bill Requires Dozens of Reports**
- **Reports Authorized in This Bill Often Are Exclusively for Senators on the Appropriations Committee**
- **Publicizing Reports Will Allow Americans to See How Their Money is Being Spent**
- **Publicizing Reports Will Allow All Members of Congress to Conduct Better Oversight of Agencies**

This amendment simply requires that all reports required to be submitted by a federal agency within this act be posted on the public website of that agency for all Americans and members of Congress to see. The only exception to this is for reports that contain classified or proprietary information.

In the 111th Congress, this amendment was unanimously adopted as an amendment to the Energy and Water Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2010 (H.R. 3183), the Transportation and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2010 (H.R. 3288), the Interior Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2010 (H.R. 2996), and the Defense Appropriations Bill for Fiscal Year 2010 (H.R. 3326).

By passing this amendment to the appropriations bill for Departments of Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related agencies (S. 1243), Congress will increase transparency of the both the legislative and administrative process and give Americans the opportunity to be more involved in holding their elected officials accountable.

Each Appropriation Bill Requires Dozens of Reports

Typically, in each appropriations bill, dozens of studies, reports, and reviews are funded for a variety of reasons.

Many of these reports are instances of Congress exercising their constitutional responsibility of oversight to ensure that certain agencies or federal programs are operating effectively and efficiently. Other reports are to ascertain how federal funding should be appropriated in the future or to justify the creation of a new federal program.

S. 1243 requires numerous reports, including:

- A “report that describes a comprehensive strategy for staffing, hiring, and training flight standards and aircraft certification staff in a format similar to the one utilized for the controller staffing plan, including stated attrition estimates and numerical hiring goals by fiscal year...”
- An “annual report to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations on any waivers granted under the Buy America requirements.”
- A report from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration “on the agency’s ability to meet its requirement to conduct compliance reviews on mandatory carriers...”

Reports Authorized in This Bill Often Are Exclusively for Senators and Representatives on the Appropriations Committees

Unfortunately, because members of the appropriations committees in the House and the Senate write these bills, these reports are often only written for appropriators.

For instance, on page 48 of the Committee on Appropriations’ report of S. 1243, lines 9-13, the following is written regarding the National Railroad Passenger Corporation: “Provided further: That not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Corporation shall transmit, in

electronic format, to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations a business plan and 5-year Financial Plan for fiscal year 2014 as required under section 204 of such law.”

There are no similar requirements for Congress as a whole or for the public. Due to similar narrow language in many other reporting requirements, the vast majority of Congress (88 percent of the House of Representatives and 70 percent of the Senate) cannot review reports before making decisions on what federal programs they would like to prioritize or where federal legislation is necessary. Additionally, the American public is effectively barred from viewing these documents and contributing their expertise and oversight capabilities.

Publicizing Reports Will Allow Americans to See How Their Money is Being Spent

By requiring that the federal agencies producing the reports funded in this bill publicize them on their public website, all Americans with access to the internet will be able to read and evaluate these reports. In today’s information age, observations made by bloggers, government accountability group, students, and others can help inform the public of needs or problems within our government and society.

Empowering millions of Americans to check up on their government by viewing these reports online will also further encourage agencies to be accountable to Congress and the people of the United States of America.

Publicizing Reports Will Allow All Members of Congress to Conduct Better Oversight of Agencies

By requiring that the federal agencies producing the reports funded in this bill publicize them on their public website, all Members of Congress and their staff will be ensured easy access to these reports.

Evaluating and reading these reports may prompt a congressional hearing, federal legislation, or even a termination of a federal program or policy. These reports may also be helpful in setting fiscal priorities by exposing Members of Congress to performance results of programs and studies on issues within federal agencies.