



February 9, 2009

An Open Letter to the House Administration Committee: Put Members' Expense Reports Online ASAP!

Dear Members of the Committee on House Administration:

Since 1997, the National Taxpayers Union (NTU) has issued regular reports on personal office spending for each Member of the U.S. House of Representatives. As part of this process, we compile information from the "Statement of Disbursements of the House," a quarterly expenditure report compiled by the House's Chief Administrative Officer. These reports detail all office operation spending in control of individual Members, such as staff salaries, postage, supplies and equipment, communications, district office rent and utilities, and travel.

Because the expenditure reports are only available in cumbersome, dense, paper-based books, we employ staff to go through the tomes and re-key the information in user-friendly electronic spreadsheets. We incur this expense because we passionately believe taxpayers deserve to see how their dollars are spent by elected officials.

NTU was thrilled to read in the January 26, 2009, edition of *Roll Call* that the Chief Administrative Officer is considering making this information more transparent by putting the reports online. We heartily commend this move, and urge its swift implementation. While a database that allows taxpayers to fully explore spending trends with various search functions would be ideal, we urge you to upload available information in an electronic spreadsheet without delay.

The *Roll Call* story cites Kyle Anderson, spokesperson for the House Administration Committee, as saying that "the Statement of Disbursements is widely distributed and easily available for constituent review." Most reasonable observers would agree that schlepping to the basement of Cannon House Office Building (or to a Federal Depository Library), flipping through hundreds of pages to find expenditures, and then having to go through additional heavy volumes to compare historical data is not what would be considered "easily available."

If you'd like best-practices examples of what some state governments are doing to make line-item expenditures available to their constituents via the Web, I encourage you to visit the Missouri Accountability Portal (<http://mapyourtaxes.mo.gov>) or Kansas' "Kanview" Web site (<http://www.kansas.gov/kanview/>). A 50-state overview of online spending transparency is available at the Show Me the Spending Coalition's homepage (<http://www.showmethespending.com>).

NTU and our 362,000 members urge you to put Members' expense reports online ASAP.

Sincerely,

Kristina Rasmussen
Director of Government Affairs