Speaking Up for Government:
The Next Chapter at OMB Watch

Annual Report 2011
OMB Watch plays a unique and crucial role in the public interest community. As an organization, it not only consistently produces the strong policy analysis that serves as the backbone of vital advocacy work to promote an open, accessible government, but also serves as a convener of groups and individuals that share its goals. Everyone involved with this organization, from the Board to the staff to its allies, knows that advocacy is improved by partnerships. Working together, change is possible.

As Chair of the OMB Watch Board of Directors for the past five years, I’ve had the privilege of guiding OMB Watch in its efforts to create a government that proactively shares information with the public, that encourages a federal budget process that is responsive to public needs, and that works to build a strong system of public protections that ensures the health and safety of every American. I couldn’t be more proud of the organization’s work and the policy changes that OMB Watch has helped bring about.

After all, we know that without a government that works for the people and supports the public structures upon which we all depend, the American dream as we know it would cease to exist.

Yet the consistent anti-government messages that have bombarded us over the past 40 years have created a distorted perception of government and the positive role it plays in our daily lives – the protections it provides, the opportunities it creates, and the privileges we enjoy as a result of its efforts. Because of the negative view of government so many Americans have developed, our country often doesn’t prioritize the issues that form the foundation of our democracy, including government reform, citizen engagement and empowerment, and access to information. Without an understanding of the vital role of government, we fail to understand how, by improving government, we can improve our democracy.

Moving forward, OMB Watch seeks to change that. We’ll tell the story of government to policymakers, activists, academics, and everyday Americans. We’ll work to reacquaint the American people with the government our predecessors demanded more than 200 years ago and, in doing so, we’ll work to make
government more effective and more responsive to the public.

This past year, OMB Watch underwent a significant transition. Founding executive director Gary Bass left to take on a new challenge as executive director of the Bauman Foundation. We’ll always be grateful to him for his role in building OMB Watch into a pre-eminent policy and advocacy organization. In July, we welcomed Katherine McFate as the new president of OMB Watch. Katherine’s commitment to the organization and its causes, as well as her energy, knowledge, and expertise, have proven incredibly valuable to shaping OMB Watch’s mission going forward.

We’re poised to strategically improve government for each and every one of us. We’re ready to create positive change for the American people, and we hope each of you will join us in this effort.

Warm Regards,

Paul Marchand
Chair, OMB Watch Board of Directors
When the Board chose me to lead OMB Watch last summer, I knew our first task was to maintain the organization’s reputation for timely, accurate policy analysis that Gary Bass built and carefully nurtured for the past 29 years. Thanks to our terrific staff, we met this goal during a very busy transition year.

In 2011, we spoke up for and defended public standards and protections. Co-chairing and working with allies in the Coalition for Sensible Safeguards, we’ve been at the forefront of efforts to retain the rules and standards that protect our air and water quality, the food we eat, the products we consume, and the safety and voice of workers.

We spoke out against changes in the federal budget process that kept negotiations behind closed doors and advocated for budget policies that reflect the priorities that the American people consistently demand. We are working with allies to keep a broad range of revenue options in the public discourse about how to deal with the economy.

We worked with officials in the Obama administration to improve government openness and accountability – to implement the Open Government Directive; to review new, interactive websites; and to encourage the release of unclassified information.

And we began deliberately working on how we’re talking about government. After forty years of strident conservative rhetoric about what government does wrong, we want to shift the conversation to a focus on the essential role of government if we are going to maintain a robust quality of life, expand the middle class, and leave a healthy environment for our children.

We are systematically speaking up for government, reminding
Americans what government does, or should do, to promote the general welfare. We are encouraging our fellow citizens to do the same – and to think about how we can make our public institutions as effective and responsive as possible to the needs of everyday Americans.

We want more than good government; we want GREAT government – government that is responsive, effective, accountable, and transparent.

These are big aspirations for a small organization, and we can’t achieve them alone. So we are building more partnerships, reaching out to more state and local groups, looking for innovative ways to convey information and inform new audiences, and inspiring more citizens to engage. At the end of the day, this work is about people and making all our lives better.

Please join us in our effort to renew the promise of democratic governance.

