



JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE
SENATOR CHARLES E. SCHUMER, CHAIRMAN
REPRESENTATIVE CAROLYN B. MALONEY, VICE CHAIR



Yesterday, Sen. Charles Schumer sent a letter to Commerce Secretary, Carlos Gutierrez, urging the Bush administration to keep the EconomicIndicators.gov website open to the public and the information on it free. Today our office received a phone call saying that the site would continue operations due in part to Schumer's letter, and www.economicindicators.gov contains an affirming message that it will continue to keep its website and email alerts going due to public outcry.

Schumer congratulated the administration for making the right decision and said, "The administration took the right step in keeping this important economic indicators website and email alerts free and open to the public. This is no time to pull back on the free flow of critical information about our quick-changing economy, and I'm glad the administration agrees that shutting down this website would be penny wise, but pound foolish."

The original press release and letter are below:

For Immediate Release
February 20, 2008

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(202) 224-5171

SCHUMER URGES BUSH ADMINISTRATION TO KEEP CRITICAL ECONOMIC DATA SITE FREE AND INFORMATION FLOWING

*Award-Winning Government Economic Data Website, Widely Used by
Public, To Be Shut Down March 1st to Cut Costs*

*On the Brink of a Recession, Commerce Department's Decision to Shut
Down Popular Economic Indicators Website Boggles the Mind*

Washington, DC—Today, Senator Charles E. Schumer, Chairman of the Joint Economic Committee, urged Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez not to shut down free public access to the Commerce Department's Economic Indicators website. Administered by

the Commerce Department's Economic and Statistics Administration, the website compiles critical information about the state of the U.S. economy, ranging from Gross Domestic Product (GDP) statistics to information about retail sales.

The website, which can be found at: www.economicindicators.gov is particularly useful because people can sign up to receive free e-mail announcements as soon as new economic data across government agencies becomes available. Current subscribers to the economic indicators emails will have to pay to continue receiving this helpful information in the future.

Schumer said, "On the brink of a possible recession, the Bush Administration's decision to shut down the free flow of economic data boggles the mind. Wasteful government spending should be cut, but shutting down an award-winning website that gives Americans easy-to-use economic information during troubling economic times is penny-wise and pound-foolish."

Schumer noted that once the fixed costs of creating a website have been paid, the operational costs of maintaining such a site should be small. He asked Secretary Gutierrez to provide information on the maintenance costs for the site and the cost-savings expected as a result of shutting it down; and he asked for data on the number of users who may be cut off from this information with such a move.

A copy of Senator Schumer's letter appears below.

February 20, 2008

*Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20230*

Dear Secretary Gutierrez:

I was deeply concerned to learn of the Department of Commerce's decision to shut down free public access to its Economic Indicators website as of March 1, 2008.

As you know, the Economic Indicators website, administered by the Department's Economic and Statistics Administration, compiles critical information about the state of the U.S. economy, ranging from GDP statistics to information about retail sales to Census Bureau information. Economic Indicators is particularly valuable because people can sign up to receive e-mail announcements as soon as new economic data across government agencies becomes available. Data compiled through Economic Indicators is so comprehensive that Forbes Magazine recently recognized the site with its "Best of the Web" award stating that trying to compile the type of information provided on this site by yourself "is an exercise in futility".

Given the current state of the U.S. economy, public access to information about the health of the economy has never been more critical. As important economic policy decisions are being made that will certainly have a lasting impact on this country's well being, easy and free access to Economic Indicators is essential to ensure a robust dialogue about the wisdom of particular policies. Shutting down this website will significantly increase the cost of getting this economic data; and it will effectively limit the public's ability to remain informed.

I was further troubled to learn that after this website has been shut down, members of the public may still receive e-mails with compilations of this type of data for a fee. Provision of accurate, easily accessible information about the state of the U.S. economy is one of the most basic government functions, and I find it appalling that taxpayers will now have to pay for data that the federal government already collects and compiles.

I find it hard to believe that shutting down this important information portal will result in any significant savings to the Department. Since the fixed costs of website creation have been paid, the operational costs of maintaining such a site must be relatively small. Can you please provide me with the cost of maintaining this site, as well as the cost-savings expected as a result of shutting it down? Additionally, I would like to know the number of e-mail subscribers who will no longer have free access to email updates as a result of shutting down this portal. I would appreciate a response within two weeks of receipt of this letter.

I strongly urge the Department to reconsider its decision to terminate the Economic Indicators website. The information previously provided through the site is a public good and must be made widely available to all Americans.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Schumer

The Joint Economic Committee, established under the Employment Act of 1946, was created by Congress to review economic conditions and to analyze the effectiveness of economic policy.

www.jec.senate.gov

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