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Capitol

## Okla. praised for online access to information

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OKLAHOMA CITY – A national survey praises Oklahoma and six other states for the level of online access they provide to information concerning state contracts.

Also singled out for providing the most information about contracting details and processes were Illinois, Indiana, Montana, New Jersey, Texas and Vermont.

The Center for the Study of Responsive Law, a nonprofit Ralph Nader organization, said that Oklahoma provides a good deal of information to taxpayers through summaries of contracts and more detailed information through the Department of Central Services Web site.

"This survey shows what has been done and what needs to be done to improve taxpayer access to information about state contracting practices," said Nader.

The consumer advocate said that on the national level Congress has made what he termed "encouraging, although incomplete" progress with the passage of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, sponsored by U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., and co-sponsored by then-U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill.

"Still needed are the full texts of these contracts," Nader said. "Most states still fall short in mirroring the progress made on the federal level."

Coburn was not immediately available for comment.

Oklahoma scored positive marks for providing summaries of contracts as well as detailed information on contract provisions, such as name and location of contract recipients, contract amounts, funding agencies, transaction types, date ranges of contracts, place of performance, program source and the competitive means of obtaining a contract.

John Richard is director of the Oklahoma central services agency.

"We are very pleased to be recognized by CSRL and can appreciate the time it took researching government contracts on a national scale," Richard said in a statement. "Our goal has been to provide as much state contract information as possible through our Web site, in order to better serve state agencies and suppliers who do business with the state, while simultaneously keeping Oklahoma citizens better informed of state spending."

The Nader group said Oklahoma could improve by providing information on the parent companies of award recipients.

On the negative end of the scale, states scored as having the worst performance were Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Rhode Island, Wisconsin and Wyoming. The center said that Minnesota, Mississippi and Rhode Island provide either insufficient information or no contract data at all.

Researcher Barry Williams said most states, even the best performers, failed to meet all criteria for optimal disclosure.

"The Internet holds great potential for casting sunshine on many state processes, but this is one area where most states have simply not done enough to make vital information available to the taxpayers," Williams said.

The center surveyed all 50 states and the District of Columbia.