

Op/Ed

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GOOD GOVERNMENT

Open the State Checkbook to All Eyes

It's a safe bet that Barack Obama and Virginia State Sen. Ken Cuccinelli don't see eye to eye on a lot of issues. For two such ideological opposites to agree on something suggests the notion must be either supremely bad, or supremely good. Fortunately, it's the latter.

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HINKLE

Obama, along with Republican Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, sponsored legislation creating a federal Web site where taxpayers can track government spending: www.usaspending.gov. The site lets visitors search federal expenditures — grants, loans, contracts, and

the like. Type in "food," start clicking on links, and pretty soon you learn, for instance, that the Bureau of Prisons has paid \$2,740 to Jamac, a frozen-food company, for 1,500 pounds of beef meatballs and 1,000 pounds of deli-cut ham.

The particular example is chosen at random, but you can easily see the utility of being able to root around in the federal checkbook to learn who's getting tax dollars — and for what. Open-government efforts such as the usaspending.gov Web site benefit watchdogs of every political stripe. They're enormously powerful tools to help keep the big boys honest.

This year Cuccinelli is teaming up with his Democratic colleague Chap Petersen on SB585, which directs Virginia's Department of Planning and Budget to create a similar searchable database.

VIRGINIA wouldn't be the first state to follow the federal lead. Several other states (Hawaii, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska,



Word power

Has Ken Cuccinelli been reading James J. Kilpatrick under the covers at night? Read more on the Barticles blog at inRich.com.

functioning. Thanks to the initiative of Gov. Tim Kaine, another Web site, Virginia Performs (www.vaperforms.virginia.gov/) provides some helpful information about the state's vari-

ous agencies. That site has drawbacks of its own, such as occasional lapses into reader-unfriendly jargon: "AVATAR provides state facility average daily census (ADC) and Community Automated Reporting System (CARS) and Community Consumer Submission (CCS) counts of consumers receiving community-based highly intensive services (*i.e.*, local MH and SA inpatient, MH PACT, MH assertive community treatment, MH DAP, MH and MR highly intensive residential, and MR Waiver services."

Moreover, skeptics of particular agencies might want to dispute the particular yardsticks used to measure success. Social conservatives, for instance, might wonder whether the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control should be trying to increase profits and taxes — *i.e.*, sales — while voters of a more libertarian stripe might argue the agency's role should be limited to enforcement, and its stores should be privatized. As Peter Drucker observed, "There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all."

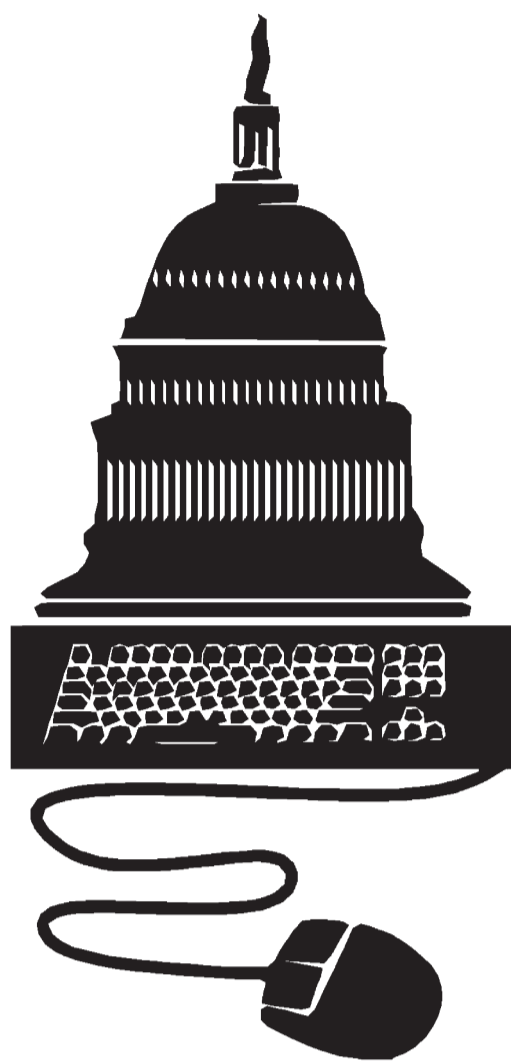
Obviously, though, *Virginaperforms* can't resolve those more philosophical questions, and isn't meant to. Nor, for that matter, would a budgetary Web site necessarily help voters decide whether certain expenditures are good or bad. But it could go a considerable distance toward democratizing Virginia's spending decisions.

