



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 written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gary D. Bass
Executive Director



Buyers Up • Congress Watch • Critical Mass • Global Trade Watch • Health Research Group • Litigation Group
Joan Claybrook, President

June 1, 2008

The Hon. Barack Obama
713 Hart Office Building

The Hon. Tom Coburn
172 Russell Office Building

RE: Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act

Dear Sens. Obama and Coburn:

Public Citizen offers its strong support for the “Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act of 2008” and applauds your on-going efforts to pull back the cloak of secrecy on government contracts and federal spending. This new legislation marks another important step in reducing wasteful and unnecessary government spending through greater public disclosure.

This measure builds upon your earlier achievement of the 2006 Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, which was the first concerted effort to place information on government contracts and spending on-line. Under this bill, several important enhancements to that disclosure system are provided. First, and most importantly, additional information about contractor and grantee performance is required to be posted on-line, including compliance to labor laws, workplace discrimination, and whistleblower protections.

The bill also recognizes the different levels of Internet savvy and research capabilities of the public. It requires that an easy-to-use summary page of each federal grant and contract be posted on-line, as well as the means provided for downloading the database for more extensive analysis.

Finally, it provides the public an interactive feature with federal agencies issuing grants and contracts to notify the agencies of potential errors in the database. These spending and contracting databases are notorious for inaccuracies, and such two-way dialogue will help improve the reliability of the data.

All of these steps are essential building blocks to achieving genuine transparency and accountability in federal spending. Public Citizen also encourages you to consider some additional steps to improve the integrity of the contracting and spending process. First, we recommend that the database be expanded to include tax benefits as well as government

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contracts and spending. Second, it is long past time the federal government revisit anti-corruption measures already adopted in a half dozen states: meaningful pay-to-play restrictions on campaign contributions from government contractors.

“Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act of 2008” is an important step in the drive to enhance accountability in federal spending through transparency. We applaud your continuing leadership in this field.

Sincerely,



David Arkush
Director
Public Citizen’s Congress Watch



Craig Holman
Governmental Affairs Lobbyist
Public Citizen

Ralph Nader, Founder

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June 3, 2008

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

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

Dear Senators Coburn and Obama:

On behalf of the 362,000 members of the National Taxpayers Union (NTU), I write in strong support of your legislation, the “Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act.” This bill amends and builds upon the success of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act you both sponsored and ushered to passage in 2006. The current bill should be supported because it would strengthen disclosure requirements, improve data quality, and give taxpayers a clearer view of contract and grant performance.

This legislation would expand the solid foundation of the 2006 bill, which created www.USASpending.gov and was itself a huge sign of progress toward greater transparency in government spending. The Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act would require disclosure of important details about agencies, recipients, and the nature of the awards, as well as require a copy of each agreement itself to be posted online. Such information will give taxpayers and watchdogs alike greater ability to monitor hundreds of billions in government spending.

The Act also makes critically needed improvements to data quality. The number of oversights and outright errors in current data is staggering. This bill would help to rectify the problem by establishing a user-directed error reporting system that would harness the latest technology and methods. This system will allow agencies, award recipients, and citizens to report errors and have them resolved in a timely manner.

Unfortunately, a great deal of government spending goes without oversight once the money is out the Treasury’s door. Your legislation would fill this gaping hole in the budget process by requiring information about grant and contract performance, including suspension, debarment, and civil, criminal, or administrative actions initiated against a recipient. This will help prevent federal funds from being disbursed to entities that have proven themselves to be poor stewards of taxpayer dollars.

NTU was proud to support the 2006 bill, spearheading several coalition letters with dozens of signatories from all across the political spectrum. That effort was successful because transparency is not an issue of right or left, it’s an issue of right or wrong. We commend you for taking the next legislative step and look forward to working with you in making certain it becomes law.

Sincerely,

Andrew Moylan
Government Affairs Manager





The Honorable Barack Obama
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Coburn
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

June 3, 2008

Dear Senators Obama and Coburn:

Thank you for your leadership in introducing the Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act. Taxpayers for Common Sense Action strongly supports the bill.

Increasing budget transparency and holding Congress and administrative agencies accountable for spending decisions are central to our mission at Taxpayers for Common Sense Action. This legislation advances these goals by building on the earlier Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act that created the web site of government spending, USASpending.gov, and will expand and strengthen the data available.

