



January 15, 2009

An Open Letter to Governor Corzine: Taxpayers Support Spending Transparency in the Garden State

Dear Governor Corzine:

In your State of the State address earlier this week, you expressed a commitment to expanding transparency and accountability in New Jersey's budgetary process. "One good idea I like is the posting of our state expenditures on the Internet...I think this is a credible way to increase accountability and transparency in our budget process," you said. On behalf of the more than 10,000 New Jersey members of the National Taxpayers Union (NTU), I commend your stance and urge the Legislature to move swiftly to make this important idea a reality.

Spending transparency is the first step in giving taxpayers a more prominent role in state government by allowing them to see how their tax dollars are being allocated. By disclosing grants, contracts, public employee salaries, and other expenditures in an easily accessible and searchable electronic format, you and your colleagues in the Legislature can provide New Jerseyans with the scrutiny tool they deserve. Other states have successfully posted this information online, including Missouri, Texas, South Carolina, Kansas, and Nebraska. The Missouri Accountability Portal alone saw over 10 million hits in its first year of existence. While it is an important resource for taxpayers, it also benefits state and local governments in identifying wasteful budget items and facilitating a more efficient allocation of resources.

Although spending transparency provides citizens with valuable information, it is important to preserve the privacy of 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 plans to enable New Jersey's residents to make sense of how their money is parceled out. Indeed, several states have done so through Executive Order.

This is an issue that has received wide bi-partisan support, as evidenced by the passage of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act in 2006. That bill was co-sponsored by Senator Tom Coburn and then-Senator Barack Obama. Versions of this legislation at the state level were often enacted at a monetary outlay far short of some pessimistic projections.

Because transparency is one of NTU's top issues, we have compiled an array of "best practices" and other information that could be of assistance to you and your staff in implementing your commitment to the people of New Jersey. I encourage you to visit our special Web site at http://sunshinereview.org/index.php/Portal:Show_Me_The_Spending to find out more, and all of us at NTU stand ready to provide you with additional help. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Joshua Culling
State Government Affairs Manager