



## AMERICANS *for* TAX REFORM

Grover G. Norquist  
*President*

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Dear Member of Congress:

With the launch of the first iteration of USASpending.gov, the website mandated by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, accomplished, I write to urge you to go even further, and to bring even more comprehensive transparency in federal government spending to the American taxpayer.

Thomas Jefferson once said, *"We might hope to see the finances of the Union as clear and intelligible as a merchant's book, so that every member of Congress and every man of any mind in the Union should be able to comprehend them, to investigate abuses, and consequently to control them."*

USASpending.gov provides a great step into the direction the Founding Fathers envisioned for government finances, and provides useful information on government operations, allowing users to search expenditures by congressional district, federal agency and contractor, among other criteria. The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act requires that credit card transactions be included after October 1, 2008, and that sub-award reporting be incorporated by 2009.

Going further than the legislation required, the website details expenditures beginning with Fiscal Year 2000, and provides information on the level of competition of a contract, as well as a wiki forum allowing a feedback discussion. It also reports individual transactions below \$25,000. Congress would be well-advised to codify these additional features into law, so that taxpayers can rest assured these features will be available in the future, regardless of the political situation.

Since its passage, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act has been emulated by several states around the country. In 2007 Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Minnesota and Hawaii passed legislation that mandates the creation of comprehensive websites for state expenditures, including grants and contracts. Several other states including Missouri and South Carolina have taken executive action or are looking to do so.

Current state legislative efforts go even further and look to enable taxpayers to not only view information *about* the expenditures, but the actual expenditure document through such a website. For more information on state level activity to this effect, including the text of legislation, and already existing websites, please refer to [www.atr.org](http://www.atr.org).

USASpending.gov could become the tool to deliver true and comprehensive transparency in government spending if the following components were added to the site:

- Users should be able to access and search the actual wording of each contract and grant, along with accompanying documents such as the initial request.
- A separate tab for all earmarks requested by Members of Congress and signed into law, as well as for executive earmarks, should be incorporated. This should include both appropriations and

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authorization earmarks. If an expenditure is the result of an earmark, this should be specified in the details given for the expenditure, and the sponsor of the earmark should be noted.

- While individual transactions are already included in the website, the transaction detail on services rendered or goods purchased needs to be strengthened. In many cases categories are too broad to give a clear picture.
- While the 2006 Act specifically exempted federal employees, salary information for these employees, including appointees and elected officials, should be disclosed on the website. Furthermore, if a listed expenditure is made/authorized by an individual rather than the government entity, that individual's name should be referenced in the contract details and vice versa.
- Ideally, the data incorporated into the website should go back ten years, so that thorough comparisons are possible.

**American taxpayers pick up the tab for all expenditures made by our government. They deserve to know exactly how government fulfills its job as steward of taxpayer dollars, and to see where every penny they send to Washington, DC ends up.**

True transparency in government spending would mean that only government expenditure information and details that are not available to the public under the Freedom of Information Act for security reasons could be withheld. However, it may be appropriate to revisit the Freedom of Information Act to see if those concerns stand up to a critical examination.

**Congress and the administration have taken an important step towards more accountable government. I now urge you to strengthen the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 to incorporate the above-mentioned components for the sake of the American taxpayer.**

Onward,



Grover Norquist