

November 19, 2007

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Senate Majority Leader  
528 Hart Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Reid:

In November 2001, President George W. Bush issued Executive Order 13233, which gives current and former presidents and vice presidents, and their heirs, broad authority to withhold presidential records or delay their release. “The Presidential Records Act Amendments of 2007” (H.R. 1255/S. 886) would nullify the Bush executive order and re-establish procedures to ensure the timely release of presidential records that the Presidential Records Act was designed to ensure.

On September 24, 2007, Senator Jim Bunning (R-Ky.) objected to floor consideration of H.R. 1255/S. 886 under unanimous consent, holding up a vote on the bill. Despite repeated requests from our organizations and the news media, Senator Bunning has refused to state the reasons for his opposition to the bill. Recently, the White House reiterated its threat to veto the bill should it pass Congress.

On March 14, 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives approved H.R. 1255 by a veto-proof margin (333-93) with 104 Republicans breaking ranks with the Administration. The bill also has broad bipartisan support in the Senate, and cleared the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee by voice vote earlier this year.

It is unconscionable that a single senator can hold up consideration of legislation that will allow the American people to know the full record of this administration, as well as past and future administrations. If Senator Bunning has legitimate concerns with the legislation, he should work with the bill’s sponsors to reach a compromise. But to date he has refused to do so, and time on the legislative calendar of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress is already growing short. There is significant bipartisan support for the bill in the Senate – likely enough support to overcome a possible filibuster. Therefore, the undersigned organizations strongly urge you to bring H.R. 1255/S. 886 to the Senate floor for consideration as soon as possible.

The Bush Administration has been perhaps the most secretive in our nation’s history. If this Executive Order is not overturned by Congress it will allow President Bush, his heirs, and – for the first time – Vice President Cheney and his heirs, to continue to delay or deny the American people access to the full historical record of this administration well beyond 2009. The importance of this issue to the public also can be seen in the recent controversy faced by presidential candidate Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) concerning the records of the Clinton Administration.

Presidential historian Robert Dallek told a House subcommittee earlier this year, “President Bush’s order carries the potential for incomplete and distorted understanding of past presidential decisions, especially about controversial actions with significant consequences. Consider what difference the release of the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon tapes has made in our understanding of the decision-making on Vietnam in these administrations.”

The American people should not be denied their basic right to have the information they need to hold their government accountable for its actions. If you fail to bring this bill to the Senate floor, the clamor for more transparency will continue while a veil of secrecy will remain in place long after the Bush Administration has left office. Please bring the Presidential Records Act Amendments of 2007 (H.R. 1255/S. 886) to the floor now.

Sincerely,

American Association of Law Libraries	National Coalition Against Censorship
American Historical Association	National Coalition for History
American Library Association	National Council on Public History
Association of Research Libraries	National Freedom of Information Coalition
Bill of Rights Defense Committee	National Security Archive
Californians Aware	Ohio Newspaper Association
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington	OMB Watch
Common Cause	OpenTheGovernment.org
Council of State Archivists	Organization of American Historians
Electronic Frontier Foundation	PEN American Center
Essential Information	People for the American Way
Government Accountability Project	Public Citizen
Indiana Coalition for Open Government	Society of American Archivists
Liberty Coalition	Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations
Mine Safety and Health News	Society for Military History

Society of Professional Journalists-  
Montana Professional Chapter

Southern Historical Association

Special Libraries Association

Sunlight Foundation

The James Madison Project

The National Press Club

U.S. Bill of Rights Foundation

Utah Foundation for Open Government

Vermont Coalition for Open  
Government

Vermont Press Association

Washington Coalition for Open  
Government