

**Clean Water Action ♦ Defenders of Wildlife ♦ Earthjustice ♦ Friends of the Earth ♦
National Environmental Trust ♦ Natural Resources Defense Council ♦ Physicians
for Social Responsibility ♦ Union of Concerned Scientists ♦ The Wilderness Society**

July 24, 2006

Dear Representative:

Good government is effective, efficient, accountable and responsive to the needs of its citizens. Sunset Commission legislation, recently introduced as H.R. 5766, is touted as a tool for good government, but is instead a scheme to create an unelected, unaccountable committee that would trigger elimination of beneficial environmental, health, and safety protections outside the public eye.

The Sunset commission is unnecessary and duplicative, and undermines Congress' role. Congress, through its authorization and appropriations processes, and other federal bodies such as the Government Accountability Office and Inspectors General already oversee federal programs and agencies. The White House-named seven-member Sunset Commission is unaccountable, would not be required to hold hearings or take public comment, and the bill establishes no obligation for the commission to open their records to Congress or the American public. The legislation would shift the responsibilities of authorizing, reauthorizing, and funding the federal government from an elected Congress to an unelected and unaccountable and likely secretive small commission. Most importantly, a Sunset Commission could be expected to eliminate crucial public programs. Under expedited procedure, a commission's recommendations would trump the rest of the legislative calendar and could leave room for little amendment or debate.

As a coalition genuinely concerned with public health and the environment, we urge you to strongly oppose H.R. 5766, the Government Efficiency Act of 2006. The commissions this legislation creates could abolish numerous programs that specifically protect the environment and the health of its inhabitants. For example, based upon "hit lists" of the White House and groups affiliated with Sunset Commission proposals, the commission can be expected to:

- ***Leave the poor out in the cold:*** *The Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) saves people the difficult choice between choosing between heating their homes in the winter and buying their groceries. In 2002, LIHEAP provided \$1.8 billion of heating assistance and long-term weatherization investments to 4.4 million American households, over two-thirds of which had incomes below the poverty line.*
- ***Increase beach closures and public health risks due to raw sewage:*** *Preventing sewer outflows, polluted waters and disease outbreaks, federal wastewater grants protect our nation's water supply. By helping states build, upgrade, or enlarge conventional wastewater treatment facilities, the grants not only improve water quality nationwide, but also stimulate local economies and create more than 400,000 jobs annually, especially in small or economically disadvantaged communities.*
- ***Eliminate outdoor recreational opportunities close to home:*** *Youth sports fields, parks and local recreational facilities build community and keep our children healthy. Many of these facilities would not exist without grants from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. In the past 40 years, LWCF has granted \$3.6 billion in funds to create these opportunities in over 98% of U.S. counties.1 LWCF has provided protection for more than five million acres of land and water nationally.*

- ***Increase our dependence on oil – and our commute!*** Federally supported public mass transit reduces our nation's dependence on foreign oil and saves Americans both time and money. In 2005, the public took more than 9.7 billion transit trips, saving \$18.5 billion and 855 million gallons of gasoline while reducing traffic congestion by 27%.

We oppose H.R. 5766 and its inevitable consequences: sweeping shifts in the separation of powers that would constrict congressional authority, diminish transparency and citizen participation in our government, and abolish critical environmental and public health protections. For these reasons, we urge you to oppose this Sunset Commission legislation.

Sincerely,

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