



A CALL FOR TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY REGARDING THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SO-CALLED “STIMULUS PACKAGE”

We, the undersigned organizations representing millions of taxpayers, small businesses, families, senior citizens and shareholders believe that transparency and accountability are of the utmost importance both in the negotiation and likely implementation process of the massive spending package Congressional leaders and President Barack Obama seek to enact in the next few days under the guise of “economic stimulus.”

Provide Transparency in What is Left of the Negotiation Process

Unfortunately, transparency and accountability have been sorely lacking in the negotiation process, as Congressional leadership is set to rush this package through Congress against the background of dwindling support from the public.

Between the time the text of the Senate “compromise” language was made available late Saturday evening and Monday’s vote for cloture, taxpayers were given less than 48 hours to scrutinize the bill.

And only a few hours after the U.S. House of Representatives passed a motion to instruct conferees on H.R. 1 providing more openness in the negotiation process mandating that the conference report be posted online in a searchable and downloadable form for no less than 48 hours before it may be voted on, negotiations began under the cover of night behind closed doors with no representatives of the Congressional minority present.

Taxpayers deserve better than being forced to shoulder a package that has been hastily crafted in secret with little opportunity for input from the Congressional minority, let alone the public.

Consequently, any compromise emerging from a conference committee should be posted on the Internet in a searchable form for ideally ten, but no less than five full business days before a vote on the conference report can occur.

Taxpayers deserve no less from a Congress that according to its leadership aspires to be the most honest, ethical, and open Congress in history.

Provide Transparency in the Implementation Process

After a failure to provide accountability and transparency with regard to the “Troubled Asset Relief Program,” and with the passage of this massive spending package becoming

more and more likely, Congress and the Administration must work to finally make good on their promises to deliver transparency and accountability when it comes to the implementation of this spending package.

Ultimately, taxpayers should be able to track - dollar for dollar - how government spends all appropriated funds, through grants, contracts and sub-awards through detailed line-item information on expenditures made under these agreements, including access to the actual expenditure documents and all relating documents (the bids, and the terms) in a form that is searchable and downloadable.

Thanks to the passage of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, the Federal government already has a website that provides information on federal grants and contracts in the form of USASpending.gov. That website could provide the general framework for housing data on expenditures made under the “stimulus” package.

All data on expenditures made under this package should be provided in a form that allows users to programmatically search and access all data in a serialized machine readable format via a web-services application programming interface, and users should be able to sort data by categories as well as search and find data by single keyword.

While both the House and Senate bills currently negotiated in conference committee require “data on relevant economic, financial, grant and contract information” be provided online, the language falls short in several areas:

- Currently available bill language is lacking clear deadlines by which the required expenditure information needs to be made available. Given the implications of this massive spending package for taxpayers, only real-time posting, or at a minimum making the information available within 24 hours, would do them justice.
- Providing information on “jobs created or maintained” can only be an estimate and fails to take into account any jobs that are destroyed as money is taken out of one part of the economy to inject it into another. The expenditure information provided online should be spin-free, so that taxpayers can draw their own conclusions rather than being inundated by propaganda.
- Along the same lines, the establishment of an “Accountability and Transparency Board” with oversight functions is not helpful unless the board consists of a diverse group of members, representing the administration, Congress and the private sector as well as different political backgrounds. Reports compiled by a partisan board are of little value to taxpayers.
- There is concern that organizations engaging in legally questionable activities may receive funds from the package, so recipients should be required to certify that no funds are being used to directly or indirectly fund illegal activities or the election or defeat of a candidate for political office.

Given that any massive government spending package will burden not only current but future generations of taxpayers, they deserve - at a minimum - full transparency, accountability and taxpayer protections in the process.

Americans for Tax Reform, Grover Norquist, president

American Shareholders Association, Ryan Ellis, executive director

Center for Fiscal Accountability, Sandra Fabry, executive director

Council for Citizens Against Government Waste, Thomas Schatz, president

FreedomWorks, Matt Kibbe, president and CEO

National Taxpayers Union, Duane Parde, president