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Conservative Group Posts State and Local Government Spending Watchdog Website

By: [Jim Turner](#) | Posted: January 10, 2012 3:55 AM

A Naples-based group claims it has created the largest online effort to expose excessive government spending in the state.

The [Foundation for Government Accountability](#), based in Naples, rolled out an interactive website on the eve of the 2012 Florida legislative session that allows users to compare 15 years of state and local government employee salaries, 18 years of state and local budgets and government contracts -- or about \$1.4 trillion in public spending.

“Floridaopengov.org is about supersizing the public’s right to know how politicians are spending their money,” said Tarren Bragdon, Foundation chief executive officer, during a media conference Monday in the Capitol.

Bragdon, a former state representative from Maine and who was director of health reform initiatives at the Maine Heritage Policy Center, said transparency is just one of four core areas the recently established nonprofit focuses on, along with Medicaid, welfare and advancing new businesses.

Florida Chief Financial Officer Jeff Atwater the Foundation effort.

“It seems to be quite in vogue these days that legislators, elected officials and candidates are quoting our Founding Fathers about the limits to government, the original intent of the Bill of Rights,” Atwater said. “But you would also know if they’re genuine and sincere about those proclamations as the founders said the very same thing about transparency.”

The state also offers a number of websites that provide the latest state fiscal numbers -- Gov. Rick Scott gained a lot of mileage for his [Florida Has a Right to Know](#) webpage in October when he posted the current salaries of state university employees.

Bragdon said the Foundation's decided to undertake the effort in order to let people compare salaries and budgets between counties and past years.

"What we did not see is a go-to source for local government people, for state payroll over time," he said.

The Foundation's data, collected through public records requests, breaks down government budgets by employee name, department, salary, spending category and year.

With the Florida Legislature facing a \$2 billion shortfall heading into the session that begins Tuesday, state Rep. Matt Hudson, R-Naples, was joined by other elected officials to support the effort they say will allow Floridians to "see what I'm up to."

"If you can see what we're up to, you can really fight against city hall," Hudson said.

Others backing the Foundation's online effort on Monday included Reps. Rachel Burgin, R-Tampa Bay, and Joseph Abruzzo, D-Wellington, and Longwood Mayor Joe Durso.

Burgin noted, in a tweet, that by using the website she found Hillsborough County went from 26 employees making \$75,000 or more in 2000 to 1,088 at or above that salary level in 2011.

As for the Foundation, the only listed board member is [Robert Levy](#), the chairman of the [Cato Institute](#).

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