

'Googling' State Tax Dollars

Government Search

I'm Feeling Lucky



By Tom Coburn, M.D., and Brandon Dutcher

Last fall, President Bush signed into law the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act. This law creates an easy-to-use Web site that will allow citizens to track the recipients of all federal funds—"to Google their tax dollars," as President Bush memorably put it at the bill-signing ceremony.

Every year the federal government dishes out nearly 1 trillion of your dollars in contracts, grants, and earmarks—often with very little transparency—to various businesses, associations, and state and local governments.

This new Web site will allow citizens "to go online, type in the name of any company, association, or state or locality and find out exactly what grants and contracts they've been awarded," President Bush said. "It will allow citizens to call up the name and location of entities receiving federal funds, and will provide them with the purpose of the funding, the amount of money provided, the agency providing the funding and other relevant information."

"Sunshine and accountability are wonderful things in the hands of voters," *The Oklahoman* editorialized September 28, applauding the bill's passage. Indeed, as Tommy Vietor, a spokesman for Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), observed, "It was a bill that just made so much intuitive sense that no one could understand how Congress could not pass it." And thanks to an army of bloggers, editorial writers, and concerned citizens, Congress did pass it.

Now it's time to take the idea to our state legislature. Oklahoma taxpayers should be empowered to Google their state tax dollars.

Many taxpayers are frustrated that the state

budget is now \$7.1 billion, an all-time high. They may be aware that their tax dollars have paid for things like rooster shows and ghost employees and \$100 car washes, but these things are just the tip of the iceberg.

The legislature should pass a law requiring the Office of State Finance to set up a searchable Web site modeled after the federal version. Taxpayers deserve to know the name of every recipient of state dollars, as well as the amount received in each of the last 10 years and an itemized breakdown of each transaction, including the state agency dispensing the money and a description of the purpose of the funding.

As conservatives, we favor low taxes, limited government, and spending limitations. Many of the people and organizations who fight for bigger government do so because, you guessed it, they receive taxpayer dollars. Those who take the king's shilling do the king's bidding. Taxpayers deserve to know who they are.

What *The Oklahoman* said about the federal funding Web site will also be true of a state funding Web site: It will be "invaluable to everyday Americans wanting to know more about how their tax dollars are being used."

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