



March 3, 2009

**An Open Letter to the North Dakota Senate:  
Taxpayers Support Online Spending Transparency (HB 1377)**

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the more than 1,000 North Dakota members of the National Taxpayers Union (NTU), I urge you to embrace accountability and transparency in state government by supporting legislation that would create a searchable online database of state expenditures for the taxpayers of North Dakota.

HB 1377, introduced by Rep. Blair Thoreson, would put expenditures on a searchable Web site to be made live by January of 2010. At present, state budget information is available to taxpayers, but not without going through an arduous and stressful process to obtain it. Rep. Thoreson's legislation ensures that any North Dakotan with access to the Internet can sort through the state budget with the click of a mouse, allowing them to see how their money is being spent. This type of openness in government should be a natural right; HB 1377 helps to make it so.

Creating a user-friendly spending Web site is not only beneficial to North Dakota's common citizens, it is also a useful tool for policymakers seeking efficiencies and cost reductions in government. In Texas, Comptroller Susan Combs' office pinpointed \$8.6 million in savings as a direct result of the implementation of Open Book Texas. Redundant and wasteful spending is more easily identified – and excised – in a transparent government, ensuring the best economic climate for all North Dakotans.

Opponents of an online transparency Web site argue that such a system is too expensive to implement. Practical experience disproves such an assertion outright. Nebraska launched NebraskaSpending.com for under \$39,000. Missouri, Texas, South Carolina, Nevada, and Alaska have also made their expenditures publicly accessible online, and have done so quickly and inexpensively. These and other states were spurred into action by similar legislation at the federal level. The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 established USASpending.gov, which has given millions of Americans the ability to see how their tax dollars are being spent. This legislation was sponsored by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) and then-Senator Barack Obama (D-IL), clearly demonstrating a bi-partisan effort.

HB 1377 has been approved in the House and is now awaiting action in the Senate. Although the scope of the legislation is narrower than what other states have pursued (for example, posting grants and contracts online), the taxpayers of North Dakota deserve this opportunity to keep an eye on how their money is being spent. States across the country are suffering from budget shortfalls. Fortunately, this is not the case in North Dakota. In order to continue effectively managing the budget, while providing the people of North Dakota a chance for greater participation in the fiscal policy process, passage of HB 1377 is imperative.

Sincerely,

Joshua Culling  
State Government Affairs Manager  
National Taxpayers Union