

Amendment 3968 – Prohibits federal commissions and studies created by this Act from having members with financial conflicts of interests, holding secret meetings and making recommendations that increase costs to taxpayers

Title III of S. 2483 requires six studies and authorizes four commissions.

This amendment would add accountability and transparency to these studies and commissions by requiring that:

- All recommendations produced by the studies and commissions shall (1) be cost neutral; or (2) result in a net reduction of costs to the Federal government. Cost neutral means that there are no net increases or decreases in Federal government spending.
- No person selected to serve as a member of a commission or as part of a study may have a financial conflict of interest related to the subject matter.
- All proceedings of the commissions and studies shall be open to the public and the minutes of the meetings shall be available in a searchable format on the internet.
- All studies and commissions shall sunset no later than 5 years after the enactment of this Act.

Federal Commissions and Studies Often Recommend Higher Costs to Taxpayers

Federal commissions and studies often serve useful purposes, such as assembling experts to examine complicated and important issues and making recommendations for policy makers.

Too frequently, however, federal commissions and study groups are created simply to recommend new government projects that increase costs to taxpayers.

A two-year study by the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission released in January 2008 recommended that “federal gasoline taxes should be almost tripled over five years.”¹

A 2004 Institute of Medicine (IOM) study recommended increased government spending to make health care coverage universal in the United States. The IOM release stated “any plan to expand coverage likely will require additional public funding.”²

The study panels and commissions contained within S. 2483 all appear to be intended to promote expanding government costs and responsibilities.

The special resource study relating to the First Battle of Newtonia in Missouri, for example, directs the study to “identify cost estimates for any necessary acquisition, development, interpretation, operation, and maintenance.” Yet there is no requirement for the study to identify ways to pay for such expenses in a manner that does not increase costs to the government or the taxpayers. The study also seeks recommendations for adding battlefields to a National Battlefield, which obviously would add costs to the National Park Service for maintenance and possibly acquisition.

The commission to study the potential creation of a National Museum of the American Latino in Washington, DC, does require a fundraising plan to seek contributions. The federal government and taxpayers, however, would most likely be largely responsible for financing the costs of constructing, operating and maintaining the new museum. The bill authorizes \$3.2 million over a two year period for this commission. This money is authorized to be spent on travel expenses and a national conference.

Two other commissions in the bill—the Champlain Quadricentennial Commemoration Commission and the Hudson-Fulton 400th

¹ “Transportation panel: Triple U.S. gasoline taxes,” Associated Press, January 16, 2008; <http://www.newsday.com/news/nationworld/ny-usgas165539626jan16.0.2347872.story>

² “IOM Report Calls for Universal Health Coverage by 2010; Offers Principles to Judge, Compare Proposed Solutions,” Institute of Medicine, January 14, 2004; <http://www8.nationalacademies.org/onpinews/newsitem.aspx?RecordID=10874>

Commemoration Commission— are each authorized \$1.5 million over a three year period. The commission is directed to coordinate efforts with the National Park Service, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Smithsonian Institution. This obviously implies that these federal agencies should expend funds or resources on activities initiated by the commissions.

Taxpayers should not be forced to finance panels that essentially promote higher taxes and increased government costs.

This amendment will ensure that any recommendations of the studies and commissions contained within this bill do not result in increased costs to taxpayers.