

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously said “Sunlight is the best disinfectant.” Indeed some of the most malignant growth of our government has been nurtured under a cover of darkness. Literally, in the dark hours of the morning at the end of the year, it has become tradition for the Appropriations committee to rush the famous omnibus bill to the floor for a vote, mere hours after it is introduced. The vote took place at 4 am the last time an omnibus spending bill was before us. We had all of 4 hours to deliberate on almost 1400 pages of important legislation. My colleagues somehow found this acceptable, however, and the bill passed 212-206. The bill for the Expansion of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) was also rushed to the floor with little time to examine the lengthy text of the legislation. If approved by the Senate this measure would increase taxes by an additional \$53.8 billion over 5 years and further extend the federal government’s reach into the healthcare of American citizens. Similar processes were followed for raising the minimum wage, providing funding for stem cell research and implementing the 9-11 conference. Of course, the most well-known example of this phenomenon might be the Patriot Act. Legislators passed the 300+ page bill less than a day after it was introduced, many out of an urgency to do something. But we are sent to Washington to make informed decisions on public policy. The very least constituents expect is that their elected representatives read the legislation citizens will be subject to, and taxed for. And once they have read it, to weigh the constitutionality and the merits of the legislation. How can lawmakers possibly do that without reasonable time allotted? This has long been a concern of mine, and for this reason I have reintroduced The Sunlight Rule. (H.RES 63) This proposed rule stipulates that no piece of legislation can be brought before the House of Representatives for a vote unless it has been available to members and staff to read for at least ten days. Any amendments must be available for at least 72 hours before a vote. 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. So far I have two co-sponsors. It is my belief that this simple new rule could greatly disinfect the House of the creeping, insidious growth, merely by shining the light on legislation before it is voted on. We need time to think before we enact. The American people deserve at least this much from their Congress.