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House adopts Amash transparency reforms

Changes to House Rules make legislation easier to read, searchable

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The House adopted a set of transparency reforms written by Rep. Justin Amash (R-Mich.) this afternoon. The reforms were adopted as part of the House Rules, which passed 234-172-1.

“For the second Congress in a row, the House has adopted my reforms to make Congress more transparent and accessible to Americans,” said Amash. “Writing legislation in a way that’s more readable will help representatives and their staffs fulfill their responsibility to review legislation before they vote on it, and it will empower our constituents to hold Congress accountable.”

The first two reforms aim to make legislation easier for representatives and the American public to read. Legislation must be printed with references to the portion of the U.S. Code, public laws, or statutes at large that the legislation amends. These references will make it easier to figure out what proposed legislation does because the references often point to sources on the Internet and in other locations available to the public.

Another reform from Amash requires legislation that is reported by House committees—where some of the most complicated bills originate—to include the entire sections of law that the legislation amends. Already, committee-reported bills include the equivalent of “track changes” in reports accompanying the bills to help make clear what laws the bills amend. However, those track changes often don’t include enough surrounding text to make the legislation’s impact obvious to readers. Amash’s second reform will help contextualize committee-reported bills’ changes to existing law by requiring the inclusion of that surrounding text in committee reports.

Finally, Amash wrote a provision in the House Rules that instructs appropriate House officials to work toward producing machine-readable documents. Those documents include embedded tags that let computer programs quickly and easily make sense of the contents of those documents.

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