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OMB WATCH AND THE CENTER FOR RESPONSIVE POLITICS UNVEIL FEDERAL SPENDING OVERSIGHT TOOLS

Washington, D.C., Oct. 10 — At a press club event today, government watchdog groups unveiled powerful new online tools developed to help the public track government spending and congressional conduct.

OMB Watch, a Washington-based nonprofit group that promotes open government, accountability and citizen participation, launched FedSpending.org, allowing users to search, aggregate and analyze all federal spending. For the first time, itemized information on the more than \$12 trillion that the federal government has disbursed between 2000 and 2005 will be available to the public in a useful format. Users can search contract and grant information by agency, congressional district, and recipient, for example.

“The American people have been largely in the dark about to whom and where their tax dollars go,” OMB Watch’s Executive Director Gary Bass told reporters. “With FedSpending.org, we believe that will change. When you buy something at the store, you get a receipt. FedSpending.org is that receipt for government spending—we can examine it and see just what kind of deal we’re getting.”

The Center for Responsive Politics, another Washington-based nonprofit group focused on good government, announced several expansions of its pioneering government transparency Website, OpenSecrets.org. The first will allow users to see overviews of members’ net worth and holdings. The second gives updated information on the lavish trips taken by members and their staffs that are financed by third parties--in many cases special interests with business before Congress. Finally, the Center unveiled a work-in-progress database that will track the “revolving door” between positions in government and lucrative jobs at lobbying firms that members and staff often rotate through.

“These new tools help provide the sort of big picture view of the conduct and priorities of our elected officials that Americans need to make the best choice on Election Day,” said Sean Moulton, director of information policy at OMB Watch, who, along with Adam Hughes, the organization’s director of federal fiscal policy, oversaw the creation of FedSpending.org.

FedSpending.org makes available much of the information that the recently passed Federal Accountability and Transparency Act will require the Office of Management and Budget to provide to the public. FedSpending.org will function not only as a tool for the public and journalists to find out about government spending, but also as a prototype against which to measure the success of OMB’s endeavor.

On why the efforts of his organization and CRP are so important, Bass explained, “When average citizens are empowered with the tools to understand and evaluate the choices their government makes, they can engage with government in a meaningful way, and government and those who carry out its work can be held to account.”

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Celebrating 20 years: Promoting Government Accountability and Citizen Participation - 1983 - 2003.

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