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September 3, 1999

I am responding to your letter of August 17 urging me to "make available on the Internet the reports of the Congressional Research Service." According to your letter, a survey conducted by your organizations identified these reports and issue briefs as the "single most frequently requested category of information that respondents to our survey wanted to see online."

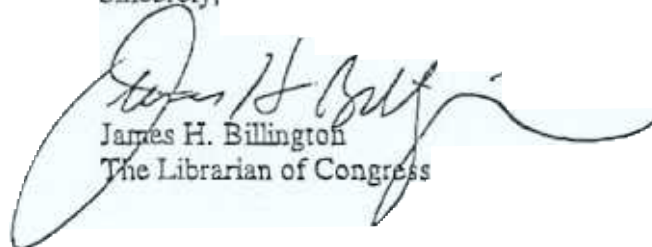
The question of the extent of dissemination of Congressional Research Service reports and issue briefs outside Congress is a matter for the Congress to determine. A long-standing legislative provision restricts CRS from directly disseminating its products to the public without congressional committee authorization. Congressional resolutions and policy statements over the years have reiterated the role of CRS as adjunct congressional staff whose communications and documents prepared in the course of supporting the legislative and representational duties of Members and committees of Congress are to remain within the control of Congress. These policies preserve the direct relationship Members have with their constituents. In addition, a variety of legal issues, cost considerations, institutional repercussions, and technical complexities need to be weighed carefully by Congress in developing policy for Internet access to these materials.

That said, you should be aware that CRS and congressional committees and Members are exploring ways to utilize the Internet to facilitate dissemination of CRS reports and issue briefs by Members and committees. Large numbers of CRS reports and issue briefs are distributed now by congressional offices when they deem these products appropriate in responding to their constituent questions and concerns. Members often find that CRS reports are responsive to inquiries by constituents on matters of public policy and many have selected such reports for placement on their Web sites. The Senate Rules Committee last year encouraged offices to use their Web sites to disseminate CRS reports and issue briefs, and the CRS oversight committees in both the House and the Senate have worked with CRS to develop a system to facilitate the posting of CRS reports and issue briefs on Member and committee Web sites.

Disclosure of CRS reports and issue briefs by Members and Committees--and greater use of the Internet to achieve such disclosure--is seen as reaching the proper balance between the public's desire for information on the issues before Congress, the preservation of CRS' role in

the legislative process, and the protection of the Member's role in informing his/her constituents on their public policy concerns. The Director of CRS is committed to working with Members of Congress to facilitate their ability to use modern technology in keeping their constituents informed about the basis of their policy decisions.

Sincerely,



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The Librarian of Congress

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