



Work Plans: 2011

For nearly three decades, OMB Watch has promoted policies and actions for a more just and democratic society, one in which an open, responsive government protects people's health, safety, and well-being, safeguards the environment, honors the public's right to information, values an engaged and effective citizenry, and adequately invests in the common good. During the same span of time, there have been countervailing forces calling for less government, echoing President Ronald Reagan's statement at his first inaugural address that government is part of the problem, not part of the solution.

In the last year or so, with the rise of the Tea Party movement, and the in the midst of high unemployment and rising income inequality, anti-government rhetoric has accelerated to an alarming level. Those who would "reduce [government] to the size where I can drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub," as Grover Norquist said in 2003, have an ambitious three-part plan. First, they would reduce government regulations, expanding on the Bush-era approach where market forces were dominant, regulatory cops were no longer on the beat, and cozy relationships between industry and regulators were common. There are consequences for such policies, such as the Massey Energy mine explosion, the BP deepwater oil drilling disaster, the Wall Street financial collapse, and recalls on numerous food products. Despite this, we are now seeing our elected leaders asking captains of industry what regulations they want killed, along with promises of legislation to slow, if not stop, further public protections.

The second strategy is to cut spending and revenue to "starve the beast." Most government observers concur that there are long-term dangers to large federal debts. However, the prescription of immediate spending cuts and reductions in revenue will add to the problem, not resolve it. Increased spending in the short run to help generate jobs and sustain economic growth is wise investment. Most responsible budget players have advocated for additional federal revenue. Yet those who want to drown government in the bathtub are using debt fears to promote policies that further their ideological objectives, not necessarily the health of our economy or the needs of the American people.

Finally, the anti-government hawks also want to privatize as many government services as possible. It is not coincidental that during the Bush administration, the fastest growing part of the discretionary budget was federal contracting – one form of privatizing governmental functions. There has been an increase in contracts awarded without open competition, not to mention sizable amounts of money wasted. Privatization has now reached a fever pitch in the states, where attacks on public employees are becoming all too common.

This ambitious anti-government agenda calls for an equally ambitious response. For OMB Watch, we will work collaboratively with other organizations to leverage resources and power to strike back at this anti-government mindset. We will defend against bad proposals while we also promote ideas for an accountable, responsive federal government. We will narrow some of our work to channel our limited resources to more effectively address the attacks that have already begun.

More specifically, within our 2011 work plans – described below – our top priorities will be:

1. **Counteracting the anti-regulatory attacks coming from businesses and Congress.** Working with other organizations concerned about worker, environmental, consumer, financial, and health protections, we entered 2011 with a framework for action for an emerging coalition that elevates the positive aspects of federal regulation. We will respond quickly to inappropriate attacks on federal regulation, such as the rhetoric that regulations are harmful to the economy, and we will take action to stop bad policies from moving forward. At the same time, we will also promote stronger regulatory enforcement and executive branch actions to address gaps in public safeguards.
2. **Advocating for greater transparency of high-priority information to strengthen government integrity.** OMB Watch applauds President Obama's commitment to open government. However, transparency for transparency's sake does not always lead to greater government accountability or help people in democratic decision making. Accordingly, OMB Watch will focus its advocacy in 2011 on public access to high-priority, timely, and accurate information that should be consistently disclosed across all government agencies.
3. **Promoting use of new tools that link government spending to performance.** OMB Watch has successfully advocated for a searchable website that tells the public who is getting how much federal money, but the public also has a right to know whether taxpayer dollars are being wisely used. This calls for a new generation of data and technology tools that link how federal awardees are using federal funds with information about recipients of federal funds and what has been accomplished with the money. OMB Watch will pilot new approaches in 2011 and advocate for the next generation in federal spending transparency.

We believe each of these priorities can help counter anti-government rhetoric by holding our government accountable and demonstrating where government has done vitally important work in our communities. OMB Watch will continue to actively speak up for progressive values that promote a more just democracy intended to improve quality of life in our communities.

