

National Experts Visit Oregon in Support of Precedent Setting Transparency Legislation

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Amidst renewed calls from the Obama administration for accountability from private contractors on the federal level, the Oregon State House of Representatives is considering a bill that would far outstrip the contractor accountability provisions maintained by any state governments to date.

This Monday at 8am, leading transparency experts from the national Coalition for an Accountable Recovery (CAR) testified before the Oregon House Business and Labor Committee in support of the bill, HB 2037, which would require private contractors in Oregon to disclose the number of employees and the wages, they pay.

The measure has taken on crucial importance as the federal government has added job creation transparency requirements as a condition of the \$6.48 billion in federal funds set aside for Oregon under the recovery plan.

According to Nathan Newman, Interim Executive Director of the Progressive States Network, a national network of legislators and advocates that is working to help states implement the recovery plan in coordination with CAR, "Oregon is taking an important step to make sure the recovery plan actually creates the jobs it is supposed to create. Every state needs this data so that they can take money away from contractors who aren't serving the public interest and give it to programs that are. It's the best way to ensure that the recovery funds go into the hands of working families who have been the most hard-hit by the recession."

Despite the emphasis by President Obama on the need for tracking job creation, no states are systematically requiring contractors to report the number of their employees, the hours they work, or the wages they receive. It is thus impossible to determine what amount of recover dollars are really going to creating jobs.

"Everyone is scrambling to put up these websites, but all the websites in the world won't make a difference if they aren't reporting meaningful data on whether contractors are actually creating quality jobs," said Newman.

The lack of meaningful contractor data comes despite explicit requirements from the federal government and overwhelming demand from American public that states collect and report such data. Under ARRA, states are specifically required to collect contractor data, including the number and quality of jobs they create. In a January a poll conducted by Lake Research Partners and Topos Partnership, 76% of those polled said it was "extremely" or "very important" that state governments maintain websites that track "what companies and government agencies are getting the funds, for what purposes, and the number and quality of jobs being created or saved."

According to Newman, “States are going to have to do this sooner or later. The states that demonstrate effective job creation programs will get additional support from the feds in the future, while those without transparent recovery plans will face an irate public ready to vote them out of office. So it’s not just a matter of ethics, it’s a matter of economic and political necessity. Fortunately, Oregon is leading the way in getting states on track to making the recovery do what it is supposed to do: put people back to work.”

Sean Molton, Director of Federal Information at OMB Watch, another member of the CAR that works to create greater transparency in government oversight programs, will also give testimony on Monday. A full text of the HB 2037 is available at: leg.state.or.us/09reg/asures/hb2000.dir/hb2037.intro.html

The Coalition for an Accountable Recovery is made up of the following groups:

21st Century School Fund
Building Educational Success together (BEST)
Center for Cities and Schools
Center for Community Change
Center for Economic and Policy Research
Center for Fiscal Accountability
Center for Responsive Politics
Center on Policy Initiatives
Common Cause
Consumers Union
Dmos
Economic Policy Institute
Good Jobs First
Moms Rising
National Institute for Money in State Politics
National Training and Information Center
OMB Watch
Open Technology Initiative/New America Foundation
OpenTheGovernment.org
Partnership for Working Families
PICO National Network
Progressive States Network
Project on Government Oversight
Public Citizen
Public Knowledge
Smart Growth America
Sunlight Foundation
Taxpayers for Common Sense
Transportation Equity Network
United States Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG)
WashingtonWatch.com