Specifically, the existing and future USASpending.gov data quality will be improved by regular audits, public error reporting, agency Inspector General spot reviews of data submissions to verify accuracy, and improved searchability features.

The Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act will also require that actual contract documents be made public, as well as information about the bidding and future contract options, and whether the award resulted from an earmark a set-aside or other mandate.

In addition to knowing more about where their tax dollars are going, the public will be able to track individual contractor's performance via a unique identifier. This will include information about historical performance, audits, defaults, legal violations, suspensions and tax compliance. Finally, the bill requires that all the information on USASpending.gov be made accessible through an application programming interface (API) which will enable the information to be built upon by outside sources and magnify its potential value.

The Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act will dramatically improve the amount and quality of spending information in the public sphere. Taxpayers deserve to know as much as possible about how and where their tax dollars are being spent. We look forward to working with you to enact this critical piece of legislation. If you would like to discuss this further please contact me or Steve Ellis at 202-546-8500 ext. 126 or steve@taxpayer.net.

Sincerely,

Ryan Alexander
President



May 29, 2008

The Honorable Tom Coburn
172 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barack Obama
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Coburn and Obama:

In 2006, with your leadership, Congress passed the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, which mandated disclosure in a searchable database of government spending whether through contracts or grants. The bill required the Office of Management and Budget to publish that database online, so that any citizen with access to the Internet could see how her taxpayer dollars were being spent. That database, USASpending.gov, has brought tremendous transparency to how and where government spends tax dollars.

You have wisely recognized that there is more to be done.

The Sunlight Foundation supports the Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act of 2008, a measure that will bring greater disclosure to official government acts, all accessible on the Internet. The Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act requires the federal government to go beyond the summary data on contracts it currently posts.

Only a transparent government can be truly accountable and responsive to its citizens. The Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act of 2008, that you will introduce, will bring the executive branch of government closer to realizing this goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellen S. Miller". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E".

Ellen S. Miller
Co-Founder and Executive Director
Sunlight Foundation

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 02, 2008

Dear Senators Obama and Coburn,

Thank you for introducing the Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act, a bipartisan measure that will strengthen and improve the groundbreaking transparency law that Congress passed in 2006 by making additional data, essential for judging government efficiency, accessible to the public.

This legislation will facilitate important advances in collecting 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. By centralizing public information concerning worker safety, pay and leave rights, workplace discrimination, labor relations, civil rights, environmental protection, whistleblower protection, tax compliance, and other regulatory protections, the database will more accurately provide the public with a complete representation of the behavior of any entity that received public funds.

Open competition and accountability are essential in the federal contracting process to ensure that bad actors are not consistently rewarded for their failure to perform basic responsibilities. We applaud your leadership and express our support of this legislation, which will enhance and expand the information available through the USASpending.gov website. A more efficient and comprehensive federal spending website will provide the information necessary to allow the public to judge the use of its tax dollars.

Thank you,

John M. Krieger
Staff Attorney – Budget and Tax Program
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(202) 546-9707 x.333
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June 3, 2008

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

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

Dear Senators Obama and Coburn,



1634 I Street, NW Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20006
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<http://www.cdt.org>

CDT is writing to offer our support to the Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act of 2008, which would significantly improve upon the implementation of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (the Transparency Act) that you both helped to enact in 2006.

The Transparency Act directed OMB to create a publicly accessible website, called USASpending.gov, which includes information about entities that receive federal grants, loans, and contracts. The Transparency Act provided for information to be taken from the Federal Assistance Award Data System (FAADS) and the Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS). While the new Web site is a major step forward in the information available on public grants and procurement, it has also highlighted inaccuracies and incompleteness of the information available in FAADS and FPDS. The follow up legislation would take steps to improve the data quality published through routine audits and creation of error-reporting mechanisms.

CDT is also supportive of the bill's push to broaden the scope of USASpending.gov to include information about the performance of contract and grant recipients. This would allow the public to see how well recipients of federal funds are following through with their obligations.

CDT is especially pleased to see that the new provisions also include a requirement that the data be created using machine-readable formats such as XML. By adding this provision, the follow-up bill will make it substantially easier for users to find and access specific information available at USASpending.gov, and empower users to create tools to better sort the data themselves.

CDT appreciates your leadership in improving public transparency on government spending and supports the improvements to the Transparency Act in this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leslie Harris".

Leslie Harris
President and CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ari Schwartz".

