



Republican Liberty Caucus



GRASSROOT INSTITUTE OF HAWAII

Congressional Accountability Project



Center for Individual Freedom



AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY



June 6, 2006

An Open Letter to the United States Senate: Support a Full Accounting of Federal Grants!

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the millions of taxpaying citizens represented by the groups signed below, we strongly urge you to support S. 2590, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act. The bill, sponsored by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) and co-sponsored by colleagues John McCain (R-AZ), Barack Obama (D-IL), and Tom Carper (D-DE), would direct the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to create a publicly-available website that would list every entity receiving federal grants or contracts and the totals awarded for the last ten fiscal years. Such a website would entail very little cost and would greatly increase transparency in the distribution of government funding. At last, those who most deserve to know about this process – the American people – would have the tool they need to conduct their own evaluations of Washington’s priorities.

It is essentially impossible for the average citizen to obtain such an accounting today. According to the General Services Administration, the federal government provides roughly \$300 billion in grants to 30,000 organizations, ranging from rail and transit security to youth theater troupes. Information is spread across innumerable agencies, frequently lacks specificity, and is not always available to the public. All too often, one must resort to filing a request under the Freedom of Information Act to truly

determine the extent or duration of funding. Americans should not be forced to navigate the treacherous waters of bureaucracy just to find out who is receiving their tax dollars.

In the past, it was not feasible to have a centralized listing of the kinds of organizations and activities that received government monies. The effort needed to calculate, coordinate, and print such a listing would have been enormous, and the final product may well have required a forklift to transport. But today, with incredible increases in computing power and the advent of the Internet, such an undertaking is far less daunting. In fact, a precedent has been set by ExpectMore.gov, a website launched by the OMB to monitor the performance of more than 800 federal programs. ExpectMore.gov has made program review more transparent and accessible to the public.

Advocates from all points on the spectrum of opinion share the common notion that transparency of and public access to government information is vital to the health of our political system. It is for this reason that S. 2590 has broad appeal. Budget watchdogs can support the legislation because it would reveal duplicative or superfluous federal funding. Environmentalists can support it because it would detail exactly how much federal money goes to organizations and practices they deem to be ecologically harmful. Traditional values groups can support the legislation because it would allow them to track funding for causes they hold to be inimical to their own. The list of those with a stake in S. 2590, from civil libertarians to defense and foreign-policy reformers, goes on and on. Reasonable people of all political viewpoints should unite in support of S. 2590, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, in the interest of good governance.

Sincerely,

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