

# Allow public review before legislation vote

By F. James Sensenbrenner

Legislation is sometimes complicated, dense and lengthy. It's often dry to read, and can be filled with a lot of jargon. Regardless, I strongly believe that members and citizens should have the opportunity to read the final version of nonemergency legislation before it is voted on. That is why I am co-sponsoring House Resolution 554, the 72 Hour Rule bill, and have signed a discharge petition to move this bill directly to the floor, as it's being held up by House leadership.

The legislation has two key points:

1.) Requires that all bills and conference reports be made available to members of Congress and the general public for 72 hours online before it can be brought to the House floor for a vote.

2.) Repeals the "last six days" provision in current House rules, which provides that the opportunity to read conference reports is automatically waived in the last six days of a congressional session.

Speaker Pelosi and President Obama talk a great deal about accountability, transparency and having open government, so I question why they oppose this legislation. It seems like common sense that the people who elect us are given the opportunity to be included in the process.

"Sunlight before signing" was one of the president's biggest campaign pledges, where he promised to post legislation online for five days for public comment before signing anything into law. He has broken this promise several times. The proposed 72 Hour Rule legislation would allow him to enhance his commitment. Additionally, this legislation benefits citizens, as their voices can actually be heard before a bill is passed, rather than AFTER, when it's already in



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queue to be signed. I've often said that haste makes waste, and that rushing to pass bills only leads to bad laws. We all know that once a bill becomes law, it is nearly impossible to repeal. During the president's relatively short time in the White House, Congress has already passed and the president has signed into law some really bad legislation. Most of this legislation was rammed through before anyone had time to review it. The \$787 billion stimulus package was voted on approximately 12 hours after it was drafted - this was the one with the AIG bonuses - and the global warming bill the house passed was voted on a mere 16 hours after a 300-plus page amendment was inserted.

Republicans and Democrats have both rushed legislation in the past. However, this Democratic majority has been using the fast track so often that it is raising concern all around. In order to have an honest debate, we need to slow the process down for everyone. And if it is not emergency legislation, is there any real harm in allowing members and the public three days to digest the legislation? Many provisions in the proposed health care legislation, for example, wouldn't even take effect until 2013 - so what's wrong with waiting an extra 72 hours?

If the speaker and the president really want to walk the walk, they should allow a vote on the 72 Hour Rule bill. This is good legislation that will make for better government, whether the Democrats or Republicans are in charge.

(U.S. Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner, R-Menomonee Falls, represents the 5th District.)