Ari Schwartz
Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

OpenTheGovernment.org

Americans for Less Secrecy, More Democracy

Steering Committee

Steven Aftergood
*Federation of
American Scientists*

Bill Allison
Sunlight Foundation

Mary Alice Baish
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*Center for
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Peg Seminario
AFL-CIO

David Sobel
*Electronic Frontier
Foundation*

*co-chairs

Patrice McDermott
Director

Chris Green
Program Associate

June 2, 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama
The Honorable Tom Coburn
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Obama and Coburn:

I am writing, as the director of OpenTheGovernment.org, to convey our appreciation for your commitment to openness in government and citizen access to data needed for transparent and accountable government. OpenTheGovernment.org is a coalition that includes over 70 organizations, from local civic groups to national watchdogs, from media groups to technology-oriented non-profits – all committed to government openness and accountability. We are pleased to see the work that began with the Federal Funding and Accountability Transparency Act being taken to the next step with introduction of the Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act.

The legislation has a number of important provisions that will enhance the usefulness and usability of the data to be made available. A key change is the expansion of the data available to the public to include a copy of the request for proposal, announcement of award, actual contract, and scope of work to be performed, linked to the information about spending. Information on whether the award is the result of a legislative mandate, a set-aside, or other criteria is also a highly useful addition.

Improving the quality of data is an important reform. Combining citizen access and governmental review procedures, and doing so transparently, will build on previous efforts to create and promote openness and civic participation. This is a rare combination of the means truly serving the ends.

We are also encouraged to see the legislation call for the examination and inclusion of more data in more detail, and connecting data from a variety of sources that represent a broad range of policy objectives – including information about contractor and grantee performance, (e.g., default, suspension, debarment) and information regarding civil, criminal, and administrative actions initiated or concluded by either federal or state governments, along with already available information about worker safety,

www.openthegovernment.org

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pay and leave rights, workplace discrimination, labor relations, civil rights, environmental protection, whistleblower protection, tax compliance, and other regulatory protections. The combining and dissemination of this information will permit the public to truly know with whom the government is doing business and whether their tax dollars are going to scofflaws and violators of public regulations.

Lastly, we are pleased by the thoroughness of the suggested technical changes, which will create a more complete picture of the process. By drilling down even deeper within the bureaucratic infrastructure, and taking pains to evaluate the integrity of the information and procedures, we are confident that this bill will continue the work of ensuring that the American people can trust, and verify, that their representatives are working for the benefit of the public.

We appreciate your leadership and ongoing commitment to openness and transparency. We look forward to the progress of this bill and policy for its laudable effect on government spending transparency and, hence, public involvement in the setting of priorities. We also are hopeful about its contribution to the evolution of both public access to and engagement with the information and the mechanisms of democracy.

Thank you. Please call me at 202-332-6736 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Patrice McDermott
Director



American Association of Law Libraries
MAXIMIZING THE POWER OF THE LAW LIBRARY COMMUNITY SINCE 1906

Mary Alice Baish
Acting Washington Affairs Representative

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June 2, 2008

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

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

Dear Senators Obama and Coburn:

On behalf of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL), I write to thank you for your leadership on the Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act and to offer our association's strong support for this legislation. This bill will help to strengthen the groundbreaking law that you made possible – the Federal Accountability and Transparency Act (P.L. 109-282) – and will make important new data more easily accessible. We believe this legislation will allow members of the public to better examine the federal government's funding decisions and priorities and will go far in promoting transparency and government accountability.

The American Association of Law Libraries is a nonprofit educational organization with over 5000 members nationwide. Our members serve the legal information needs of legislators, judges, and other public officials at all levels of government, corporations and small businesses, law professors and students, attorneys, and members of the general public. AALL's mission is to promote and enhance the value of law libraries, to foster law librarianship and to provide leadership and advocacy in the field of legal information and information policy.

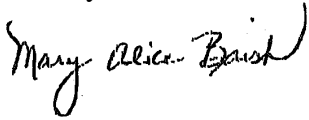
In particular, we support three key elements of the Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act. First, the bill will make technical corrections to the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 by increasing the data available to the public. Second, the bill will improve data quality on the USASpending.gov website. Third, the legislation will 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.

The Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending Act is an important reform that will enhance and expand the information 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 government accountability and thank you for your commitment to improving access to information about government spending.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Alice Baish". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

Mary Alice Baish
Acting Washington Affairs Representative
American Association of Law Libraries