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HON. RON PAUL OF TEXAS

Before the U.S. House of Representatives

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Statement on the "Sunlight Rule"

Mr. Speaker, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously said, "Sunlight is the best disinfectant." In order to shine sunlight on the practices of the House of Representatives, and thus restore public trust and integrity to this institution, I am introducing the "Sunlight Rule." This measure amends House rules to ensure members have adequate time to study a bill before being asked to vote on it. One of the chief causes of increasing public cynicism is the way major pieces of legislation are brought to the floor without members having an opportunity to read the bills. This is particularly a problem with the Appropriations committee conference reports, which are often rushed to the floor of the House in late-night sessions at the end of the year. For example, just this past December the House voted on the fiscal year 2006 Defense Appropriations conference report at approximately four a.m.--just four hours after the report was filed. Yet the report contained language dealing with avian flu, including controversial language regarding immunity liability for vaccine manufacturers, that was added in the House-Senate conference on the bill. Considering legislation on important issues in this manner is a dereliction of our duty as the people's elected representatives.

My proposed rule requires that no piece of legislation, including conference reports, can be brought before the House of Representatives unless it has been available to members and staff both in print and electronic versions for at least ten days. My bill also requires that a manager's amendment making substantive changes to a bill be available in both printed and electronic forms at least 72 hours before a vote. While manager's amendments usually are reserved for technical changes, oftentimes manager's amendments contain substantive additions to bills in the form of pork. Members should be made aware of such changes before being asked to vote on a bill.

The Sunlight Rule provides the American people the opportunity to be involved in enforcing congressional rules by allowing citizens to move for censure of any Representative who votes for a bill brought to the floor in violation of this act. The Sunlight Rule can never be waived by the Rules committee or House leadership. If an attempt is made to bring a bill to the floor in violation of this rule, any member can raise a point of order requiring the bill to be immediately pulled from the House calendar.

Mr. Speaker, the practice of rushing bills to the floor before individual members have a chance to study them contributes to public distrust of Congress. Voting on bills before members read them makes a mockery of representative government and cheats voters who sent us here to make informed decisions on public policy. Adopting the Sunlight Rule is one of the most important changes to House rules this Congress could make to restore public trust and help preserve the integrity of this institution. I hope my colleagues will support this change to House rules.