



## AMERICANS *for* TAX REFORM

Grover G. Norquist  
*President*

April 4, 2008

Dear California State Legislator,

I write to urge you to lend your support to AB 1843 sponsored by Assemblyman Martin Garrick.

This bill would require the state controller, with the assistance of the department of technology services, to create and maintain an easily searchable comprehensive online database, linked to from the State of California website, providing detailed information on government expenditures. Where possible, a link to the program, contract or grant will be provided. This measure would provide an important step towards greater fiscal accountability.

Since the passage of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 which resulted in the creation of [www.USASpending.gov](http://www.USASpending.gov), Americans for Tax Reform has been working with policymakers and activists around the country to pass legislation and get executive orders signed that emulate and ideally go beyond the federal legislation.

In 2007, five states (Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and to a more limited extent, Minnesota and Hawaii) passed legislation that mandates the creation of comprehensive websites for state expenditures. In most cases, these bills enjoyed broad bipartisan support. A number of states including Texas, Missouri, South Carolina, Alaska, Louisiana and most recently Nevada have already taken executive action.

Several of the websites mandated by legislative or executive action have already gone live, and provide taxpayers with an opportunity to track their tax dollars at a mouse-click. Among these are Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas and South Carolina, and all these sites have been very-well received so far.

This spending transparency effort is consistent with the Founding Fathers' notion of accountable government: It was Thomas Jefferson, who 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."*

Providing easy online access to comprehensive government expenditure information would provide California taxpayers with a tool hold government more accountable, and ultimately foster a better understanding of the ways in which government operates. Ultimately, it would help reduce fraud, waste and abuse. Opacity in the way government spends tax dollars often leaves taxpayers frustrated, and can create the perception of possible abuse of the system.

More public scrutiny will help eliminate impropriety in dealing with taxpayer dollars – be it perceived or real impropriety.

Because it goes back to one of the most fundamental principles – accountability – this movement has broad bipartisan support. This is not a right-left issue, it is a right-wrong issue.

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There may not be agreement on how the money should be spent, but there is agreement that taxpayers should be able to scrutinize government expenditures. In today's digital age, there is no justification for keeping taxpayers in the dark as to how their tax dollars are being spent.

The founding fathers had the vision, and today, we have the tools at our disposal to make that vision a reality – at little cost to taxpayers:

- *The Oklahoma website, which just went live on December 28, 2007 and can be accessed at [www.openbooks.ok.gov](http://www.openbooks.ok.gov), initially carried a price tag of \$300,000. In the end the implementing agency reported that the website cost only \$8,000 plus expended staff time.*
- *The Missouri Accountability Portal, an expenditure website created via executive order by Gov. Matt Blunt, was created without the appropriation of a single additional tax dollar.*
- *Even the federal grant and contract website which was unveiled in December and is accessible at [www.USASpending.gov](http://www.USASpending.gov) was put together at a price tag of less than \$1 million - and that covers grants and contracts of the entire federal government. The software that was used to create the federal site is available as open source software. The watchdog organization OMB Watch will provide it to whoever is interested in building a similar site.*
- *Companies like Google and Microsoft have offered to partner with states in their endeavours to make government spending information more accessible, helping to further defray cost.*

The Kansas website was incorporated into a comprehensive overhaul of the state's financial management system, which had already agreed upon and budgeted for. The cost to taxpayers for building the site was consequently \$0. It is our understanding that a similar comprehensive overhaul is being undertaken in California. It will be worth while examining whether it is possible to tie AB 1843 into the context of this overhaul, thereby minimizing the fiscal impact on California taxpayers.

**With this bill, California has the opportunity to empower its taxpayers, and that is an opportunity that should not be missed.** Americans for Tax Reform urges your support for AB 1843 and is looking forward to working with you to advancing accountability and transparency for the sake of California taxpayers.

Onward,



Grover Norquist