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Chairman Towns Passes Major Transparency Reforms

Seeking to create a seamless transition, U.S. Rep. Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY) hit the ground running on the first day of the 111th Congress with two major pieces of legislation, which passed the House of Representatives: the Presidential Records Act Amendments of 2009 (H.R. 35) and Presidential Library Donation Act of 2009 (H.R. 36). Rep. Towns’ bills were the first order of business and the first to be considered on the first day Congress met to address legislative business. Both bills include significant transparency reforms that would overhaul the process for accessing presidential records and disclose donations to presidential libraries.

Specifically, the Presidential Records Act Amendments of 2009 would overturn Executive Order 13233 issued by President George W. Bush and restore procedures to ensure the timely release of presidential records. The Presidential Library Donation Act of 2009 would require disclosure of donations and make information about donations available to the public.

“President-elect Obama and House Democrats agree on the need to increase transparency in the federal government, and these reforms will provide a new level of openness for the incoming Administration,” said Rep. Towns.

“President Bush’s executive order created an imbalanced and restrictive process. The Presidential Records Act preserves the important intent of the original post-Watergate law, which was to assure timely accessibility and preservation of official White House records for historical and, if necessary, legal purposes,” said Rep. Towns. “And, with the Presidential Library Donation Act, we will do away with anonymous donations by foreign countries and nationals, and make certain that the process is transparent to the public.”

The legislation is similar to bills that passed the House in 2007 as H.R. 1254 and H.R. 1255.

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