

September 29, 2014

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Rein in the Franking Privilege

Dear Member of Congress:

We write to you to encourage your support of the “Ending Special Mail Privileges for Congress Act of 2014” (H.R. 4872), sponsored by Reps. Rob Woodall (R-GA) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL). The Woodall-Duckworth legislation is a bipartisan and measured response designed to rein in some of the worst abuses of the privilege by making it clear to both constituents and Congress alike that “franked mail” costs taxpayers.

Our organizations include: Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW); Common Cause; National Taxpayers Union; Public Citizen; Prof. James Thurber, Dept. of Government, American University; Taxpayers Protection Alliance; and U.S. PIRG.

Under current franking rules, members of Congress simply sign their name on the envelope in place of a postage stamp, which serves as an IOU with the Postal Service. The congressional offices then estimate the mail expenses and reimburse the Postal Service from member expense accounts. The franking privilege even extends to the spouse of a member who dies in office.

This “signature system” of postage, with congressional offices calculating their own mailing expenses, gives constituents the impression that the mailing is a free congressional perk and lends lax accounting methods to congressional offices of the actual costs of franked mail to taxpayers.

H.R. 4872 would end the signature system of postage, requiring congressional offices to affix an actual postage stamp to each franked mail, and thus provides an accurate business-like accounting system of the actual costs. The legislation would also end transferring the franking privilege to spouses of deceased members.

In the end, making the actual costs of the franking privilege evident to constituents and members will encourage greater self-restraint by members and more accurate accounting. In this era of electronic communications in which “snail mail” is no longer the medium of choice, it may also lead to ending the franking privilege altogether.

We urge Congress to adopt the bipartisan Woodall-Duckworth legislation to rein in abuses of the franking privilege.

Sincerely,

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

Common Cause

National Taxpayers Union

Public Citizen

Prof. James Thurber, Dept. of Government, American University

Taxpayers Protection Alliance

U.S. PIRG