



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

Cleveland Plain Dealer

By Jackie Borchart

March 18, 2015

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- A new treasurer's office project that makes state expenditures publicly available online has earned the state high marks for government spending transparency.

Treasurer Josh Mandel launched Ohiocheckbook.com in December 2014, but the database ranked No. 1 among state spending databases in 2014 in the U.S. Public Interest Research Group's annual "Following the Money" report.

Phineas Baxandall, senior policy analyst with PIRG, said Ohio's score of 100 points is the highest of any state in the six years the PIRG report has been issued.

"As other states seek to improve their online spending transparency, they can look to OhioCheckbook.com as an example," Baxandall said in a statement. "To stay on top, we expect that Ohio will need to keep building on the strong transparency tools that Treasurer Mandel has already established."

All 50 states provide online public checkbooks to some areas of state spending, but Ohio's system ranked second to last in last year's PIRG report. In the 2015 report released Wednesday, Ohio received an A+ and ranked ahead of Indiana, Wisconsin and Oregon.

"The work U.S. PIRG's doing on open government is helping set off a national race for transparency," Mandel said in a news release. "My office was motivated to participate in this race and we will continue to work with U.S. PIRG and others to empower taxpayers to hold public officials accountable."

Ohio's website was praised for its "cutting edge technology" and "user-friendliness" in the report. The site features a search bar, similar to Google or other search engines, that makes it easy for users to find information without knowing exact search terms.

The site uses charts and graphs to display spending by category and year-over-year changes.

The new website cost \$814,000 to create, which was funded out of the treasurer's office operating budget. A bill in the Ohio House would require future treasurers to continue maintaining the database.

Ohio's spending database began with more than \$408 billion in state expenditures from 2008 to 2014, and new expenditures will be added monthly.

Mandel has been traveling the state to lobby county and city officials to make their expenditures available through Ohiocheckbook.com.

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