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Consumers for Paper Options Applauds Congressional Efforts to Launch GAO Review of Access Issues with Electronic Savings Bonds

Bipartisan Group of House Members Call on GAO to Study Impact on 'Small Savers' & Potential Remedies

WASHINGTON, D.C. – [Consumers for Paper Options](http://www.paperoptions.org), a coalition advocating for access to paper-based services and information, today applauded a bipartisan group of U.S. representatives for calling on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to review the U.S. Treasury Department's policies and practices concerning savings bonds, which are no longer sold in paper form.

In its [formal request](#) to the GAO, the bipartisan group of representatives notes that “the savings bonds program has become inaccessible to millions of small savers and investors who do not have bank accounts, access to high speed internet, and/or digital literacy” since the U.S. Treasury ended the sale of paper savings bonds in 2012. The [letter](#), which was spearheaded by Rep. Matthew Cartwright (D-PA), was co-signed by Reps. Benishek (R-Mich.), Duffy (R-Wis.), Ellison (D-Minn.), Hinojosa (D-Texas), Neal (D-Mass.), Michaud (D-Maine), Rangel (D-NY), and Tsongas (D-Mass).

Formerly available over-the-counter at banks and other financial institutions, savings bonds must now be purchased online through TreasuryDirect, which requires a bank account, Internet and computer access, and digital literacy. While the Tax-Time Savings Bond Program allows taxpayers to receive their tax refunds via paper savings bonds, the U.S. Treasury has only committed to maintain this program through the 2014 tax season. The SAVINGS Act (H.R. 3385), introduced by Rep. Cartwright, would preserve the Tax-Time Savings Bond Program through 2018.

“By eliminating paper savings bonds, the U.S. Treasury is ensuring that many long-time savings bond buyers – seniors and small savers without Internet access – will no longer use this important savings tool,” said **John Runyan, executive director of Consumers for Paper Options**. “There is a steep cost to society when the government makes it harder for citizens to accumulate long-term savings. The GAO should review the program and recommend solutions to make savings bonds accessible for all Americans.”

Rep. Cartwright commented: “With savings accounts on the decline, hundreds of thousands of Americans – most of whom are low-income – have lost one of the only savings vehicles available to them. This is evidenced by a sharp drop in savings bond sales, which have declined by 58 percent since Treasury ended the sale of paper bonds.”

According to the U.S. Treasury Department's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, savings bond sales declined from \$1.7 billion in fiscal year 2011 – the last year paper bonds were sold – to \$719.4 million in fiscal year 2012. This decline also reflects the fact that electronic bonds are also very difficult to give as gifts, as recipients' account information and Social Security numbers are required.

The decision to eliminate the sale of paper savings bond is just one recent effort by the federal government to cut paper-based options for key services. Federal benefits checks, Social Security earnings statements and even tax forms have been subject to elimination or minimization, rendering these services difficult or even impossible for millions of Americans to access.

Consumers for Paper Options supports H. Res. 97, a bipartisan resolution introduced by Reps. Duffy and Michaud that seeks to protect access to paper-based government resources and bring agency decisions to eliminate paper options under Congressional review.

About Consumers for Paper Options

Consumers for Paper Options was established by the Envelope Manufacturers Association (EMA) to bring together industry, non-profits and consumers in an effort to address the transition to Internet-only resources at the exclusion of millions of citizens. Consumers for Paper Options is united in the belief that paper-based communications are critically important for millions of Americans, especially seniors and the 25 percent of households without Internet access. While regulated entities and governments at every level need to streamline services, cut costs and improve efficiencies, the goal of Consumers for Paper Options is to preserve access in a way that neither hinders the natural evolution of technology nor discriminates against those who may not, or cannot, use it. For more information, visit www.paperoptions.org.