

**Amendment\_\_\_\_\_ – Requires the budget expenditures of every Senate office to be posted on-line in a publicly searchable format.**

The Legislative Branch appropriations bill provides billions of taxpayer dollars to fund the day to day operations of Congress, including both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Unfortunately, much of the information on how Congress spends its budget is not currently available on-line for the public to review.

To remedy this, Speaker Pelosi has initiated an effort to post House expenditures on-line. However, despite the fact that the Secretary of the Senate publishes a biannual report detailing Senate office expenditures, the Senate has yet to post this information on-line as a first step toward transparency and accountability to taxpayers for how it spends their money.

Without requiring any additional burdensome reporting requirements, this amendment would require the Secretary to post on-line, all expenditures by every Senate office, in a searchable format, within 60 days after the publication of the biannual expenditures report. In addition, the Secretary would no longer be required to print bound copies of the report, which would lead to savings in printing costs.

**Every Year, Congress Spends Over \$3 Billion In Taxpayer Funds**

The Senate Legislative Branch Appropriations bill provides \$3.138 billion to fund the operations of Congress in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010. This is an increase of more than \$100 million from the \$3.035 billion enacted in FY 2009.

Each member of the House and Senate receive annual allowances to run their offices. These office allotments may be spent on staff salaries, travel, printing, mailing, and other items and services for their offices. Office allowances generally range from \$1.3 million to \$1.6 million for each House member, according to a 2008 report by the Congressional Research Service. Members of the Senate receive more than \$2.7 million each.<sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> Perry Bacon Jr. "House to Put Office Spending Online," The Washington Post, June 4, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/03/AR2009060303500.html> .

## **Some Congressional Spending Is Published Periodically, But Public Access To This Data Is Limited**

The Secretary of the Senate publishes budget data for each Senate office every six months. The House of Representatives publishes similar office budget information every three months.

Yet, few taxpayers can access this information because it is contained in reports that are printed in a limited number and not available on-line.

Most taxpayers are probably not even aware that these publications are available since they are so inaccessible.

The public can request specific receipts, but lawmakers are not required to provide them.<sup>[2]</sup>

## **Congress Passed Legislation Requiring Executive Branch Agencies To Post Expenditures On-line**

In 2006, Congress passed and President Bush signed the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (S. 2590) that requires all spending by federal departments and agencies be posted on-line in a searchable format for the public.

Then-Senator Barack Obama, a co-author of the law stated, “This legislation marks a small but important step in the effort to change the culture in Washington, D.C. American taxpayers soon will be equipped with a significant tool that will make it much easier to hold elected officials accountable for the way taxpayer money is spent.”

The website created by this legislation, [USASpending.gov](http://USASpending.gov), allows Americans to track how their taxes are being spent for the first time ever. New updates to this website are expected soon that will make the federal spending by the Executive Branch even more transparent and accountable.

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<sup>[2]</sup> Louise Radnofsky. “Lawmakers Bill Taxpayers For TVs, Cameras, Lexus,” The Wall Street Journal, May 30, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124364352135868189.html> .

While Congress has required such transparency of Executive Branch spending, it has done little to lead by example by providing transparency of how members of Congress spend the tax dollars that they are entrusted with.

### **The House of Representatives Will Begin Posting Office Expenditures On-Line This Summer**

The House of Representatives has announced plans to begin posting every members' expense reports online this year.

House Chief Administrative Officer Dan Beard said the expense reports would be posted by August 31, 2009.<sup>[3]</sup>

But, while the House is starting to make efforts to provide greater transparency, the Senate is not.

### **The Senate Has Evaded Reforms to Make Its Spending More Transparent To Taxpayers**

The Senate has lagged in several respects regarding public disclosure of tax-supported expenditures.

Not only are office budgets not publicly available online, but Senators are not required to provide details of their spending on rent for their offices back home, nor of amounts spent on communications, utilities, supplies and materials. Those costs typically total millions of dollars each year. Congress passed a rule change in late 2000 that allowed senators to avoid publicly disclosing details of such spending. Instead, only a total for each of the categories is listed in the Senate's semiannual reports.<sup>[4]</sup>

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<sup>[3]</sup> Elizabeth Williamson, Louise Radnofsky, and T.W. Farnam. "House Lifts Lid On Its Expenses," The Wall Street Journal, June 4, 2009, page A1, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124404974993181853.html> .

<sup>[4]</sup> Elizabeth Williamson, Louise Radnofsky, and T.W. Farnam. "House Lifts Lid On Its Expenses," The Wall Street Journal, June 4, 2009, page A1, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124404974993181853.html> .

## **This Amendment Does Not Impose Any New Reporting Requirements And Represent An Easy And Long Overdue First Step Towards Bringing Transparency To Senate Spending**

This amendment would be a first step in bringing much needed and long overdue transparency to how members of the Senate are spending taxpayer dollars. It would not require new or burdensome reporting by Senate offices, but simply ensure that the information that is currently reported and published will now be posted on-line. This simple reform will ensure greater accountability.

## **Questionable Spending By Congress Demands Greater Transparency And Accountability**

A Florida congressman spent \$24,730 last year to lease a 2008 luxury Lexus hybrid sedan.

An Ohio member expensed a \$1,435 digital camera.

A delegate to the House from American Samoa bought two 46-inch Sony Televisions for \$1,473 each.

A California member expensed \$84,000 worth of personalized calendars printed by the U.S. Capitol Historical Society.

A Pennsylvania congressman paid \$22 for a Liz Claiborne cellphone pouch.

“The expenditures were legal, properly accounted for and drawn from allowances the U.S. government grants to lawmakers,” according to the *Wall Street Journal*.<sup>[5]</sup>

According to an investigation by the paper, “The records show that some lawmakers spent heavily in the final months of the year to draw down allowances before the end of December—a time when U.S. households were paring their budgets and lawmakers were criticizing Detroit auto

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<sup>[5]</sup> Louise Radnofsky. “Lawmakers Bill Taxpayers For TVs, Cameras, Lexus,” The Wall Street Journal, May 30, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124364352135868189.html> .

executives for taking private aircraft to Washington to plead their case for taxpayer funding.”

Any unspent money from the allowance is returned to the U.S. Treasury, and, therefore, cannot be rolled over to the next year. While some members do return unspent tax dollars, others go on a “use it or lose it” spending spree.

The *Wall Street Journal* review showed that “the increased year-end spending went not only toward equipment but also to fund year-end ‘bonuses’ to aides. The average House aide earned 17% more in the fourth quarter of the year, when the bonuses were paid, than in previous quarters, according to an earlier Journal analysis. Payments ranged from a few hundred dollars to \$14,000.”<sup>[6]</sup>

While members of Congress can determine for themselves if such allowable expenses are appropriate, taxpayers should also be given the ability to review the expenditures so they can reach their own conclusions as well.

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<sup>[6]</sup> Louise Radnofsky. “Lawmakers Bill Taxpayers For TVs, Cameras, Lexus,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124364352135868189.html> .