

**Chairman's Statement**  
**Senator Tom Coburn, M.D. (R-OK)**  
**July 26, 2006**

On April 6, I introduced the "Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006", along with Senators Obama, Carper, McCain. We believed then, as we do now, that the information on government spending currently made available to the public is inadequate and that more transparency is needed in this area. The purpose of our bill is to equip the public with information about what the government is doing with taxpayer money. Passage of this bill will be a big step forward in the quest for transparent and accountable government. Since introduction, I am proud to say that we have been joined by more than one hundred organizations across the political spectrum, as well as by 18 other Senate co-sponsors.

The bill would require the creation of a single, searchable website with access to virtually all government spending. The website would be free for anyone to access and would include detailed information on almost all recipients of taxpayer money. It would provide details regarding how much money was given to recipients of federal funding and for what purpose it was given – all the way down to subcontractors and subgrantees. The concept behind the bill is really quite simple: put information on government spending out there for all to see and greater accountability will follow. I like to think of this bill as "Google for Government Spending."

According to government statistics, the federal government spends approximately \$1 trillion each year on various grants, procurement contracts, and loans. However, there is currently no single searchable website or resource that provides access to information about each transaction. American taxpayers deserve better. As various investigations into the federal response to Hurricane Katrina have shown, a lack of accountability and transparency in federal spending can lead to massive waste, fraud, and abuse. Every dollar that is wasted is a dollar that is unavailable to support our troops and veterans, improve America's global competitiveness, or reduce tax burdens and the federal deficit. Greater transparency and accountability can directly reduce waste, fraud, and abuse, while also enabling us to improve the quality and efficiency of government services and to help those who depend on us.

As I mentioned earlier, a massive bipartisan coalition of over 100 organizations supports the enactment of our transparency bill. Organizations across the political spectrum – from AFSCME to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, from Greenpeace to the American Conservative Union, from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to the American Family Association – have endorsed S. 2590.

Some have argued that the government already makes portions of government spending through existing databases and, therefore, nothing else is needed. I wholeheartedly disagree that more cannot be done; in fact, I believe it is imperative that more be done. The information out there now cannot be considered timely, easily usable or even very accurate. One should not have to be an expert in computer science to figure out where taxpayer money is spent.

The federal government does not collect all spending information into one place. Congress does not collect the all of the information. The bottom line is that there is no single source of information explaining where federal money is spent, and there should be. This bill will change that by making nearly all federal spending easily searchable all in one place.

I would also like to thank Chairman Collins and Ranking Member Lieberman and their staff for working so closely with me on this bill. Their hard work is reflected in the language we have before us today. With the help of their experience and knowledge, I believe that we have before us a workable compromise that will make government more open and accountable without creating unreasonable burdens on those who receive federal funding. I want to quickly highlight some significant changes that we made to the bill over the past few weeks:

1. We have pushed back the date that the website must be online from January 2007 to January 2008;
2. We have changed the requirement for data going back ten years to say that the website only needs to contain data prospectively from 2007 and forward;
3. We have ensured that reporting requirements will not be too burdensome to public and private entities receiving the money; and,
4. We established a pilot program to address the concerns of some over the reporting of subawards.

While some have said the goal of tracking federal subawards is too lofty, I believe it is vitally important to know where taxdollars are ultimately spent. Often times, grants and contracts are given to initial recipients, but the money goes to organizations farther down the line. The bottom line is that taxpayers deserve to know how their money is ultimately spent. The compromise language before us today addresses both the need to make federal spending information available and the need to minimize the burden of collecting and reporting that information.

As Thomas Jefferson wrote back in 1802, "We might hope to see the finances of the Union as clear and intelligible as a merchant's books, so that every member of Congress and every man of any mind in the Union should be able to comprehend them, to investigate abuses, and consequently to control them." His words are as true now as they were over two hundred years ago. There is simply no excuse for not making federal spending information readily available to anyone who wishes to see it.

A single, searchable website of federal spending information, powered by citizen investigators who need only a computer and an Internet connection, will lead to greater accountability and reduced government waste and fraud. In the age of widespread Internet use and availability, it just makes sense to provide easy-to-use access to taxpayers so they can know more about how their money is spent. I thus urge my colleagues to join Chairwoman Collins, Ranking Member Lieberman, Ranking Member Carper, and me in supporting this bill.