COALITION OF
JOURNALISTS FOR
OPEN GOVERNMENT
1101 Wilson Blvd, Suite 1100, Arlington, VA 22209 703-807-2100

2/9/2005

The Honorable John Cornyn
Senate of the United States

Dear Sen. Cornyn,

The Coalition of Journalists for Open Government and the undersigned member organizations strongly support your efforts to increase federal government openness and access to information and to provide meaningful reform of its public records law.

We believe your Open Government Act of 2005 will do much to achieve those goals, by closing some existing loopholes that have permitted unreasonable delays, providing for better tracking of requests and reporting on service to citizens, mandating greater agency responsibility and accountability, and establishing an ombudsman empowered to bring disputes to a conclusion that is quicker and more economical for the requester. The clarification on recovery of attorneys fees will ensure that those requesters who do find it necessary to take legal action are compensated when that is the fair thing to do.

We also strongly endorse the provision for an impact statement accompanying legislation that creates new statutory exemptions to FOIA. This will ensure that adequate attention is given to any such exemption and that the open government consequences are reasonably considered.

As you suggested in your recent article in the LBJ Journal and in your talk last fall to the American Society of Access Professionals, it has been too long since Congress has taken a solid look at the workings of the Freedom of Information Act and held hearings to determine whether, in its everyday execution, it continues to facilitate the informed citizenry needed to help our democracy thrive.

You quoted our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln, "Let the people know the facts, and the country will be safe."

This is a time when there is considerable focus on issues of safety and national security. Lincoln's admonition reminds us that an informed citizenry is central to that goal. We believe a Freedom of Information Act that is effective and allows for the robust interplay of information is essential to an informed public upon which our ultimate security rests.

We look forward to working with your staff as your proposal moves forward.

Pete Weitzel

Pete Weitzel, coordinator
Coalition of Journalists for Open Government

Associated Press Managing Editors
Association of Health Care Journalists
Committee of Concerned Journalists
Education Writers Association
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