

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 24, 2003

The Honorable Robert W. Ney
Chairman
Committee on House Administration
1309 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Bob:

We are writing to respectfully request that the House Administration Committee reinstate the comprehensive database that allowed Members and committees to easily provide access to CRS reports through their websites. A recent policy change eliminated the database, requiring those wishing to continue this program to link each report to their websites individually. It has become clear the new procedures make it harder, rather than easier, to provide constituents access to CRS reports.

The bottom line is the process of linking each report individually is so labor-intensive that it is a strong deterrent to continuing to provide access to these valuable, taxpayer-funded reports. In addition, because many CRS reports are available only as pdf files, Members and committees choosing to continue providing access will have to create new links to these reports each time they are updated. This not only means more work, but also less accuracy, because it will be all but impossible to update links each time a report is updated.


While we questioned CRS's reasons for opposing opening its website to the public, we were willing to try a pilot program in which Members could post certain CRS products on their website. That program clearly demonstrated the substantial constituent interest in CRS reports, but also revealed the very real limitations of providing indirect access to these products. The new program all but blocks Members from providing constituents the means to access these important and informative materials.

Since the enactment of the new program, we have been contacted by several constituents and organizations asking that previous levels of access be restored. The fact is the confines of the new program make it functionally impossible for Members and committees to provide constituents the breadth of information they have come to expect on our websites.


Bob, CRS reports are financed by taxpayers, and it seems to me taxpayers are entitled to benefit from them. We hope you will give serious consideration to reinstating the old procedures for providing access because the new program is so restrictive that it effectively deprives constituents of these valuable sources of information.

We appreciate your consideration of this request. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or my Legislative Assistant, Danielle Rosengarten, at 202/225-5541.

Sincerely,



Christopher Shays
Member of Congress



Jay Inslee
Member of Congress