



posed budget for next year – and one of those two was him. Does anyone else care about school spending? Add a comment to Fischer's post at Cincinnati.Com Search: Mags.

Enquirer Editorial

Put government spending data online

History shows that when a proposed policy gets support from a wide political spectrum, it tends to be either a very good idea or a very bad one.

Fortunately, the idea of increasing the transparency and accountability of government spending by putting the data online for citizens to see is a very good idea – one that we may see implemented soon in Hamilton County, thanks to a proposal by Commissioner Pat DeWine. It would be a welcome development, and we urge the county to give taxpayers the fullest possible access to information about how their money is being spent.

Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., started this trend two years ago when he proposed a searchable public online database that would include the details for virtually all federal spending. Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., quickly stepped up to co-sponsor the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006.

It passed with broad bipartisan support, but only after bloggers "outed" two senators who put secret holds on the

What do you think?

Do you like the idea of an online spending database? Would you use it? E-mail us at letters@enquirer.com.

bill – pork kings Ted Stevens of Alaska and Robert Byrd of West Virginia. The result of this "Google government" initiative is still in progress, but you can see it at www.usaspending.gov.

Since then, similar sites have been authorized in nine states through legislation, and in another five states by executive order. Others may follow suit. An Ohio bill by Rep. Tom Brinkman, R-Mount Lookout, passed the House by a unanimous vote and will be considered by the Senate. A bill submitted in Kentucky got nowhere in this year's session.

Such sites, DeWine said, have already helped citizens spot examples of waste, fraud and abuse, and have put pressure on officials to clean up their acts. Making such data available also can reveal the political and personal connections to spending.

But the real point is that

this is public information anyway – data we have the right, but often not the access, to view and study. If it causes controversy or helps advance the various agendas, fine. The contest of ideas should be free-wheeling and well-informed.

Hamilton County would be one of the nation's first counties to put spending data online. DeWine wants to have the site up by July 1, with all current documents online by the end of the year. Based on a similar program in Milwaukee, he estimates the cost to set up the site at about \$10,000.

The goal, he said, would be to "disclose spending at the greatest level of detail." We hope that becomes the case – that such a site is fully searchable, with expenditures fully itemized. Actual contract language should be included, and there should be as few exemptions as possible in the types of data posted. It's a good idea that advances a core concept in American life – that government should be open and accountable to the people.



"HOLD IT RIGHT THERE, CONGRESSMAN! YOU DIDN'T SIGN IN."

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