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Expensive Economy

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EXPENSIVE ECONOMY

The teachers of reading and the reading specialists doubtless deem it a bad omen that the government found it useful to its own ends to drastically cut the number of *Congressional Records* each representative may mail to constituents. To publicize this curtailment of reports to taxpayers as an "economy move" was a flagrant example of arrogance and shortsightedness.

Just as educational administrators often believe that hiring a reading teacher constitutes a reading program in their schools, our elected government officials mistakenly believe that passing a bill which gives money to schools for reading is a solution to the reading problem in the nation. What schools in our towns and cities need is a constant reminder from our leaders that reading is all-important to a self-governing people.

It appears now that we all need to be reminded that we *are* a self-governing people. Reading reports of what representatives in our nation's Capitol are considering ought to be everyone's business. When our nation was younger, independent newspaper owners jealously guarded their right to receive the *Record*, and regularly told their subscribers exactly what was being done about local, area, and national problems. Now we have lost most of our locally owned independent newspapers, and we are left with news-for-profit enterprises which avoid antagonizing anyone, but do little to inform readers. We are also being lulled into telling our students that television is "instructional," that the banalities we hear are "incisive reports" on our representatives' work in Washington.

The alternative to the *Congressional Record* is a comprehensive written report from each representative to the taxpayers every day on every issue, so that young people can again feel they are closely associated with a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Our young people should not be taught critical reading by perusing workbook pages of hypothetical examples. They need to compare statements by real people on current, vital, and urgent issues. They need to recognize the number and the range of problems that face legislators every day of each session. They need to be alerted to the great need for sincere leaders, a fact which is manifested in the pages of the *Congressional Record*.

How could our legislators accept this denial of their need to report to their constituents, without more than a murmur of protest? Have they fallen into the trap of thinking that if homefolks see their faces on television now and then, *that* would convince all of us that they were serving well?

Reading teachers cannot carry the burden of demonstrating the importance of reading without a real gesture of support from our elected representatives. The *Record* is a commitment to the people, it is a solid piece of evidence that a democracy does not hide or conduct its deliberations in secret, it is a line of direct communication with the people who sent legislators to the forum to discuss matters in their stead.

The amount of money being saved by abandoning this service of sending *Records* to concerned citizens cannot be great in a day when “billion” no longer strikes awe in our hearts. One can be more specific, however, in considering the loss to our concept of democracy, when we stop to question the motives of a government which foolishly thinks cutting off the *Record* is of no consequence. In ancient times it was advantageous to have an illiterate populace. Today, it is calamitous. Let us not be guilty of de-emphasizing reading the *Record* by pretending to save money.

Kenneth VanderMeulen
Editor