

*We the people of Maine...*

THE MAINE HERITAGE POLICY CENTER

August 5, 2011

[www.mainepolicy.org](http://www.mainepolicy.org)

The Honorable Olympia Snowe  
United States Senate  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

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Portland, Maine 04112

Tel: 207.321.2550  
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The Honorable Susan Collins  
United States Senate  
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Snowe and Collins:

The Maine Heritage Policy Center believes an open and transparent government is critical in a free and democratic society. Citizens have a right to know the actions of their government officials and how those officials are using our hard-earned tax dollars.

As an organization, we commit substantial resources to expand government transparency and protect citizens' right to access public information. We created and maintain the [MaineOpenGov.org](http://MaineOpenGov.org) Web site, which features salary information for some 90,000 taxpayer-paid Maine government employees, billions of dollars in state government contracts, and pension payment data for Maine government retirees. We have also partnered with other transparency advocates including the Maine Civil Liberties Union to promote legislation to strengthen Maine's Freedom of Access laws.

Because of our steadfast commitment to expand government transparency, we were encouraged to learn of an effort by some of your Senate colleagues to make a newly-created congressional deficit-reduction committee open and accountable. In a letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, your colleagues have called for the committee's meetings and hearings to have advance public notice, allow live television broadcasting, and be open to the public. Additionally, the Budget Control Joint Committee Transparency Act that has been proposed would amend the Budget Control Act of 2011 to require this critical transparency.

The deficit-reduction committee is tasked with identifying \$1.2 trillion in federal spending cuts by November. Some members of Congress are also calling for the committee to pursue tax increases. Raising taxes during this time of recession would be devastating. The results of the committee's work could have a tremendous impact on taxpayers in Maine and across the nation. As such, our ability to know what takes place during these committee meetings should be guaranteed.

I write to urge you both to join this movement to open these meetings to the public. Government transparency is too important an issue to ignore. Your influence in the Senate is vital to protecting and expanding our right to know.

Thank you for your consideration of this critically important issue, and for your service to the people of Maine.

Sincerely,



Lance Dutson  
Chief Executive Officer