



Indiana Auditor of State
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Op-Ed

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An Open Letter to My Fellow Public Servants: **Increase Transparency and Secure Freedom**

To My Fellow Public Servants,

Last week, March 13—19, was Sunshine Week, a national initiative to promote a dialogue about the importance of open government and freedom of information.

During Sunshine Week, but especially in the weeks that follow, it is important for us to embrace the idea of increasing government transparency as a means of securing freedom.

Founding Father Patrick Henry said, “The liberties of a people never were, nor ever will be, secure, when the transactions of their rulers may be concealed from them...to cover with the veil of secrecy the common routine of business, is an abomination in the eyes of every intelligent man, and every friend to his country.”

If we truly believe that our government is one of, by, and for the people, then we must also believe in the notion that as public servants we are merely extensions of those whom we serve.

So when the people send their money to us— to be spent to benefit the greater good— that money does not magically become *ours*. It remains *theirs*. We simply assume the most important fiduciary duty ever known.

But we must always remember, as Governor Mitch Daniels used to say, when we take a dollar away from a private citizen through taxation, we make them a dollar less free. No longer do the people get to decide what to do with their dollars.

That’s why it’s essential for us to conduct the people’s business in the open.

With all the technology and connectedness the 21st Century has to offer, we ought to embrace it. We must communicate, interact, and share with the people in real time in order to build trust and prove to them we're spending their money wisely and effectively.

Additionally, it is important for us to understand that when folks advocate for greater transparency, their motives are not to politicize or sensationalize the numbers and data.

On the contrary, these folks are driven to solve problems *with* us. They advocate for transparency because it is a fundamental principle of a free society. They believe, as I do, that greater transparency allows them a greater opportunity to hold their government more accountable so that we all may benefit from a freer and more prosperous state.

The good news is, we're already well on our way to having a more open government.

For example, this session, the Indiana General Assembly passed [Senate Enrolled Act 126](#) which urges the Legislative Council to study the expansion of open data in Indiana.

And last week, the Indy Chamber announced winners of its #INCapitolHack Hackathon. My office asked the hackers to develop a solution which enables us to better track state credit card spending. In just 24 hours, Team Shake & Bake developed [interactive dashboards and analytics](#) which allow us to trace spending down to the location, penny and spender.

In addition to these great developments for a more open Indiana, my office recently kicked off a 21st Century Government Transparency tour. On this tour, we are travelling to different areas of the state to promote the [Indiana Transparency Portal](#) and find ways that we can make the state's financial data more useful and user friendly.

And in the coming months, I will be taking those ideas from everyday Hoosiers and collaborating with a small working group of public and private sector individuals who can apply those solutions and make our state more open than it has ever been.

In conclusion, it is my hope that as public servants we will embrace our roles and act in good faith on behalf of the people by opening the doors and conducting their business in the light. If we commit to this principle, I believe we will be able to solve more problems and secure more freedoms for Hoosiers everywhere.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Crouch

Indiana State Auditor

Elected in 2014 as Indiana's 56th State Auditor, Suzanne Crouch serves as the state's Chief Financial Officer and administrator of the Indiana Transparency Portal. Prior to becoming State Auditor, Crouch served eight years as the State Representative for House District 78 in Southern Indiana.

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