

April 8, 2009

An Open Letter to Governor Schweitzer and the Montana Legislature:

We write to urge you to emulate and go beyond the advances in bringing more openness to governmental expenditures put forth by over two dozen states, in addition to the federal government.

While the undersigned do disagree on many other issues, we believe in a strong and informed electorate and share a strong belief that taxpayers should be able to easily access clear and concise information on how their tax dollars are being spent by governments at all levels.

Over the past few years, governors and legislatures across the country have issued executive orders and passed legislation which enables citizens to easily search for and find on the internet detailed information about state revenues and expenditures. To cite just a few examples, Missouri allows its citizens to track \$20 billion a year in spending with a web site that was created by executive order and runs entirely on existing staff and revenues. Oklahoma created a site with \$40,000 from its existing budget. Texas implemented its transparency web site and identified over \$8 million dollars in immediate and future savings.

At the federal level, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, cosponsored by Senators Barack Obama (D-IL), John McCain (R-AZ), Tom Coburn (R-OK), and Tom Carper (D-DE), created a free, publicly searchable web site for all federal programs and grants. Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle came together and joined forces to move in the right direction. The web site, which was signed into law on September 26, 2006 and implemented in December 2007, tracks over \$2 trillion in spending, cost less than \$1 million to implement, and was strengthened by an amendment with the same sponsors in July 2008.

We urge you to work expeditiously to make the full text of all your written state expenditures and contracts, ranging from procurement of goods and services to grants, leaseholds, and labor contracts available to the public on the internet in a clear and searchable format.

We encourage you to require not only state agencies to disclose their revenue sources, expenditures and contracts, but also to extend this requirement to all subdivisions of government, including school districts, counties, cities, special districts, and public authorities.

We come from different policy and programmatic backgrounds, but here we arrive at the same conclusion: Transparency is one of the core principles of representative democracy.

Another way of putting it is that “information is the currency of democracy.” Today’s technology allows us to easily place information in our citizens’ hands, and they deserve no less.

We look forward to your positive response and stand ready to assist you in this spreading movement for the public’s right to know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Graham'.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Singer'.

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