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Missouri Gets C+ Grade on Transparency Practices

*Improvement Needed on Disclosure of
Tax Breaks, Economic Development Subsidies*

November 15, 2007--Missouri earned a C+ grade for its overall transparency practices, with improvement needed particularly in its online disclosure of corporate tax breaks and other economic development subsidies. Information about Missouri is included in a national report released today by the Corporate Research Project of Good Jobs First, a policy resource center in Washington, DC.

Online disclosure of subsidies lags far behind reporting on procurement contracts and lobbying activities, according to the report. Missouri transparency scores and grades are: 65 percent (D) for economic development subsidies, 90 percent (A-) for contract procurements; and 83 percent (B) for lobbying.

The rating on economic development subsidies is based on information available on the state's website about the Quality Jobs Program and the new "Missouri Accountability Portal" website that reports on all tax credits awarded by the Department of Economic Development and all government contracts.

A bill providing for increased funding for Missouri's Quality Jobs Program was passed by the Missouri Legislature in its 2007 special session.

"The Internet makes possible an unprecedented level of government transparency and public participation," said Good Jobs First Executive Director Greg LeRoy. "But

many states have been slow to adopt vigorous online disclosure, especially with respect to economic development subsidies. Twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia still provide no systematic online subsidy disclosure.”

The Good Jobs First study evaluates the quantity and quality of state government online disclosure in three categories: economic development subsidies, state procurement contracts and lobbying activities at the state level. It rates each state’s Web sites in the three areas on criteria such as ease of searching (especially for company-specific data), level of detail, scope of coverage and currency of data. Using these criteria, it assigns a score (0 to 100 percent) to the states’ performances in each of the three areas and overall, and translates the percentages into school-style letter grades (A through F).

For access to the full text of the report and the state appendices visit www.goodjobsfirst.org/statedisclosure.cfm.

“We see evidence that states are improving,” said Philip Mattera, Research Director of Good Jobs First and principal author of the report. “Yet the average state gets a grade of only B-minus in contract disclosure and C-minus in lobbying disclosure. On subsidies, given the large number of states that scored 0, the average grade is an F. No state receives better than a B across all three categories.”

The Good Jobs First report offers state officials and legislators a set of policy options to improve online transparency:

- Make it possible to browse through complete databases on subsidies, contracts, etc. as well as to search for data on a specific party.

- Provide a variety of data formats, so that users can either download full databases and analyze the information offline or import the data to other Web sites (through Application Programming Interfaces).
- Enhance subsidy and contract disclosure to include data on outcomes. For example, subsidy disclosure should reveal how many jobs (with what wage rates, benefits, etc.) were created by subsidized companies, and contract disclosure should indicate how well the vendor company carried out its responsibilities.
- Also enhance subsidy and contract disclosure to include data on the past performance of companies. This could include their track record on environmental, workplace, and consumer-protection compliance as well as the existence of any tax liens.
- Combine disclosure about subsidies, contract awards and lobbying with data on state campaign contributions by the companies involved or their top executives.