

## EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY TO SAVE TAXPAYERS MONEY

### *S. 298: The Senate Campaign Disclosure Parity Act*

Did you know that U.S. Senate candidates are still required to file their campaign finance reports on paper? That's right: Even in the age of smartphones, social media and cloud computing, Senate candidates are still required, by law, to file paper documents to detail their fundraising and expenditures, instead of electronically filing them.

House candidates and presidential candidates, on the other hand, have been filing their reports electronically without issue for nearly two decades. There is no reason why Senate candidates should not do the same.

The Senate Campaign Disclosure Parity Act (S. 298) — currently sponsored by a bipartisan group of more than 50 senators — is a straightforward bill that would address this disparity and save taxpayers money in the process.

### The problems with paper:

The Senate's current, cumbersome paper-based filing system is a prime example of bureaucratic inefficiency and wasteful spending.

Nearly all Senate candidates presently maintain electronic databases of their donations and expenditures. Instead of being able to electronically submit this information to the government, these campaigns must print paper reports that are then either mailed or hand-delivered to the Secretary of the Senate. Next, Senate staffers scan those documents — often hundreds, if not thousands, of pages — back into an electronic format to send them to the Federal Election Commission (FEC). That agency, in turn, hires private contractors to perform data entry to re-digitize the information that was first stored digitally.

All the while, the risk of mistakes being made is heightened as records are transferred from electronic form to paper and back again. Moreover, the public is kept in the dark for days — even weeks — about who is bankrolling Senate campaigns and how funds are being spent.

### Here's how the Senate Campaign Disclosure Parity Act will fix this:

- ▶ **Modernize the filing process.** The bill would require Senate campaigns to electronically file their campaign finance reports directly with the FEC, instead of submitting paper copies to the Secretary of the Senate.
- ▶ **Save taxpayers money.** The FEC has estimated that requiring Senate candidates to e-file would save taxpayers more than \$898,000 a year.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ **Increase transparency.** Campaign finance reports that are e-filed are made available on the FEC's website and may be downloaded by the public within minutes of submission. No longer would constituents be required to wait days — even weeks — to fully and easily access information from Senate campaign finance reports.

The often-divided FEC has itself, on numerous occasions, unanimously urged the Senate to adopt this change. As the agency recently told Congress: "Mandatory electronic filing for Senate reports will create considerable cost savings and will result in easier, more efficient dissemination of data."<sup>4</sup>

*"Filing Senate campaign reports electronically is a simple, efficient and cost-effective approach that is long-overdue."*

Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS)<sup>1</sup>

*"Accountability goes hand-in-hand with transparency — and Washington needs more of both."*

Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wicker.Senate.Gov, <http://bit.ly/2vVW1cv>

<sup>2</sup> Huffington Post, <http://bit.ly/2vWjISg>

<sup>3</sup> Federal Election Commission, <http://bit.ly/2Cwz4R2>

<sup>4</sup> Federal Election Commission, <http://bit.ly/2vVWpd>