



Opinion

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Cato's Harper sees Obama progress on transparency front

By: [Mark Tapscott](#)

Editorial Page Editor

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There is some very encouraging news from the Obama White House on the transparency in government front, according to Jim Harper, who follows these issues for the Cato Institute.

Last year, despite the president's campaign promise to post all bills passed by Congress for at least five days on the White House web site before deciding whether to sign or veto them, that was done for only six of the 123 bills that came to his desk.

So far in 2010, however, 37 of the 69 bills that have gone to the president's desk were posted on the White House site for five days before getting their final treatment from the chief executive.

Harper tracks this data under Obama's rubric of [Sunlight Before Signing](#).

That's quite an improvement in the batting average, going from .049 last year to .530 so far this year. And, Harper notes, just in the month of June, the White House has thus posted 16 of 19 measures, for an .840 batting average.

There are some problems with the White House posting system, though, as Harper explains:

"The signed legislation section is a bit of a jumble. It's in no apparent order, it does not include public law numbers, it has different 'signed' dates for some bills than the Thomas system has, and it even lists a few bills that have not been signed into law."

Still, the good news outweighs the bad because, Harper notes, each of the bills have "RSS feeds that make it easy for the public to stay informed about what bills have reached the president's desk to get their five-day review. Voters and bloggers can easily get a quick sense of what Congress and the president are doing. Think of the social studies teacher who might use the bills Congress sends to the president in any given week for a class assignment."

That's a significant and positive contribution to the public good because, as Harper points out, "each time a bill reaches the president, it will pop up in RSS feeds nationwide. A habit of civic awareness can

take root thanks to these RSS feeds, and the administration deserves credit for implementing them, even if it has done so tardily."

You can read the rest of Harper's excellent analysis [here](#), including his chart for last year and this year, and a display of the status of every bill that has been posted on the White House site since Obama took office.

For all of the things that Obamas has done that drive conservatives and libertarians up the wall, it's important for us to praise the president when he does things we support, especially so on the transparency front because greater transparency means improved accountability, which is a crucial tool in the efforts to restore limited government.

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