



March 7, 2008

An Open Letter to the Alaska Senate: Taxpayers Support Online Spending Transparency (SB 201)

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the more than 1,100 Alaska members of the National Taxpayers Union, **we urge you to bring greater transparency to Alaska's government spending by creating an expansive online database containing information on all state expenditures.**

In the current legislative session, you have an opportunity to accomplish this worthy goal by supporting Senate Bill 201. This legislation revolutionizes the role taxpayers have in Alaska's state government by creating a comprehensive Web site detailing information on grants, contracts, subcontracts, and other expenditures in excess of \$10,000. Such a database is crucial for helping taxpayers make their own evaluations of Juneau's spending decisions and priorities.

While SB 201 provides citizens with valuable information on many government expenditures, taxpayers would be better served by having access to details on *all* outlays. It is for this reason we urge you to include all expenditures in the database, regardless of the amount. In addition, it is important that elected officials preserve and respect the privacy of their citizens. Accordingly, we recommend that information pertaining to tax exemptions and credits be withheld from the database. **Nonetheless, it is imperative that you move forward with this legislation to enable Alaska's residents to make sense of how their tax dollars are parceled out.**

Your own Governor recognizes the importance of government transparency, as evidenced by the recent launch of Alaska's online spending database, Checkbook Online, which lists all state expenses exceeding \$1,000. While Gov. Palin took an important first step toward a more open and accountable government, the Legislature now must adopt a bill that makes this disclosure permanent. Many other states (such as Hawaii, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas) have recently approved or implemented spending Web sites for their own residents' use. These highly commendable efforts are in large part a state response to the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act that was signed into law in 2006. The resulting Web site was launched in December 2007, and taxpayers can now visit www.USASpending.gov to track outlays for federal grants and contracts.

Support for spending disclosure has transcended party lines at both the federal and state levels – and for good reason. Policy makers on both sides of the aisle understand the importance of accountability in government. It is vital that the veil of secrecy be lifted and ordinary citizens be given the ability to scrutinize government expenditures. This access will help promote an informed conversation over public policies and reduce waste and fraud.

Taxpayers deserve to know how their money is spent. We encourage you to support SB 201 and put state spending data online in a comprehensive, integrated fashion.

Sincerely,

Kristina Rasmussen
Director of Government Affairs