

Washington, DC, September 30, 2008

Dear Member of the E-Transparency Task Force:

The Center for Fiscal Accountability, a project of Americans for Tax Reform appreciates the opportunity to weigh in with the E-Transparency Task Force, which will meet this week to discuss the composition and presentation of Kentucky's Open Door Web site, to be launched in January 2009 and to hear the public's feedback.

Thomas Jefferson once said: *"We might hope to see the finances of the Union as clear and 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."*

Although our Founding Fathers lived in a time in which information traveled much slower than today, they understood that accountability is one of the cornerstones of representative Democracy and the Republic in which we live, and that transparency is the prerequisite for accountable government. After all, the "consent of the governed" from which government is to derive its just powers is much more meaningful if it is informed consent.

Unfortunately, though, Americans' trust in government is at an all-time low, and recent surveys have found that most people believe that their governments are secretive, be it the federal government, state or local governments.

**A movement to change this perception is sweeping the nation, and the E-Transparency Task Force is part of this trend.**

Since the passage of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, seven state spending transparency websites detailing comprehensive information on government expenditures created by executive action or legislation have gone live. Twelve states have passed spending transparency legislation in the past two years, several governors have resolved to create similar searchable websites and taxpayers in at least eight states saw their state constitutional officers take their own steps to increase transparency in government spending.

While the Kentucky legislature missed the opportunity to pass Rep. Jim DeCesare's spending transparency legislation in the last two years, Secretary of State Trey Grayson led by example and began posting his own office's expenditures online earlier this year, and we look forward to working with the Task Force, the Bluegrass Institute, Secretary of State Grayson, and the legislature to advance government transparency in Kentucky.

**Having done work with lawmakers, activists and taxpayers from across the political spectrum in all fifty states, we are pleased to offer some comments on what we believe is important as you construct Kentucky's spending transparency portal:**

- The website should incorporate detailed information on *all* government expenditures with no dollar threshold for disclosure. This should include all grants, contracts, purchase orders, task orders, expenditures made with government purchase cards, agency outlays like salary and travel, bond payments, aid to local units of government.

- An inventory of all state assets/state-owned land and information on how much government money is sitting in government accounts should also be incorporated.
- The website should provide itemized details on expenditures/transactions and not just aggregates.
- The website should be searchable by single keywords and categories, and provide access to the actual expenditure document – the grant, the contract, the purchase order etc.
- The website should programmatically search and access all data in a serialized machine readable format (such as XML) via a web-services application programming interface, so that users can export and sort the data and conduct their own analyses.
- The data provided on the website should be updated in real-time if possible, but within a reasonable time after an expenditure occurs.

Good examples of existing spending transparency websites can be found in Missouri, Kansas, and Texas, although all of these sites, too, should be improved in some areas. Please do not hesitate to call on us if we can be of assistance in the coming months.

Sincerely,



Sandra Fabry  
Executive Director  
Center for Fiscal Accountability