



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

Improves Ohio's Transparency Ranking from 46th to 1st in the Nation, Receives Highest Score in the History of U.S. PIRG's Rankings

COLUMBUS – The U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG) released their annual "Following the Money 2015" report today and Treasurer Josh Mandel earned Ohio the number one transparency ranking in the country for providing online access to government spending data. Ohio was prominently featured in the report after climbing from 46th to 1st in spending transparency as a result of Treasurer Mandel's release of OhioCheckbook.com. Due to the launch of OhioCheckbook.com, Ohio received a perfect score of 100 points this year – the highest score in the history of the U.S. PIRG transparency rankings.

"Treasurer Mandel's office has taken huge strides to ensure that information about state expenditures is accessible to the public. In the six years that we've released this report on spending transparency, this is the highest score that any state has achieved," said Phineas Baxandall, Senior Policy Analyst with the U.S. Public Interest Research Group. "As other states seek to improve their online spending transparency, they can look to OhioCheckbook.com as an example. To stay on top, we expect that Ohio will need to keep building on the strong transparency tools that Treasurer Mandel has already established."

"I'm proud to have built OhioCheckbook.com and taken Ohio's transparency ranking from 46th to 1st in the nation," said Treasurer Mandel. "I'm doing this because I believe the people of Ohio have a right to see how their tax money is being spent. My vision is to create an army of citizen watchdogs who are empowered to hold the politicians accountable. The work U.S. PIRG's doing on open government is helping set off a national race for transparency."

"I commend Treasurer Mandel for his commitment to state government spending transparency through the establishment of OhioCheckbook.com," said State Representative Mike Dovilla, author of legislation to place into statute that Ohio's online checkbook be maintained under future Treasurers. "In just three months since this resource launched, we have seen the positive response to his embracing the spirit of House Bill 46, our 'Open Ohio' legislation. Now, it is important for us to advance this measure to enactment, making permanent in state law the requirement that all future treasurers maintain this government accountability tool."

"As the chief financial officers in states across the country, Treasurers can play an important role in improving transparency for state and local taxpayers. Josh Mandel is leading the charge and pushing the envelope in Ohio and across the country through OhioCheckbook.com," said Tennessee Treasurer David Lillard, President of the National Association of State Treasurers (NAST). "I will continue to encourage other state treasurers to find innovative ways to empower taxpayers."

This report is the U.S. PIRG's sixth annual evaluation of state transparency websites. Read the U.S. PIRG press release, the full report, and a list of the 50 state rankings at: USPIRG.org. Highlights of the U.S. PIRG Report's references to Ohio's new transparency site include:

Pg. 3 – "Ohio unveiled an entirely new transparency website incorporating all of the features typically found on leading sites, as well as cutting-edge functionality."



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Pg. 22 ‐ "Ohio saw the largest improvement with an increase of 49 points. This is the first year of our study in which the state with the highest score was also the most improved."

Pg. 23 ‐ "The launch of Ohio's new transparency portal marks the beginning of a new era of open government for the state."

Pg. 24 ‐ "Ohio has made enormous strides with its new site, which incorporates user-friendly features that are commonplace on the internet's cutting-edge sites but typically lacking in government's web presence."

Pg. 24 ‐ "Ohio's transparency website pursues topflight standards for user-friendliness, creating a portal that feels like many search websites citizens use every day."

Pg. 32 ‐ "Ohio sets a new standard for user-friendliness and accountability with its online checkbook: Many transparency websites offer search functions and contact information, but Ohio's new online checkbook raises the bar."

Pg. 32 ‐ "With the ability to conduct Google-style contextual searches, which populate instant search suggestions based on the letters typed into the search bar, Ohioans will find that their state's transparency website looks and behaves much like the webpages they most commonly visit and interact with elsewhere on the internet."

OhioCheckbook.com was launched on December 2, 2014, marking the first time in Ohio history when citizens could actually see every expenditure in state government. It displays more than \$408 billion in spending over the past seven years, including more than 112 million transactions. The website includes cutting-edge features such as:

- "Google-style" contextual search capabilities, to allow users to sort by keyword, department, category or vendor;
- Fully dynamic interactive charts to drill down on state spending;
- Functionality to compare state spending year-over-year or among agencies; and,
- Capability to share charts or checks with social media networks, and direct contact for agency fiscal offices.

Coalition Supports Transparency Efforts Through OhioCheckbook.com

A strong coalition of groups from across the spectrum have expressed support for Treasurer Mandel's efforts on OhioCheckbook.com.

"Kudos to Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel for unveiling the best website I've seen to easily slice-and-dice how government spends money," said Dennis Hetzel, Executive Director of the Ohio Newspaper Association and President of the Ohio Coalition for Open Government. "OhioCheckbook.com is a great tool for journalists and anyone who supports open government in Ohio. Treasurer Mandel has done a service to all of Ohio with this website."

"Access to state spending online encourages the public to ask questions and government officials to be thrifty," said Catherine Turcer of Common Cause Ohio. "Ongoing access to this information is important because it reinforces government accountability to taxpayers."

"Efforts like OhioCheckbook.com are critical for the future of transparency in Ohio. In the long-run, the only way Ohio taxpayers



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are going to be able to hold government accountable for how it spends their money is to see exactly what the government is doing," said Greg Lawson of The Buckeye Institute. "This lies at the heart of what The Buckeye Institute has long pushed for with our own public salary databases."

"The Ohio Society of CPAs has long supported increased transparency throughout government," said Scott Wiley, President and CEO of the Ohio Society of CPAs. "Treasurer Mandel's online checkbook helps open the books for taxpayers across Ohio and is a step in the right direction when it comes to increasing government transparency."

For more information visit OhioCheckbook.com.

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