



July 17, 2018

Dear FY19 Minibus Appropriations Conferee:

As you may know, the Senate's version of the FY19 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill contains a provision to require Senate candidates to join all other federal candidates in filing their campaign finance reports electronically. This simple, but important, measure will save taxpayers at least \$898,000 each year, reduce bureaucratic inefficiency and increase political transparency and accountability.

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you, as a member of the Minibus Appropriations conference committee, to ensure that this provision — Section 103 of the Senate bill — remains in the final FY19 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill.

House candidates first had the option of electronically filing their campaign finance reports in 1995. The law that allowed this — Pub. L. No. 104-79, 109 Stat. 791 — also required that House candidates file their reports directly with the Federal Election Commission (FEC), rather than with the Clerk of the House. But this law did not include a similar change for the Senate, so Senate candidates continue to file their reports with the Secretary of the Senate. In 2002, the FEC required most reports filed with the agency to be done so electronically, but that change did not cover Senate candidates. So while House candidates, presidential candidates and political action committees have been required to electronically file their campaign finance reports for more than a decade, Senate candidates must still file paper copies of their reports. Because the FEC must still make the information in those paper reports publicly available, these documents undergo an inefficient bureaucratic process that would make Rube Goldberg proud.

Here's how the process works today: While virtually all Senate candidates maintain electronic databases of their donations and expenditures, they must print paper reports that are then either mailed or hand-delivered to the Secretary of the Senate. Next, Senate staffers must then scan those documents — each report is hundreds, if not thousands, of pages long — and convert them into electronic files to send to the FEC. That agency, in turn, uses private contractors to perform the data entry necessary to re-digitize this information that was stored digitally in the first place. Several weeks — and hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars — later, the information in these reports finally becomes available for the public to review in a searchable, sortable and downloadable fashion.

Section 103 of the Senate version of the FY19 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill fixes this problem by simply requiring Senate candidates to file their reports directly with the FEC.

The current, paper-based campaign finance filing system for Senate candidates is a prime example of bureaucratic inefficiency and wasteful spending. The FEC estimates that requiring Senate candidates to electronically file their reports would save taxpayers more than \$898,000 each year — or approximately \$1.8 million during the 2017-2018 election cycle. The FEC itself has frequently urged the



Senate to adopt this policy change — writing in one recent Congressional Budget Justification that “mandatory electronic filing for Senate reports will create considerable cost saving and will result in easier, more efficient dissemination of data.”

These points have been echoed by numerous senators as well. For example, Senator Steve Daines (R-MT), the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee’s legislative branch subcommittee, recently said that e-filing campaign finance reports "enhances government transparency, reduces unnecessary bureaucratic red tape and would save taxpayer dollars."

Senator Daines is right about this. Now is the time for the Senate to take this technological leap forward. Doing so would modernize the outdated rules governing Senate campaigns and would save Americans millions of dollars each election cycle. The e-filing provision is the right mix of smart policy and good politics. We urge you to ensure that this provision remains in the final FY19 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

Business for America
Campaign Legal Center
Cause of Action Institute
Center for Democracy and Technology
Center for Responsive Politics
Coalition to Reduce Spending
Common Cause
Data Coalition
Demand Progress Action
Democracy 21
Issue One
Judicial Watch
League of Women Voters of the United States
Liberty Coalition
MapLight
National Institute on Money in Politics
National Legal and Policy Center
Open the Government
Project On Government Oversight
R Street Institute
Sunlight Foundation
Take Back Our Republic
Taxpayers for Common Sense