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My name is Mark Tapscott. I am Editorial Page Editor of The Washington Examiner daily newspaper here in the nation's capitol and proprietor of Tapscott's Copy Desk blog. The views I express in this testimony are my own, and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Washington Newspaper Publishing Company or Clarity Media, Inc. I appreciate very much the opportunity to testify on "The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006."

One of the most frequently visited web sites on the Internet is [OpenSecrets.org](#), the web site of the Center for Responsive Politics. At OpenSecrets.org, any citizen can easily find a list of all the campaign donors to his congressman or senator, as well as detailed lists of expenditures by the incumbent office holder's campaign committee. The same information can be found on the site for congressional challengers, presidential candidates, political action committees and 527 committees. Donations by individuals are available on the web site, along with detailed lists of all donors within a particular state or zip code. The data is broken out by industry, by lobbying firms and by individual lobbyists. There are incidentally 242 individual lobbyists with the last name of "Smith."

In short, voluminous information about campaign finances is available within a few mouse clicks to anybody with an internet connection and a laptop. You don't have to have a PhD in statistical analysis or be a computer software jockey in order to make use of the data on OpenSecrets.org because the data is helpfully organized behind a "front end" that does most of the heavy searching labor for users.

Campaign finance data has been readily available on the Internet for only a couple of decades and OpenSecrets.org is no longer the only web site where

one can find such data on the Internet. But OpenSecrets.org was the first and it led the way in bringing about an information revolution in politics and the news media. In politics, for all practical purposes there is no such thing as an anonymous donor. Individual citizens can see in minute detail the financial and special interest support behind federal candidates and then use that information in deciding how to vote.

As I mentioned, OpenSecrets.org is one of the most popular web sites, but the influence of easy access to campaign data extends far beyond web visitors. The news media has also undergone massive changes as a result of the availability of campaign finance data. Political reporting has been tremendously enhanced, of course, and detailed analyses of a candidate's donors and the expenditures of his campaign committee have become standard stories.

But the scope and depth of investigative reporting in general about the day-to-day operation of government at all levels has been tremendously expanded by access to campaign finance data. Before, investigative journalists were often unable to trace the frequently complex links among office holders, corporate or special interests, lobbyists and legislative and executive branch management actions and decisions. Without an inside source, it was usually impossible, which meant countless stories that could have exposed waste, fraud and other forms of corruption went unreported.

Today, hardly a day goes by that legions of journalists aren't asking tough questions of politicians, contractors, lobbyists and campaign officials, based upon information gleaned at least in part from campaign finance data. Investigative teams of journalists are poring over reams of campaign finance data as part of their coverage of the 2006 congressional races. It is no exaggeration to say that every daily newspaper in America and many broadcast and internet news operations devote substantial time and resources to telling the American people everything that can be learned from knowing about who gives what to which candidates during and between election campaigns.

The widespread access to campaign finance data is part of a more comprehensive and healthy explosion in recent years of publicly available data from government and private sources concerning virtually every major public policy issue. The federal government is the largest source of such data. Go to the Internet and you can fairly easily find and download data from government agencies showing how many firms received OSHA safety inspections last year and what the results were, the quality of health care provided in nursing homes in every state, how many taxpayers filed returns indicating estates worth more than \$600,000, the number of maintenance operations that have been conducted on a specific commercial airliner from its first day of flying, how many people moved from California to Arizona or Nevada, the number of jobs created in Omaha last month and on and on. We live in a veritable ocean of data.

But nowhere to be seen on that ocean is an easily accessible web site where citizens can find out such basic information as how much money the government paid to which companies last year to deliver food and supplies to our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, maintain suitable office space for thousands of federal employees, teach remedial reading to free-lunch kids in Baltimore city or advise senior executives in the regional offices of a government agency on how to make the best use of their new information technology systems.

Some of that kind of data is available through databases like the Consolidated Federal Funds Reports and the Federal Awards Assistance Data System. But these resources are practically useless for the layman who doesn't know how to use a database manager like Microsoft Access. The CFFR covers one area of federal spending, while FAADS covers another, but it is virtually impossible for the two databases to "talk to each other" because they are structured so differently.

Consequently, very little comprehensive daily reporting is seen that focuses on the details of federal spending. Analyzing the federal budget and the spending of a particular agency is at best an arcane exercise even for veteran journalists. Only a very tiny number of journalists have the expertise and professional opportunities to even think about such reporting. Instead, they must rely on inside information that typically focuses on a particular program, contract or official, or an Inspector-General report or GAO audit. The result is we get anecdotal stories about bridges to nowhere in Alaska that would cost hundreds of millions of tax dollars but we never read comprehensive, detailed reporting about the ins and outs of the estimated \$300 billion the government will pay thousands of contractors literally around the globe – nearly half selected non-competitively - to purchase everything from legal advice to industrial zinc.

