

Coburn Amendment #422– Establish an online, publicly accessible database containing all unclassified reports submitted to Congress.

This amendment would increase government transparency by providing for the establishment of an online, publicly accessible database to contain every report submitted to Congress.

Current law requires federal agencies to submit hundreds of reports to Congress every year. Many of these reports require agencies to provide details about performance, evaluations, and investigations. Yet, too often these documents are sent only to Congressional committees, which rarely post them on their websites.

The Clerk of the House of Representatives publishes a document at the start of every session listing the reports federal agencies are required by statute to submit.ⁱ Hundreds of reports – if not thousands – are listed, and one can only wonder how many are actually submitted. These reports are lost in the annals of history, unavailable to public access and even to other Congressional offices.

Placing all reports into a single searchable database would aid the oversight of Congressional offices and committees that do not receive certain reports from agencies.

In addition, external watchdog groups and the general public should have access to the information without having to go through Congressional offices.

Similar to the operation of USASpending.gov or Recovery.gov, a website with these reports should be highly searchable based on keywords, titles, agency names, and even the statute requiring submission of the report.

The website could build on existing capability already at the Government Printing Office. Last year, the Government Printing Office (GPO) – the agency in charge of “producing, procuring, cataloging, indexing, authenticating, disseminating, and preserving the official information products of the U.S. Government”– said it “will be prepared to carry out” such a task, should Congress require it to do so.

Any legislation to this end could exclude reports already exempt from public disclosure.

ⁱ <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CDOC-111hdoc83/pdf/CDOC-111hdoc83.pdf>