

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Congressional Transparency Caucus
Our Principles
March 2010

Transparency in government is crucial to our democracy because our government derives its power from the informed consent of the governed. We believe:

1. **The American people have the right to public access to all of their government's information.** All of the federal government's information, with a few well-defined exceptions, should be freely available online.
2. **The American people have the right to analyze their government's information.** The federal government's information should be published in its raw format, downloadable in bulk and machine-readable, so that citizens and watchdog groups can collaborate on new ways to examine it. The government should adopt consistent data standards so that different agencies' forms, filings, and records can all be searched together. All documents should be published at permanent Web addresses so that links to them remain valid.
3. **The American people have the right to interactive access to federal laws, regulations, and rules.** All federal laws, regulations, and rules should be published online in a format that makes them easily searchable, sortable, and downloadable, so that citizens can electronically participate in the development of laws, regulations, and rules.
4. **The American people have the right to track all federal spending and scrutinize the federal budget.** Data on how taxpayers' funds are spent, and the federal budget itself, should be searchable, with every earmark and appropriation electronically identified.
5. **The American people have the right to demand objective, transparent performance standards for all federal agencies.** Federal agencies should track their goals and achievements using a format that is electronically searchable, sortable, and downloadable, so that spending data can be associated with performance.
6. **The American people have the right to aggressive, independent oversight.** Inspectors general at federal agencies should be kept independent and active, and should regularly evaluate transparency in government. The House and Senate committees on government oversight and operations should conduct regular hearings and investigations on transparency. Disclosures by regulated entities –

such as filings by lobbyists, federal contractors and grantees, banks, and public companies – should be published online, in formats that make them easily searchable, sortable, and downloadable. Citizens should be empowered to scrutinize these disclosures and collaborate to expose corruption, fraud, and other abuses.

7. **We must institutionalize a culture of open government.** For the government's default setting to change from a presumption of secrecy to one of openness, a cultural shift must occur. Through education and outreach, Congress should strive to encourage decision-makers throughout all branches of the federal government to choose openness over secrecy.