Dear Joseph Stiglitz, Elizabeth Warren, Sunlight Foundation, Lee Fang, Represent.us & all other transparency advocates...

You are the reason the system is rigged.

At CRI, we find that government transparency drives corporate lobbying, campaign finance and government capture. And it overwhelmingly favors big banks, big oil & the ultra wealthy.

And we're not alone...

Here are a few of the hundreds of citations we've collected from celebrated scholars, politicos and journalists who find that congressional transparency is driving the rise in inequality, lobbying and corporate capture.

Because of the transparency reforms of the early 1970s, corporate lobbyists went from being outsiders (stuck in the lobby), to insiders – seated at the most important legislative tables. This is why over 200 years ago, the Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution behind closed doors, under strict secrecy. But somewhere along the line, flawed notions of transparency became synonymous with ideas of good governance, and many well-intentioned practitioners, bought it. So please tell Joe Stiglitz that his fanciful notions of democracy are driving inequality. Tell Al Gore that his fanciful notions of democracy are driving inequality. Tell Al Gore that his fanciful notions of democracy are driving inequality. Tell Al Gore that his fanciful notions of democracy are driving inequality. Tell Al Gore that his fanciful notions of democracy are driving inequality. Tell Al Gore that his fanciful notions of democracy are driving inequality.

To the naive sirens of maximum democracy, greater transparency is an unalloyed good. It is a real dilemma for liberal reformers,” says Jeff Drumtra, director of the Tax Reform Research Group, an arm of Ralph Nader’s Public Citizen organization. “When you look at recent tax bills, the best ones have come out of closed sessions. You take the opening up of the legislative process can make lawmakers much more directly accountable to interest groups whose support they may need for reelection. Lobbyists, after all, now actually sit in on committee markup sessions.

Conversely to the naive sirens of maximum democracy, greater transparency is a dangerous populist illusion... Almost all of these reforms failed in their objectives of creating higher levels of accountable government. The reason is that democratic publics are not in fact able by background or temperament to make large numbers of complex public policy choices; what has filled the void are well-organized groups.

The congressional sunshine initiative became a tool for the very special interests whose power the reforms were supposed to dilute. Corporations and lobbying groups have seized upon the open hearings to help them hold legislators accountable as never before.

The enactment of the ‘sunshine’ laws, which had opened up committee legislative drafting sessions to the public in order to obtain the power of business lobbyists, had precisely the opposite effect. They enabled business lobbyists to monitor the votes of each elected official more closely.

The idea that more transparency in government is always an unalloyed good is a dangerous populist illusion... Almost all of these reforms failed in their objectives of creating higher levels of accountable government. The reason is that democratic publics are not in fact able by background or temperament to make large numbers of complex public policy choices; what has filled the void are well-organized groups.

The more open a system becomes, the more easily it can be penetrated by money, lobbyists and fanatics... The idea was to make the process more democratic... but in practice sunshine measures intensified the access of lobbyists.

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