Details of our work plans for 2011 are divided into three sections:

- Ensuring a Regulatory Framework that Protects the Public, Safeguards Society, and Supports Nonprofit Speech;
- Making Government More Transparent and Accountable; and
- Promoting Fiscal Accountability, Performance, and Fairness.

I. Ensuring a Regulatory Framework that Protects the Public, Safeguards Society, and Supports Nonprofit Speech

OMB Watch's longer-term goal is to ensure that the government protects the public and the environment through its regulatory powers. Specifically, we seek to restore, protect, and advance public protections in health, safety, civil rights, civil liberties, and the environment; and to develop, analyze, and disseminate information on activities by government, nonprofits, and private sector groups affecting public protections.

We also advocate for federal regulations that support a participatory civil society with particular focus on protecting nonprofit advocacy and political speech rights. We do this because we believe a democracy thrives when its citizens are actively engaged in decisions that affect them. Our objectives are to find ways to encourage public participation in governmental decision making and to level the playing field so that all have equal access and say.

We expect 2011 to be dominated by numerous attacks on federal regulations. Some of the specific ideas were described in the House Republicans' *Pledge to America*, while additional ideas are being advocated by powerful special interests. We will be prepared to respond to these attacks and will work collaboratively in a broad coalition to oppose hostile legislative and executive branch proposals, better describe how public protections benefit the public, and emphasize the importance of enforcing existing regulations. We will also continue to advocate for a more responsive and transparent regulatory system.

2011 Work Plan Includes:

1. Defend Against Attacks on Federal Regulation and Role of Government
2. Advocate for Changes in the Regulatory Process
3. Advocate for Improved Federal Regulations
4. Continue Watchdogging Government Agencies with Regulatory Oversight
5. Educate the Public About the Regulatory Process

II. Making Government More Transparent and Accountable

The public's right to know is a core democratic principle and, some would argue, a basic human right. From the first day of his administration, President Obama promised a more transparent, participatory, and collaborative government that embraces 21st century technologies and policies. We have worked with advocates from across the political spectrum to hold the administration to its promises.

Our top priority for 2011 is to improve public access to information that strengthens government accountability and the public's ability to participate in our democratic society. This will call for two general objectives: (a) increase the amount of government information that is made available voluntarily without the public needing to submit

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests; and (b) ensure that all agencies provide high value information – a floor, if you will – that becomes a new standard for voluntary disclosure. Additionally, we will push the envelope on improving the public's right to know in two substantive areas: federal spending and use of toxic chemicals.

2011 Work Plan Includes:

1. Advocate for a More Transparent and Participatory Federal Government
2. Advance Transparency on Environmental Health Issues
3. Reduce Unnecessary Security Secrecy

III. Promoting Fiscal Accountability, Performance, and Fairness

Federal tax and spending policies are a reflection of our national priorities. OMB Watch hopes to change these priorities by encouraging government to spend more on meeting public needs, investing in long-term growth, and strengthening the economy – and to do so in a fiscally responsible and socially equitable manner. We also hope our actions contribute to restoring trust in government, as we believe government is an important vehicle in serving and protecting the common good. Finally, we support efforts that will lead to increased accountability and better public understanding of how government delivers services and generally carries out its work.

These values will come under assault in 2011 with ongoing advocacy to cut federal spending *and* federal revenue, even as there is a vital need to stimulate the economy and create jobs. For OMB Watch, we will oppose reckless cuts in discretionary spending and entitlement programs and will advocate for increased revenue through tax reform and greater transparency of tax expenditures. We will also focus on ways of linking performance measures to information about federal spending in order to bring greater accountability to taxpayer dollars. A final priority will be to reduce wasteful spending in the contracting process, including efforts to shine a spotlight on influence peddling to win awards and to make information about contractor performance more accessible.

2011 Work Plan Includes:

1. Advance Transparency on Federal Spending Issues
2. Advocate for Improved Tools on Government Performance
3. Pursue Tax and Spending Reforms