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Montanans Eager to Track State Spending ***Statewide Poll Reveals Desire for Transparency***

Bozeman, MT - 4/06/09 - In a poll released today, over 93% of Montanans said that it is important for state and local governments to supply spending information that is fully transparent and easily accessible to taxpayers. In addition, over 65% said they would use a searchable web site containing detailed government revenue and spending information if it was free and easily available on the internet.

The poll, conducted by the Montana Policy Institute in Bozeman - a nonpartisan policy research center, sought to gauge public attitudes towards current state and local government transparency, and to determine how much Montanans know about current open records laws. It found broad support for detailed and easily accessible information surrounding the individual recipients and amounts of state expenditures. Over 95% would like easy access to contract information, 67% would like state employee compensation information to be easily available, and 81% believed that all state spending information should be easily available and accessible to taxpayers.

In contrast to the high numbers of Montanans who would like more data, only 16% of those polled indicated they had ever tried to obtain detailed state revenue or spending information, and of those barely a third (37%) were satisfied with the speed and ease with which their request was handled. "These results clearly fly in the face of the recent Governor's Office testimony (opposing SB 241, the Taxpayer Right to Know Act) that the current system of showing up at a state office or mailing a request is good enough." according to Carl Graham, president of MPI. "People want to know where their tax dollars go, and they want finding out to be as easy as getting their own banking information or finding an old high school friend."

The poll's results seemingly go beyond assumptions about public attitudes behind several measures currently working their way through the state legislature that would provide more detailed and easily accessible information about state revenues and spending, including federal stimulus dollars. These measures, if approved, would provide easier access to program level revenues and expenditures, but would not satisfy the apparent desire of many Montanans for more detailed information about specific recipients and amounts. SB 241 and HB 645, the Montana Reinvestment Act, both direct the state to make some information available to the public, but, according to Graham, "While these are both steps in the right direction, what the public really hungers for is the ability to track exactly whose wallet their dollars end up in and why. They want to know that their trust is not being violated as all this money is doled out. And they want to see the information before it's too late to act on it."

The poll was conducted the week of March 30th, 2009 and contacted 10,000 Montana households. It has a margin of error of +/- 3%.

The Montana Policy is an independent nonpartisan policy research center based in Bozeman. It provides analysis and information to encourage individual freedom, personal responsibility, and free markets in Montana.

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