



AMERICANS *for* TAX REFORM

Grover G. Norquist
President

March 26, 2008

Dear Committee Members,

I write to urge you to support and strengthen current legislative efforts to bring greater transparency into the Sunshine State's finances, both at the state and local level, as spearheaded by Sen. Ronda Storms (R-Brandon) and Rep. Gayle Harrell (R- Port St. Lucie).

SB 392, as passed out of the senate community affairs committee would require local governments to post contract information relating to each contract entered into with a value of \$5,000 or more while specifically excluding school districts from the requirement.

An amendment that would extend the requirement to create an online searchable database for expenditures made under contracts to the state level has been offered. We urge your support for this amendment as it constitutes an important addition.

While the provisions put forth in SB 392 and the offered amendment are a meaningful step in the right direction, more could and should be done. We would urge you to make the following modifications to this legislation in order to bring truly meaningful "Online Sunshine" in the area of government spending to Florida:

Taxpayers, who fund every expenditure made by government, deserve the most comprehensive level of spending transparency. Ultimately, this means that every financial transaction made by the government, every check written, be it at the local or state level, should be posted online. In short, a virtual check register should be created – which is what other states are doing.

The \$5,000 threshold for disclosure should be eliminated, and non-contractual expenditures should also be included in this online disclosure requirement.

While Florida's school district expenditures may be reported in a different data system than other local government entities, it is crucial for Florida taxpayers to be able to discern how the stewards of their children's education spend their tax dollars, and so we urge you to extend the disclosure requirement to these districts.

Ideally, Florida would require all local governments to post their expenditures on their websites in a searchable form, while at the same time creating a single searchable online database detailing information on all state government expenditures, along with access to the actual expenditure document – the grant, the contract, purchase order etc. That statewide online database could also include the local expenditure information or, at a minimum, link back to the local expenditure websites.

The maturing and expansion of the Internet makes it possible for you to improve constituents' ability to access information specifically in the area of government expenditures, and I would encourage you to seize this opportunity to empower taxpayers to become fiscal watchdogs.

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

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intelligible as a merchant's books, 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."

Strengthening and passing this legislation will provide Florida 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 will 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. Ultimately, taxpayers will be best served when all levels of government – federal, state and local – are required to disclose their expenditures in a clear and searchable public format.

In passing legislation that creates comprehensive spending transparency for the state and local levels, Florida can once again lead the way for the country, and can take pride in the nickname “Sunshine State” through more than just the climate.

Onward,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Norquist", written in a cursive style.

Grover Norquist