



Government Transparency is a Necessity

January 11, 2008

By: Eli M. Gold

When leaving office Gov. Robert Ehrlich was hailed for turning a \$1 billion deficit into a \$1 billion surplus. So how can it be that the next morning when Gov. Martin O'Malley sat behind the governor's desk for the first time, we had a \$1.5 billion dollar "structural" deficit?

The key word here is structural. Unlike a deficit, where you will have a negative balance in your bank account; a structural deficit is where you have a positive number in your account bank, but if you keep spending like you are, you will bounce your checks.

So why, even after a special session that raised taxes by more than a billion dollars, is the governor still saying that there is not enough money to go around? Could it be that if our government says we need to spend more, we assume that it is true?

Now imagine this: it comes the end of the week and as always you go on line to see what and where your money was spent, only to be shocked to see an enormous expenditure that should never have been made or one that you never would have approved. Would you call your bank or credit card company? Of course you would. Well now imagine that the account you were looking at was not your personal account, but rather your state government's.

So, why is it that when you put money into your personal account it's okay to call the bank to discuss the issue, but when you, the taxpayer, put money into the government's account it's not okay to call. While many Marylanders do call their legislators, many do not because there is a feeling that they will not be heard, as illustrated by Maryland's special session.

When your child asks for a raise in allowance, do you give with no questions asked? Will an employer give a blank check to an employee? No.

Well, our legislators are our employees, and many have the spending habits of our children. It's about time we started asking our legislators where they are spending our money before they spend it.

While our legislature does currently have a website that allows anyone to track both pending and past bills, it is only good for the person who knows how to read a legislative bill. It is for this reason that we should urge our legislators to pass a Maryland Funding Accountability and Transparency Act.

This act would require all expenditures above \$5,000 be put on-line before they are passed, in order for the Maryland taxpayer to be able to easily learn about and more knowledgeably participate in the state and local dialogue on the expenditure of their money and the administration of their government.

Unfortunately, this bill is actively being pushed in Annapolis, by a minority of low spending politicians to a majority of big spenders. What's worse is that many legislators never even heard of it. Could it be for this reason that this will be the third time such a seemingly non-partisan bill will attempt to make it's way through the legislature?

The only way to see this to fruition would be to take this bill from a legislator's to a people's. If we the people can make our representatives know that we are watching and want to see something as comprehensive as the federal government's, www.USASpending.gov (2006 Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act), then we could see it pass this session.

Two news sources that have been very helpful in getting the word out and should be commended for their work is the Baltimore Examiner and Fox 45 http://foxbaltimore.com/players/news/cover_story/vid_208.shtml.

So, ask you legislator, "Have you signed The Harbour League's 'Oath of Government Transparency' or Maryland Funding Accountability and Transparency Act?". If the answer is no, then ask them if they condone corruption.

This bill alone can do wonders towards the Structural deficit.