



AMERICANS for TAX REFORM

Grover G. Norquist
President

May 30, 2008

To: All Members of Congress
Re: Increasing Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending

Dear Member of Congress:

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 provided a first step towards greater fiscal accountability at the federal level. Much more remains to be done - and in some areas, the states are leading the way.

Since the passage of the 2006 federal law, many states have been working to emulate, and in some cases, to go beyond it. The synergies and snowballing effects created at the state level should be harvested at the federal level, too. For example, the recently enacted Mississippi law requires that the wording of the actual contract be made available to taxpayer scrutiny in the to-be-created online database for government expenditures. Indiana taxpayers have been able to scrutinize the wording of government contracts thanks to an executive order issued by Gov. Mitch Daniels in 2005. In other states, taxpayers can also track agency outlays like salaries, travel expenses and office supplies.

In order to deliver truly comprehensive transparency in federal government spending, Congress should pass legislation that would make the following improvements to USAspending.gov:

- *Most importantly, users should be able to access and search the actual wording of each 'federal award' as defined in the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006. Not only should the full text of the contract be made accessible in both Portable Document Format and searchable text format, but also the full text of the request for proposals, the bids, the announcement of the award, and the agreements or terms of any award.*
- *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 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. Taxpayers will benefit from being able to access detailed information on agency outlays like salaries, office supplies and travel expenses by obligation and object class, as well as budget function.*
- *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.*
- *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. 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.*

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- Lastly, the \$25,000 threshold for disclosure of spending information must be removed.

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."

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,

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

Grover Norquist