



The Honorable Barack Obama
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Coburn
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

June 2, 2008

Dear Senators Obama and Coburn,

We are writing to commend you on the introduction of the Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act today and offer our strong support for the legislation. This bill will help to strengthen your groundbreaking transparency law that you both made possible – the 2006 Transparency Act – but also make important new data more easily accessible to the public that is necessary for citizens to hold our government accountable for the fiscal stewardship of our shared resources.

The Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act has three key elements that we support. First, it would make technical corrections to the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006. These changes would expand the data available to the public by requiring: additional information about when payments are approved and disbursed; the name of the agency, department, subagency or suboffice that approved the award and whether the award is the result of a legislative mandate, set-aside, or other criteria; more detailed data on number and size of all bids submitted for contracts, and socioeconomic characteristics of all recipients. This additional data is important for the public to understand exactly what and how the government is spending federal resources.

Perhaps most significantly, these changes would also require a copy of the request for proposal, announcement of award, actual contract, and scope of work to be performed be made available to the public for the first time and linked to the information about spending. This will truly give citizens the ability to judge for themselves the value that contractors are providing for the federal government. Perhaps equally as powerful is that the bill requires all information on USASpending.gov be accessible through an application programming interface (API), which will create the type of open architecture that allows for innovation and expansion of use of the information.

The second aspect of the bill deals with improving data quality on the USASpending.gov website, which is essential to effective accountability. This legislation achieves this by creating a robust, user-generated, error reporting system that would connect the public directly and

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efficiently with federal agencies to report and monitor errors in federal spending data. This system will provide useful data on not only the extent of data problems but also on the efforts of the government to correct legitimate reports of incorrect data from the public. It also creates a government review system for data quality by mandating biannual audits from Inspectors General offices to ensure the data is accurate and that data standards are being followed by agencies. We strongly support a provision in the bill that would mandate that company identifiers, including its parent ownership, are correct and regularly updated, and made available through the API. Finally, we are pleased to see a provision that would ensure that previous instances of individual citizen's personally identifiable information being published by the government on the Internet would no longer be tolerated. This is a long overdue reform that will protect citizens' personal information in federal spending databases.

Finally, your legislation would make important strides in combining and disseminating information about contractor and grantee performance, including instances of default, suspension, debarment, and any information regarding civil, criminal, and administrative actions initiated or concluded by either federal or state governments in the preceding five years against federal award recipients. This section would take data that is already publicly available concerning worker safety, pay and leave rights, workplace discrimination, labor relations, civil rights, environmental protection, whistleblower protection, tax compliance, and other regulatory protections and provide the public with the full picture of the behavior of any entity that received public funds. The public has a right to know whether government is doing business with scofflaws, and your bill would provide the public with just that information.

This data is essential for both the government and its citizens to have easily accessible to make sure not only that the government is getting a good value for its investments, but also so it is clear that those who are benefiting from those federal investments follow the laws and principles of our country.

The Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act is an important reform that will enhance and expand the information you have already made available to millions of citizens around the country through the USASpending.gov website. We applaud your leadership in continuing to promote transparency and public access to spending data and believe this legislation will go far in reducing waste, fraud, and abuse of federal resources, establishing appropriate national funding priorities, and making our government develop more responsive and effective solutions to community needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary D. Bass". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Gary D. Bass
Executive Director