INDEED, the Internet has democratized information to a degree not seen since Gutenberg's day. The Virginia Public Access Project (vpap.org) enables citizens to see which political candidates have been taking money from which individuals and interest groups. Virginia blogger Waldo Jaquith has done the state a signal service by producing richmondsunlight.com, a Web site that helps track legislation through the General Assembly (the Assembly's Web site is <http://legis.state.va.us/>). And those are just a few of the sites that enable the masses to find information once held tightly by the powerful few. Not that long ago, anyone hoping to follow the money and the bills had to spend hours poring over paper records at the state capital. Now you can do it at home in your pajamas.

Of course, knowledge does not guarantee wisdom, and a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. But even a little knowledge is far less dangerous than none.

My thoughts do not aim for your assent — just place them alongside your own reflections for a while.

— ROBERT NOZICK.



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FIRST AMENDMENT

The Right From Which All Others Flow

NEW YORK

What distinguishes us from all other nations is the range and depth of the First Amendment's expressive individual liberties against government control of what we say and think. Having researched and written

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about it for more than 50 years, I can attest that the most compelling, readable account of its tumultuous and often imperiled history is the newly published *Freedom for the Thought That We Hate: A Biography of the First Amendment* by Anthony Lewis (Basic Books).

Part of the title comes from Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes' warning of the most powerful need of the First Amendment, especially in times of national danger and epidemics of speech-suppressing political correctness:

"If there is any principle of the Constitution that more imperatively calls for attachment than any other, it is the principle of free thought — not free thought for those who agree with us but freedom for the thought that we hate."

I commend the title and the Lewis book to Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., who is still trying to get his expanded "hate speech" legislation to become law. It adds extra prison time not for the actual conviction of violent acts but for the "hateful" speech accompanying them as interpreted by police and prosecutors.

Once our Republic began, James Madison expected that no American would be punished for his "thoughts." But "hate crimes" laws — vigorously and incredibly supported by the American Civil Liberties Union — are what Madison feared. If these added penalties for thought crimes, also passed overwhelmingly by the House, get to the Oval Office, the president should veto the legislation.

FOR MANY years, Anthony Lewis, twice a winner of the Pulitzer Prize, was a nonpareil reporter and analyst of the continuous First Amendment wars in his *New York Times* column. I do not understand his removal from that sentry post since that paper now has no regular columnist with Lewis' legal and First Amendment history credentials.

Justice William Brennan once told me when I was talking about the Bill of Rights in schools around the country, "Tell them stories!" That's what Lewis does in *Freedom for the Thought We Hate*. How many Americans know that before the Constitution and our Revolution, "Massachusetts hanged Mary Dyer for her Quaker views"? I would add that before Jefferson and Madison surfaced in Virginia, Catholics were not allowed to hold office and priests were barred from even entering the colony.

Lewis also dramatizes why and how "it took more than a century for [our] courts to begin

protecting speakers and publishers from official repression in the United States."

And showing the continuing struggle to interconnect rights of privacy and speech, he quotes Justice Stephen Breyer that "the right to be let alone" encourages us to speak freely during those times "when we fear that our private conversations may become public." But the Founders couldn't have predicted the advent of computer technology and government databases, and how we may be approaching the Last Rites of privacy.

Lewis brings into the conversation a 1927 opinion (*Whitney v. California*) by Justice Louis Brandeis, joined by Holmes, that affected me with the thrill of Americanism when I was a youngster. It had the freedom force of Louis Armstrong's trumpet:

"Those who won our independence . . . believed liberty to be the secret of happiness and courage to be the secret of liberty . . . and that the greatest menace to freedom is an inert people, that public discussion is a political duty. They knew that order cannot be secured merely through fear of punishment for its infraction . . . They eschewed silence coerced by law."

AND IN THIS age of terrorism — as before in our history when we were menaced from within and from afar — "Fear of serious injury cannot justify [government] suppression of free speech and assembly." As in Salem, Brandeis wrote, "Men feared witches and burnt women."

To which George Orwell added: "If large numbers of people believe in freedom of speech, there will be freedom of speech even if the law forbids it. But if public opinion is sluggish, inconvenient minorities will be prosecuted, even if laws exist to protect them."

That's why I hope large numbers of Americans, of all ages, will read Lewis' odyssey of why we are Americans.

