

January 28, 2008

Mr. Grover G. Norquist  
President  
Americans for Tax Reform  
1920 L. Street NW, Suite 200  
Washington, D.C. 20036-5036

Dear Mr. Norquist:

It was great to see you a couple of weeks ago at the Texas Public Policy Foundation Policy Orientation Transparency Panel. You have provided a crucial voice in giving transparency in government spending the spotlight it deserves. I very much appreciate your work to showcase the strides several states have made to give citizens a detailed look into how their tax dollars are spent. There is often increasing frustration on the part of citizens – government spending is often seen as impenetrable and unknowable. Taxpayers have the absolute right to know how their money is being spent, and it is only with transparency that government can be held truly accountable.

As the chief financial officer of Texas in my capacity as Comptroller, I have made transparency one of my highest priorities and have seen firsthand the valuable impact that transparency can have in both direct and indirect ways. As I mentioned during the panel discussion, from the moment I took office in January 2007, I wanted to make sure Texans had a direct window into how their tax dollars were spent. The third day in office we posted our agency's expenditures, down to pens and pencils on our Window on State Government Web site. In April of 2007, we expanded the information available online by posting detailed expenditures for 24 other state agencies. In June of 2007, we unveiled our new *Where the Money Goes* Web site ([www.window.state.tx.us/wherethemoneygoes](http://www.window.state.tx.us/wherethemoneygoes)), the main access point to a searchable expenditure database for all state agencies under broad spending categories. In October of 2007, we expanded our transparency initiative by harnessing the power of today's technology to make deep enhancements to our *Where the Money Goes* Web site and let the public see who gets paid by the state and how much — a virtual check register — *down to the transaction level*.

Taxpayers not only expect this level of transparency and openness, but they deserve it for many reasons. First and foremost, it's their money. We're giving Texans easy access to information useful in deciding whether tax dollars are being spent in a responsible manner. In the process, we're getting taxpayers involved in state government and holding agencies more accountable to the public.

In addition, state agencies can use this information to drive efficiency and change. At my office alone, we have already saved \$2.3 million from a top to bottom examination of all our processes – saving \$73,000 on combining printer toner contracts into one; saving \$250,000 by not printing a duplicate study being done by another agency; and saving \$130,000 in printing and postage by putting publications online. We found \$457,319 in savings through the elimination of several information technology contracts, \$100,000 through the elimination of microfilm no longer needed, and \$14,600 through pager disconnections. Our agency is looking at expenditures and turning over every rock to find taxpayer savings!

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It is exciting and gratifying to know we can help **thousands** of citizens examine state expenditures in one place without needing to contact multiple agencies. We appreciate the support of media commentators and watchdog groups that have praised the steps Texas has taken to show citizens how their money is spent. With information available on the Web site, agencies will become more conscious of their expenditures and will save and spend money more wisely.

Again, I appreciate your efforts and the efforts made by the Americans for Tax Reform, and I look forward to working with you in the future. Please keep me informed if you think there is anything I can do to help.

Sincerely,

  
Susan Combs