That will all change with passage of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act. Making federal spending data easily accessible will have even more effects on the news media than did the availability of campaign finance data.

I believe the federal spending database required to be established by FFATA will reinvigorate the routine coverage of government at all levels in the nation's daily newspapers because getting the information needed for such coverage will become much easier. If the database allows users to search and filter spending information at such

elementary levels as by state and by category of activity, every reporter covering basic beats like schools, crime, the environment and transportation will incorporate information from the database in their stories on a regular basis. With so much more information available about federal spending on these beats, there will soon be more reporting on the effectiveness of federal programs. Just as reporting on the special interests giving contributions to candidates has become a familiar and standard part of political reporting in virtually all daily newspapers, so will reporting on who receives federal tax dollars and how they spend those funds will become a frequent feature of reporting on most public policy issues.

The impact on investigative journalism will be even greater. Just as having campaign finance data available has strengthened the ability of journalists to trace the links between office-holders, candidates and lobbyists, having comprehensive federal spending data available will strengthen the ability of journalists to uncover the legions of consultants, Beltway Bandits and other special interests that thrive on federal spending that goes on year after year after year regardless of the effectiveness of the programs.

If traditional mainstream media organizations pursue this new field of reporting aggressively, it could help restore the image of journalists, which currently ranks right down there with used car salesmen and Members of Congress.

As positive a development as that would be, I believe the effect of the FFATA federal spending database would be even more significant on new media, especially the Blogosphere. As you know, bloggers are fulfilling an increasingly important role in the American public policy arena, often providing detailed news and analyses before mainstream media outlets are able to do so. There are millions of bloggers and their ranks are growing at an amazing rate.

In many respects, the Blogosphere's collective capacity to cover a news event or issue vastly outweighs that of the mainstream media, if only because the Internet enables what New Yorker magazine columnist James Surowiecki calls "the wisdom of crowds." That is, the simultaneous focus of the knowledge, experience and analytical skills of hundreds or thousands of people on a particular problem or question. Or as Surowiecki succinctly puts it, no one of us is as intelligent as all of us.

The immense power of the Blogosphere was most vividly seen during the 2004 presidential campaign in the hours following the broadcast of now-former CBS News anchor Dan Rather's 60 Minutes report on President Bush's National Guard service. The Rather report was based on a set of documents allegedly written by National Guard leaders during Bush's service. Those documents suggested Bush had received special treatment by the National Guard, a fact, which if widely believed by voters so late in the campaign, could quite conceivably have affected the outcome of the election.

But within hours of the CBS broadcast, bloggers located experts with the most arcane of knowledge about the kinds of type faces used by National Guard typewriters when Bush was in uniform. Those experts and other analytical skills brought to bear by bloggers demonstrated conclusively that the Rather documents were forgeries. We all know the rest of that story.

It is easy to imagine what will happen when that same power of the wisdom of crowds is applied to the details of federal spending made available through the FFATA database. We've already been given a glimpse of things to come with the Porkbusters effort among bloggers, led by Glenn Reynolds of Instapundit and N.Z. Bear of The Truth Laid Bear. The nation first learned about the scandal of earmarks and the congressional culture of corruption symbolized by the Bridges to Nowhere largely as a result of Porkbusters bloggers who led the way in publicizing Sen. Coburn's efforts in Congress and in digging out new details on specific earmarks such as the Railroad to Nowhere in Mississippi.

But think of what will happen when there are thousands of Porkbusters examining the details of federal spending. Ed Morrissey of Captain's Quarters blog puts it this way:

"The real value in this database will come not just from exposing line-item spending to the mainstream media, but from exposing it to all of the taxpayers equally. I predict that 10,000 blogs will be born just to focus on the spending habits of their own representatives. Constituents can use their computers to do their own research on the types of spending that their Congressmen and Senators sponsor.

"How many Bridges to Nowhere will survive that kind of scrutiny? How many politicians will earmark money for federal highways that bring heavy traffic to property that they themselves own if they know that anyone can look it up at any time and make the connections?"

If anything, I think Ed might be underestimating the number of bloggers who will use the federal spending database made possible by FFATA. I have no doubt there will be many, perhaps hundreds of blogs created specifically to analyze and track federal spending within specific issue areas and industries. These blogs will be associated with private citizens, non-profit advocacy groups and even consultants and executives with companies bidding for federal contracts.

The result will be a vastly more well-informed citizenry, a public policy debate informed by much more accurate and extensive knowledge of government policies and programs and a more effective targeting of our society's resources. Just as politicians and political campaign professionals soon learned they could not afford to ignore OpenSecrets.org, I have no doubt that politicians, government contractors and lobbyists will soon learn that they cannot ignore blogs made possible by FFATA, at least one of which will probably be called something like SpendingSecrets.org.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.