



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

By Chris Balusik | Chillicothe Gazette

CHILLICOTHE – Want to grab a peek into the state's checkbook?

State Treasurer Josh Mandel thinks you should have that ability and has embarked on a tour of the state to drum up support for legislation that would make it easier to take a look.

House Bill 175 calls for the creation of an Ohio State Government Expenditure Database that would provide an online resource for taxpayers to track where state money is being spent. The bill passed the State House June 4 by a vote of 86-8, including support from Scioto Valley representatives, and is now in the state Senate.

"This will be the first time in the state of Ohio that citizens will be able to go online and see every single check the state spends," Mandel said during a stop Wednesday in Chillicothe. "Everything from \$2 for a pack of pencils up to \$2 million for a contract and everything in between."

Mandel said the database would be presented in a way that will be simple for taxpayers to navigate and that information will be both searchable and downloadable. Information will be updated regularly using the state accounting system.

The estimated cost to get the system up and running is about \$500,000, but Mandel said it would not require additional taxpayer money, being paid for primarily through money saved by voluntary budget reductions in his office over the last three years. He is pushing for support now because if the legislation doesn't win final approval this year, the process would have to start from scratch in the next legislative session.

His purpose involving the legislation is two-fold. First, he said he wants to increase accountability among officeholders and state agencies, with residents able to track spending and compare spending habits between agencies.

"I think the best way to make the government smaller and more efficient is to empower the taxpayers to hold the politicians accountable," Mandel said. "My vision is to create an army of citizen auditors throughout Ohio and empower the people to hold the politicians accountable."

For example, he said taxpayers would be able to see the business travel records of state employees to see which ones stay in four-star hotels on business trips and which ones save money opting for two-star options.

His second purpose is to get a system in place that could then be replicated for school districts and city and county governments across the state to open their spending up to public scrutiny, with those local databases paid for and maintained by the state treasurer's office.

"If any of these cities and schools and counties drag their feet and refuse to give their information, I'm going to start showing up at



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city council meetings and school board meetings and asking what they have to hide," Mandel said.

The legislation, if passed, would require the statewide database to be maintained by future state treasurers. Mandel, a Republican, is being challenged for his position in November by Democrat Connie Pillich, a state representative from the Cincinnati area whose name is among 38 sponsors listed in support of HB 175.