



July XX, 2006

An Open Letter to the United States Senate: Make Budget Justifications Public!

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the organizations below, representing hundreds of thousands of citizens, the National Taxpayers Union and OMB Watch strongly urge you to support efforts to make all federal departments' budget justifications publicly-available. These detailed reports, currently furnished only to the Appropriations Committees, explain agencies' spending priorities and outline budget allocations from previous years.

Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) plans to introduce amendments that would make those documents a matter of public record, while still excluding information that could compromise national security. Under such legislation, each department would be required to post its entire budget justification online within 48 hours of submitting it to the Appropriations Committee. This requirement would further open the budget and appropriations process to public scrutiny at virtually no cost or effort to the agencies.

As advocates from diverse political perspectives, we concur that government transparency is vital to the health of our political system. Regardless of our views on the appropriate role of the federal government, we believe government must publicly disclose its spending decisions and the rationale behind them. Such disclosure will help encourage a more actively engaged citizenry, resulting in a more effective and efficient government.

American taxpayers should not be kept in the dark about spending decisions, and yet there are obstacles at every turn. Shadowy policymaking climates often lead to adverse results, as recent bribery investigations of several Members of Congress demonstrate. Disclosing agency budget justifications is a key step in shining sunlight on the appropriations process and should be accessible to any American. Moreover, the availability of such information will help the electorate better understand the decisions that Members of Congress make.

We realize this proposal may draw resistance from federal agencies and possibly within Congress. Yet bureaucratic conflicts and congressional turf wars are not sufficient reasons to withhold this information from the public. In the interest of good governance and democratic principles, we urge you to unite in support of legislative efforts to disclose budget justification documents.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned