

Representative Henry A. Waxman
Statement Supporting the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act
September 13, 2006

Mr. Speaker, the bill we are considering today, S. 2590, requires the Office of Management and Budget to create a searchable database of federal grants and contracts accessible to the public on the Internet. I am pleased to support this bill.

In June, the House considered a watered down version of this bill, H.R. 5060. The House bill included only grants, leaving out hundreds of billions of dollars in annual spending on federal contracts. At the time, I urged Chairman Davis to work with me to include contract disclosure in the legislation.

The bill before us today is stronger and more comprehensive than the bill passed by the House in June. While the House bill covered only grants, the database created under this legislation will include all federal grants and contracts. If this bill is implemented properly, any citizen with Internet access will be able to examine a comprehensive set of records for information about federal spending. For each grant or contract awarded, the database will include details about the recipient of the award, as well as the amount of the award, the purpose of the funding action, and other relevant information.

There has been considerable confusion about what this bill does and does not do. The information that this bill requires to be posted on the Internet is not secret. In fact, there are existing databases that are accessible to Congress and the public that are already required to include the information covered in this bill.

Under current law, for example, there is a federal procurement database maintained by the General Services Administration. This database, called the Federal Procurement Data System, is required to contain significant amount of information about each federal contract.

Similarly, there is a grants database maintained by the Census Bureau, the Federal Assistance Data System, which collects information about domestic financial assistance awards. In addition, grants.gov and various databases maintained by individual agencies, contain some of this information.

But these databases don't always contain the information that they are supposed to contain. They aren't always kept up to date. And they can be difficult to use.

In essence, what this bill does is require that these existing databases be compiled into a new database that is more organized and more accessible.

Ordinarily, I would not be in favor of legislation that requires the government to spend money repackaging data that is already in existence. But this bill is an exception.

The current state of the existing databases is so poor that Congress is justified in passing new legislation.

Ultimately, implementation will be key to the success of this bill. If the administration is not committed to making the legislation work, all we will get is another incomplete and hard-to-use database. My hope is that by passing this bill with broad, bipartisan support, we are sending a signal to the administration that it needs to do a better job.

Members of Congress from both parties and both the House and Senate have worked hard to make this bill a reality. I want to compliment Senator Obama and Senator Coburn, in particular, for their leadership. They put aside partisanship to forge the bill we are considering today. I also want to thank Chairman Davis for agreeing to expand the scope of this bill to cover contracts.

The legislation we are passing today is not comprehensive reform; it will not restore honesty and accountability in government. It's a modest, bipartisan step in the direction of open government. But in the climate we're currently in, even a small step forward is worth supporting and celebrating.

I urge support of this legislation.