



AMERICANS *for* TAX REFORM

Grover G. Norquist
President

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Dear Committee Member,

I write to urge you to lend your support to SB 300, sponsored by Sen. Chip Rogers.

This bill would mandate the creation of a single searchable website for government expenditures including, but not limited to, grants and contracts, which will allow taxpayers to search and aggregate information on how government spends their hard-earned tax dollars. 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, 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. Several other states including Texas, Missouri, South Carolina, and, just this month, Louisiana have already taken executive action or are looking to do so.

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 Texas, Oklahoma and Missouri, 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."*

Creating such a website would provide Georgia taxpayers with a tool to access, search and easily find relevant spending information, 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. 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.

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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 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.*
- *The Oklahoma website, which just went live on December 28, 2007 and can be accessed at 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.*
- *Even the federal grant and contract website which was unveiled in December and is accessible at 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 will soon be available as open source software.*
- *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.*

With this bill, Georgia has the opportunity to empower its taxpayers, and that is an opportunity that should not be missed. Ideally, the actual expenditure document – the grant, contract or purchase order – should also be included in the to be created Internet website.

Some clarification may be needed to address one aspect of the bill: The bill calls for the inclusion of information on “tax refunds, rebates, or credits,” and further stipulates that the Department of Revenue shall prepare a report on “all provisions of state tax law that reduce state revenue through exclusions, deductions a, credits, exemptions, deferrals and other preferential tax treatments.”

These provisions could stand in conflict with privacy statutes and should be re-addressed to make sure no undue burden is placed on individual taxpayers who might find their personal information compromised. Disclosing such information should be limited to instances in which tax credits and the like can be equated to spending. Tax refunds resulting from income tax overpayments should be excluded.

With this in mind, Americans for Tax Reform urges your support for SB 300 and is looking forward to working with you to advancing accountability and transparency for the sake of Georgia taxpayers.

Onward,



Grover Norquist