He acts on what he writes about. On his current book tour, he spoke before the American Library Association at Philadelphia's National Constitution Center. The ALA's leadership has resolutely refused — by contrast with library associations throughout Europe — to demand that Communist Cuba immediately release the independent librarians it has imprisoned for opening private libraries for books banned by this dictatorship, which has burned those confiscated books, including a biography of Martin Luther King Jr.

Lewis told the delegates what ALA officials there — touting their mission of freedom to read — didn't want to hear, even in the National Constitution Center: "I can't think of anything worse than putting people in jail for opening libraries."

Freedom for the Thought We Hate will, of course, not be barred from our libraries. But, then again, the Founders did not intend the First Amendment to be exclusively American.

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HEALTH CARE

Uninsured In Area Have Access Now

In the Metro Richmond area, an estimated 57,000 low-income residents are uninsured. Most are members of the working poor, who live precariously despite regular employment. For these low-wage earners struggling to make ends meet,

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REAMS

health insurance is a luxury that can't compete with the more immediate concerns of food, shelter, and transportation.

The price the uninsured pay for gambling with their health can be high. Most forgo annual check-ups and postpone needed care until health problems become acute. Even those who rely on free clinics may find themselves shut out of treatment if their illness is beyond the expertise of the clinic's primary care doctors. Too often, the uninsured end up in hospital emergency rooms with serious illnesses that could have been prevented with prompt attention.

To address this growing dilemma, the Richmond Academy of Medicine (RAM) is leading a new initiative that builds on the care given at free clinics and community health centers. Called Access Now, this referral system is modeled after Project Access in Asheville, N.C., the brainchild of physicians in the Buncombe County Medical Society who in 1995 began linking the neediest uninsured patients in their community with free services from medical specialists, hospitals, pharmacies, and diagnostic experts.

PHYSICIANS IN Richmond have long provided free care to those who can't afford to pay. Access Now strengthens that tradition by providing a better coordinated system that helps involve more doctors.

With a central system to organize care, everyone benefits. Doctors are able to carry out the ideals of the medical profession while sharing the cost of free care with hundreds of other physicians. Clinics get specialized treatment for their clients without having to plead each case individually with doctors or hospital administrators. Hospitals reduce the number of uncompensated emergency room visits and the lengthy hospitalizations brought on by delayed care. Eligible participants obtain needed services without being bankrupted by medical bills. The community gains the economic benefit of a healthier, more productive work force.

Richmond's Access Now officially kicked off on Jan. 3, 2008. We've been meeting with key players for more than a year and have recruited fully a quarter of RAM's 1,600 physicians, as well as 11 clinics, public health departments, and federally qualified health centers. A pilot program launched last February has already helped dozens of clinic patients with complicated medical issues. We have partnered with REACH, the Richmond agency devoted to increasing access to health-care services.

RAM has donated office space, administrative support, and \$125,000 to help with start-up costs, including computer software to connect all the constituencies. All three of the region's hospital systems are on board — Bon Secours, HCA, and VCU — and each has pledged \$50,000 for program expenses and outreach materials.

Straightforward eligibility rules will ensure that help goes to those who need it most. Participants must have incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, which is currently \$20,420 for singles and \$41,300 for a family of four. Those eligible will receive a membership card that functions much like an insurance card, which helps us track who's giving and receiving aid.

AFTER CLINICS refer patients, Access Now will review eligibility, enroll qualified patients, schedule appointments with participating physicians, educate patients about their responsibilities, and respond to any concerns from program participants. Since all referrals are channeled through a central hub, a formerly fragmented system is replaced by a streamlined approach that operates much more efficiently. With structured access to specialty care and prescription medicines, more people will get the help they need.

While we've come a long way in a short time, we still have far to go. We hope to bring in other medical societies, as well as physicians who aren't members of any association.

In the 12 years since its inception, the Project Access network has spread to more than 50 communities throughout the U.S., with some including chiropractic care, dental services, and volunteer medical interpreters. Over time, we'd also like to add to the services we offer.

Access Now won't solve the massive problem of the region's uninsured — but it will make a marked difference in the lives of many. We believe it's better to light a candle than to curse the darkness. Helping others is at the heart of what physicians do, and it's a part of who we are. Access Now will relieve suffering, one life at a time.

• Patricia N. Reams, MD, MPH, FAAP, is a pediatrician and director of Access Now.