



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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Opening up the state's checkbook was a bold move by Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel.

We can now scrutinize how state officials are spending our money. Mandel calls it transparency in government. Mandel recently visited the Morning Journal, sister paper to The News-Herald in Willoughby, and he indicated he wants every governmental entity in Ohio to open its checkbooks. We support him on this mission to create an army of citizen watchdogs to hold politicians accountable — especially when it comes to spending our money. Every state transaction for the last seven fiscal years is online at OhioCheckbook.com, including expenditures for junkets, office supply purchases and more.

The perception, whether real or not, is that the people don't have a lot of access to what our civil servants — who work for and are paid by us — are doing.

Opening up the checkbook removes some of that. This is the best way for us to keep tabs on some of what's going on in the public sector.

Imagine walking into a governmental agency and demanding to look at the books.

Now with state expenditures you can do just that. With just a few clicks of the mouse, "presto," the spending is right in front of you.

We're calling for all governmental entities to follow suit. The state will even foot the bill, Mandel said.

During Mandel's first term as treasurer, he cut \$4 million from his budget. With some of the savings, he spent \$813,980 for the online checkbook system.

The 3,800 local government entities — cities, school districts, villages, townships, counties, municipal boards, libraries — would send their financial information to the treasurer's office, which would post it to the online checkbook.

The state's website was built to handle all of the local data as well. It features dynamic charting, and searches by topic, state agency, expense type, date, and others regarding more than \$408 billion in state spending.

Mandel said one of his peeves is politicians spending tax money on junkets. We agree.

Mandel gave us a tour through the website, and he typed "Disney resort" in a search bar. It revealed a state employee spent \$709 of our money for travel expense to the resort. Other interesting searches include the companies paid the most by the state and the highest paid officials.

The OhioCheckbook.com website lists 112 million individual separate checks, providing 3.9 billion pieces of information available through the end of fiscal year 2014, which was June 30.

In the next couple of months, Mandel intends to update the website monthly, with more developments planned. All of this information is already a matter of public information; the online checkbook makes it easily accessible.

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"We're empowering the people to hold politicians accountable," Mandel said.

There have been about 100,000 online checkbook searches in the month and a half since the system went live, and we're encouraging everyone to visit the site.

Mandel vows to send a letter to every local government and will ask them to partner with the state on this issue.

Localities that refuse to place their finances online will receive a letter, then a follow-up telephone call.

If the governments ignore him, he said he is going to show up at city council meetings and school board meetings and demand transparency.

We hope Mandel follows through with this.

Giving the people access to an open online checkbook to how our governments are spending our money is good civic policy.

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