



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

By Steven Collins | Circleville Herald

CIRCLEVILLE — State of Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel stopped in Circleville Wednesday to promote Ohio House Bill 175, also known as "Open Ohio," a bill he says will promote fiscal transparency of state funds.

Mandel said he felt people have the right to know how their state tax dollars are spent, which is why he's supporting this bill.

"I believe in the concept that sunlight is the greatest disinfectant to government waste, and the more sunlight we shine on spending, the smaller and more efficient our government will be," he said.

Mandel said the idea would be to give interested citizens the chance to more easily look at how state dollars are spent by creating an Online database that can be searched. In this database will be any purchase made by a state body, even if it's a \$2 pack of pencils.

"I want to create an army of citizen auditors throughout Ohio and empower the people to hold the politicians accountable," he said.

The bill was voted on in the Ohio House with 86 yea votes and eight nay votes last month, and Mandel said he hopes to have it pass the Senate and be enacted into law by the end of the year.

"One of my pet peeves is when politicians spend taxpayer money on junkets to places like Hawaii and Disney World," he said. "I think putting this information on the Internet will make the bureaucrats and the politicians think twice before they waste taxpayer money or defraud the citizens."

Mandel said the Web site will have seven years of information starting on day one and build from there. Each record will have some context so it can be more easily understood.

"The direction that I've given my staff is to provide information that's easy to search and that has context," he said. "Citizens will be able to compare agency to agency and administration to administration back through time. You'll also be able to compare different agencies."

That way, he said, any possible discrepancies can be easily seen and quickly addressed.

"If you see four of them are going to the conference in Cincinnati and one of them is going to the conference in Hawaii, you can ask them the question of why they're doing that," he said. "If four of them are staying at the Holiday Inn for \$100 a night and another at the Ritz Carlton for \$500 a night, you can ask them why they are doing that."

Mandel said all the information that will be available is already public record, which won't create extra work, but because there isn't an easy way to search for it, it's almost impossible for the average person to access.



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

“Even though there is a lot of data, it will be easy to search and analyze,” Mandel said. “The problem today is that it’s virtually impossible for Joe Six-Pack to access it. What we’re doing is taking millions in state expenditures, totaling billions of dollars and putting it in one place and presenting it in a way that it’s easy for citizens to search and follow the money.”

Mandel said that while the bill only brings state funds to the table, he wants to bring local governments and school districts on board in the future as well.

“If they aren’t willing to do this, then I’m going to start showing up at meetings and asking them what they have to hide,” he said. “Hopefully they’ll cooperate because they have nothing to hide, but if not we’ll drag them kicking and screaming.”

Mandel said startup costs would be \$500,000 and that he plans to pay for it using money out of his office that he’s cut out of the budget already.

“In the last three and a half years as state treasurer, I’ve volunteered to cut \$5 million out of my office’s budget,” he said. “We’re going to use about 10 percent of that for this database. The legislation does not ask for any money to pay for this from the legislature.”