

Senator John Cornyn: Creating a More Open Government

- Senator John Cornyn's philosophy of government is based on principles put forward by our Founding Fathers that a **democracy depends upon a fully informed citizenry**, and open government is the cornerstone of any free society.
- Echoing the words of Patrick Henry, Senator Cornyn believes that the "**liberties of a people never were, nor ever will be, secure, when the transactions of their rulers may be concealed from them.**"
- Senator Cornyn's home state of **Texas has one of the most effective laws in the United States** regarding freedom of government information.
- While serving as Attorney General of Texas, **Cornyn vigorously enforced freedom of information laws** and expanded its reach throughout the state.
- Since his election to the Senate, **Cornyn has fought to bring "Texas sunshine" and openness to Washington, D.C.** and the federal government.

During his tenure in the US Senate, Senator Cornyn has established a strong record on open government issues.

- Authored the landmark **Open Government Act of 2007** which made the most significant reforms to the Freedom of Information Act in its history.
- Cosponsored the **Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act**, creating a single public website to track all non-classified federal funding.
- Helped pass the **Legislative Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Transparency Act** in the Senate, making it more difficult for government bureaucrats to withhold information from FOIA requests.
- Introduced the **Faster FOIA Act** to establish an advisory commission on Freedom of Information Act processing delays.
- Encouraged President Bush to issue **Executive Order 13392: Improving Agency Disclosure of Information**. The order requires federal agencies to appoint a Chief FOIA Officer to be responsible for FOIA compliance.
- Supported improvements to the **Public Interest Declassification Board**, a board established to prevent the over-classification of materials and to expedite the process through which classified documents are declassified and made available to the public.

Senator Cornyn has continued to press for additional open government measures by:

- Cosponsoring the **Openness Promotes Effectiveness in our National Government Act**, bipartisan legislation that expands the accessibility and openness of government data. The bill:

- Close FOIA loopholes that often lead to months- or years-long waits for requested information.
- Protect access to FOIA fee waivers for journalists and for those, including bloggers, who contribute to the expanding world of information.
- Establish FOIA hotlines in federal agencies and enable citizens to track the status of a request by phone or Internet.
- Place a FOIA ombudsman at each agency to review compliance with FOIA regulations.
- Strengthen incentives for agencies to act on FOIA requests in a timely manner.
- Cosponsoring amendments to the **Legislative Transparency and Accountability Act** to provide a longer public review process before legislation is voted on, and to implement a disclosure requirement for information on financial costs of earmarks to be included in appropriations bills.
- Cosponsoring the **Presidential Records Act Amendments of 2007** to repeal an executive order impeding public access to presidential papers.

Praise for Senator Cornyn on Open Government:

- Editorial boards across the country and Texas have praised Senator Cornyn's work.
 - **Austin American-Statesman**: "Cornyn is right to push for more access to government records and actions and we applaud his efforts." (Austin American-Statesman Editorial, "Going online to see if government is in line," 1/18/08)
 - **Dallas Morning News**: "Texas Sen. John Cornyn won our praise last month when he and Vermont Sen. Patrick Leahy pushed through a bill making it easier for the public to gain access to government records through an independent ombudsman's office at the National Archives. The idea was to create a review process free from the executive branch's intervention. President Bush signed it but then pulled a fast one by trying to place the ombudsman's office under Justice Department control, where the White House can intervene. We hope the senators succeed in their efforts to fight the move." (Dallas Morning News Editorial, "Yeah, about that 'open government' thing...", 2/18/08)
 - **Shelby Star (North Carolina)**: "Sen. Cornyn deserves praise for a well-thought-out measure, and he needs support in establishing an office that can objectively rule on requests for government records and other open-government matters." (Shelby Star Editorial, "Keep light shining on Bush record," 3/17/08)
 - **Sarasota Herald Tribune**: "To their credit, Republicans and Democrats in Congress aren't backing down. The measure's chief sponsors -- Sens. John Cornyn, R-Texas, and Pat Leahy,

D- Vt. -- say they'll continue to fight to preserve the concept of an independent ombudsman.” (Sarasota Herald Tribune, 2/11/08)

- **The Brownsville Herald**: “U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, over the protests of President Bush, very smartly wrote the Open Government Act last year to place the compliance officer in the office of the National Archives, an independent organization that is dedicated to historical records, not presidents.” (Brownsville Herald Editorial, “Keep the light on,” 3/16/08)
 - **The Clarion-Ledger (Jackson, Mississippi)**: “On the national level, the federal Freedom of Information Act recently was renewed and strengthened. Last week Sens. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., and John Cornyn, R-Texas, introduced legislation to further strengthen the FOIA Act by making Congress more accountable if it attempts to add exemptions to the act.” (The Clarion-Ledger, “Editorial)
 - **Portales News-Tribune**: “Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, is the other co-author of the OPEN Government Act, and has long been a champion of open government.” (Portales News-Tribune, “Senators look to build on FOIA reforms)
- Senator Cornyn’s efforts in advocating open government have been recognized by:
 - **National Newspaper Association’s *Sunshine in Government Award***
 - **Freedom of Information Foundation**