

**Statement of Bill Sali**  
**Information Policy, Census, and National Archives Subcommittee**  
**The Plain Language in Government Communications Act of 2007 (HR 3548)**  
**January 29, 2008**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for bringing this legislation before our Subcommittee today. The Plain Language in Government Communications Act would enhance citizen access to government information and services by promoting the use of “plain language” in government documents issued to the public. I look forward to working with the Chairman and Rep. Braley as this legislation moves forward.

So it is encouraging to see that this Committee is working to make government documents more accessible and understandable to everyone.

The concept underlying this proposed bill is a concept integral to our form of a government – one formed by “We the People.” Today the citizens of our great country are subject to volumes upon volumes of government regulations, notices, forms and similar documents, whether they relate to benefits, taxes or regulations. Common sense would seem to dictate that those same regulations, notices and forms should be written in a way that can be readily understood.

While I support the legislation’s goal of making information about government benefits and services more understandable to the general public, I would like to note a couple of areas where I believe this legislation could be strengthened as we move forward.

First, H.R. 3548 as introduced expressly excludes regulations from the list of documents that should be written in plain language. Today there are well over 200 volumes of federal

regulations. It is unclear to me why regulations – which are the bane of existence to so many small businesses throughout this country – would be excluded from the plain language requirement. Such a requirement would be a positive and long-overdue reform to our current regulatory scheme.

I would also like to note that while the National Small Business Administration and Women Impacting Public Policy have supported this legislation they also have urged “the federal government to embrace the concept of plain language in all of its communications with the public, including its regulations” and point out that the cost of complying with federal regulations for small businesses with fewer than 20 employees is about \$7,600 per employee. Small businesses operate on a narrow margin to begin with. Nearly \$8,000 per employee in regulatory compliance costs is just ~~nuts~~ *unacceptable*.

Second, H.R. 3548 only covers, and I quote, “document[s] that explain how to obtain a *benefit* or *service*.” Given that tax forms and other IRS documents are neither “benefits” nor “services,” would this legislation require them to be written in understandable language? My cursory read is that they would not currently be covered under this legislation.

While I support the underlying goals of H.R. 3548, I believe this Committee is missing a significant opportunity to lessen the burden of government on small businesses and taxpayers. I intend to vote in favor of this measure but note for the record that I hope the Chairman will work with me and other Members of the Committee to address these issues and expand the scope of this legislation as it moves forward.