

72- HOURS TO CONSIDER LEGISLATION

The United States Congress was established by our Founding Fathers to evaluate, analyze, and debate proposed measures that create and amend laws. Members of Congress, in turn, would be able to learn about legislation under consideration, express the views of their constituency, and cast an educated vote. Unfortunately, this principle has often been overlooked in an effort to rush through legislation – regardless of anyone’s ability to actually read and understand the underlying policies of the bill. When Members of Congress are not afforded the opportunity to read and review legislation, the voice of their constituency is silenced. Furthermore, the transparent process of Congress is diminished and laws become crafted without appropriate oversight or input of the American public.

There are two recent examples of significant legislation that Members of Congress were not provided an opportunity to adequately read and review prior to voting on:

- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (H.R. 1) – The 1,071 page “stimulus” bill was provided to Members of Congress less than 24 hours prior to the vote on the floor of the House of Representatives. Members simply had no opportunity to fully read the legislation prior to voting on it, despite its \$787 billion cost.
- The American Clean Energy and Security Act (H.R. 2454) – At 3:00am (the day of the vote) a 300 page amendment was provided to Members of Congress to this climate change legislation. Despite the significant cost, economic implications, and tax increases included in the bill, Members of Congress were provided with less than 15 hours to read and analyze this amendment before being forced to vote on the legislation.

As Congress considers reforming America’s health care system, there is a real concern that Members of Congress will again not have sufficient time to read the final bill. The current House bill, America’s Affordable Health Choices Act (H.R. 3200), is over 1,000 pages and has many moving parts that are subject to change as Democrats seek to craft a bill that will pass the House. Since health care represents 17 percent of the U.S. economy, it is critical that Members of Congress have ample time to read and analyze the final product.

Rushing legislation through Congress is not a responsible way to govern and this practice needs to come to an end. I have supported several initiatives to permanently institute a 72-hour rule, which would provide members with the time needed to adequately analyze legislation prior to a vote:

Steps Taken to Institute the 72-hour Rule in the 111th Congress

- Cosponsor of H.Res. 554 and H.Res. 689, which would require all bills and conference reports to be made available to Members of Congress and the general public for 72-hours before it can be brought to the House floor for a vote;
- Signed a non-partisan pledge to not support any health care legislation that has not been read and that has not been available to the public on-line for at least 72-hours;
- Signed a discharge petition that would mandate consideration of a bill requiring legislation to be available for 72-hours prior to a vote on the House floor (A discharge petition needs 218 Members of Congress to sign before a bill can be considered. The current petition has 174 signers);
- Supported a procedural motion that would require 72-hours for Members of Congress to read the Agriculture Appropriations bill.

For more information on this and other issues please visit my website, www.adamputnam.house.gov