

June 20, 2006



An Open Letter to the United States Senate: Support a Full Accounting of Federal Grants!

Dear Senator:



Center for Individual Freedom

On behalf of the millions of taxpaying citizens represented by the groups signed below, we strongly urge you to support S. 2590, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act. The bill, sponsored by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) and co-sponsored by colleagues John McCain (R-AZ), Barack Obama (D-IL), and Tom Carper (D-DE), would direct the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to create a publicly-available website that would list every entity receiving federal grants or contracts and the totals awarded for the last ten fiscal years. Such a website would entail very little cost and would greatly increase transparency in the distribution of government funding. At last, those who most deserve to know about this process – the American people – would have the tool they need to conduct their own evaluations of Washington's priorities.

It is essentially impossible for the average citizen to obtain such an accounting today. According to the General Services Administration, the federal government provides roughly \$300 billion in grants to 30,000 organizations, ranging from rail and transit security to youth theater troupes. Information is spread across innumerable agencies, frequently lacks specificity, and is not always available to the public. All too often, one must resort to filing a request under the Freedom of Information Act to truly determine the extent or duration of funding. Americans should not be forced to navigate the treacherous waters of bureaucracy just to find out who is receiving their tax dollars.

In the past, it was not feasible to have a centralized listing of the kinds of organizations and activities that received government monies. The effort needed to calculate, coordinate, and print such a listing would have been enormous, and the final product may well have required a forklift to transport. But today, with incredible increases in computing power and the advent of the Internet, such an undertaking is far less daunting. In fact, a precedent has been set by ExpectMore.gov, a website launched by the OMB to monitor the performance of more than 800 federal programs. ExpectMore.gov has made program review more transparent and accessible to the public.

Advocates from all points on the spectrum of opinion share the common notion that transparency of and public access to government information is vital to the health of our political system. It is for this reason that S. 2590 has broad appeal. Budget watchdogs can support the legislation because it would reveal

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duplicative or superfluous federal funding. Environmentalists can support it because it would detail exactly how much federal money goes to organizations and practices they deem to be ecologically harmful. Traditional values groups can support the legislation because it would allow them to track funding for causes they hold to be inimical to their own. The list of those with a stake in S. 2590, from civil libertarians to defense and foreign-policy reformers, goes on and on. Reasonable people of all political viewpoints should unite in support of S. 2590, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, in the interest of good governance.

Sincerely,

John Berthoud
President
National Taxpayers Union

Mike Arata
Board Member
Alliance of Contra Costa Taxpayers (CA)

F. Patricia Callahan
President
American Association of Small Property Owners

Jane Orient, MD
Executive Director
American Association of Physicians and Surgeons

William Lauderback
Executive Vice President
The American Conservative Union

Jon Coupal
Chairman
American Tax Reduction Movement

Michelle Korsmo
Executive Vice President
Americans for Prosperity

Timothy M. Wise
President
Arlington County Taxpayers Association (VA)

Terrence Scanlon
President
Capital Research Center



Jeff Mazzella
President
Center for Individual Freedom



Barbara Anderson
Executive Director
Citizens for Limited Taxation

Matthew J. Brouillette
President and CEO
Commonwealth Foundation



Gary Ruskin
Director
Congressional Accountability Project

Thomas A. Schatz
President
Council for Citizens Against Government Waste



Phyllis Schlafly
President and Founder
Eagle Forum



John McClaughry
President
Ethan Allen Institute

Bob Williams
President
Evergreen Freedom Foundation



Thomas McClusky
Vice President of Government Affairs
Family Research Council



Matt Kibbe
President and CEO
FreedomWorks

Tom Devine
Legal Director
Government Accountability Project



C.L. (Weiss) Beems
Editor/Publisher
Gozarks: Everything Ozarks (AR)



**New York Tax Reform
Organization**

OUTRAGE



**Republican
Liberty Caucus**



San Diego Tax Fighters



**Taxpayer Protection
Alliance**



Richard O. Rowland
President
Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

Kevin McLaughlin
President
Iowans for Discounted Taxes

Michael D. Ostrolenk
National Director
Liberty Coalition

Patrick C. Guerriero
President
Log Cabin Republicans

Richard Falknor
Executive Vice-President
Maryland Taxpayers Association, Inc.

Matt Foreman
Executive Director
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

Doug Kagan
Chairman
Nebraska Taxpayers for Freedom

Fred Lane
Founder
New York Tax Reform Org.

Keith L Runyon
Executive Director
OUTRAGE

Danielle Brian
Executive Director
Project on Government Oversight

William Westmiller
National Chairman
Republican Liberty Caucus

Paul Gessing
President
Rio Grande Foundation (NM)



Richard Rider
Chair
San Diego Tax Fighters

Samuel M. Slom
President
Small Business Hawaii



Lori Klein
Taxpayer Protection Alliance (AZ)

Steve Ellis
Vice President of Programs
Taxpayers for Common Sense



The Conservative Caucus

David Strom
President
Taxpayers League of Minnesota

**U.S. Bill of Rights
Foundation**

Rick Durham
President
Tennessee Tax Revolt



Howard Phillips
Chairman
The Conservative Caucus

Dane von Breichenruchardt
President
U.S. Bill of Rights Foundation



Rose Bogaert
Chair
Wayne County Taxpayers Association (MI)

Lewis M. Andrews
Executive Director
Yankee Institute