With Gratitude and Warm Wishes,

Katherine McFate
President
Our mission is to build an open, accountable government that invests in the common good, protects people and the environment, and advances the national priorities defined by an active, informed citizenry.

- Improved public understanding of the vital role of government and of how government works.
- A federal regulatory system with the resources, authority, and will to protect public health, workplace safety, and environmental quality.
- Proactive government disclosure of timely, useful information that empowers people to participate in democracy and safeguard the well-being of their families and communities.
- Transparent budget and spending systems that generate sustainable investments in the public structures that undergird American democracy and allow citizens to understand and participate in tax and spending decisions.
THIRTY YEARS AGO, Gary D. Bass founded OMB Watch in order to lift the veil of secrecy shrouding the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB). At that time, OMB was exerting new influence on the operations of a range of executive agencies, but the changes were occurring behind the scenes — unaccountable and little understood by the public.

Our issue portfolio has grown over the years, but a basic theme remains: We fight for government that operates in the open and encourages citizen input and oversight. In a democracy, government must be accountable to all the people, not just the wealthy and powerful.

TODAY, we work in three main policy areas: information policy, fiscal policy, and regulatory policy. We advocate for public access to meaningful government information, for fiscal policies that support the public programs and structures that make America a great place to live, and for a strong federal regulatory system that protects our health and well-being.

To ensure government is effective and responsive to the priorities of the American people, we conduct policy research and advocacy; develop and disseminate reform ideas; build broad-based coalitions to advance our values; and create tools to encourage citizen participation and government accountability. To ensure the American people understand the vital role of government and can participate in the governing process, we produce and disseminate educational tools and communications materials. We are a resource for policymakers, the media, advocacy groups, community organizations, and the public.
When Americans have access to government information, they have the power to participate in democratic decision making and to hold government officials accountable for their actions. Today, more than ever, we have the technologies to examine potential conflicts of interest and access information quickly, inexpensively, and effectively. We’re helping 21st century technologies transform the link between citizens and government.
Throughout 2011, OMB Watch continued to play a central role in assessing the Obama administration’s transparency efforts. In March 2011, we published an in-depth assessment of the Obama administration’s progress on the almost 70 open government recommendations that we made to the incoming president in late 2008. The review, Assessing Progress Toward a 21st Century Right to Know, showed that various agencies in the executive branch were utilizing e-government and Web 2.0 technologies to a greater degree than previous administrations and that advances in scientific integrity and the release of unclassified public information had improved.

We continue to advocate for a centralized mechanism for handling Freedom of Information Act requests, restored funding for the Electronic Government Fund, limited government secrecy categories, and the expansion of the number of industries required to disclose the chemicals used in their factories.

“Modern technologies provide endless opportunities for reforming how the public interacts with the government. A 21st century American democracy will be truly of, by, and for the people — online and in real time.” – Sean Moulton, Director of Information Policy
At OMB Watch, we believe that every American has a right to know that the products they buy, the air they breathe, and the communities they live in are safe. When people have the ability to monitor information about potential toxins, they have the power to become their own advocates.

In 2011, we released *An Agenda to Strengthen Our Right to Know: Empowering Citizens with Environmental, Health, and Safety Information*. We presented the report to the Obama administration in May, based on consultation with more than 100 environmental, health, and community groups. We then organized meetings with key agencies so advocates could make their case directly to policymakers and explain how the release of information would help them.

**The Open Government Partnership**

On Sept. 23, 2010, President Obama addressed the United Nations and called on countries to strengthen government openness and make formal commitments to improve their own transparency and accountability practices. Seven countries joined the U.S. to form the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and to develop, in consultation with civil society groups, national action plans. By the end of 2011, more than 40 countries were involved in the OGP.

OMB Watch and other advocacy groups met with administration officials over the summer to discuss the U.S. National Action Plan, and we were pleased with the 26 commitments contained in the initial plan. The initiative continues to raise the international profile of open government efforts.

Our work with the Open Government Partnership continues as implementation moves forward. We’ve been invited to provide more specific recommendations to refine the U.S. plan and continue to work with other nonprofits to follow up on how the administration intends to implement each of the commitments made in the plan.
Strengthening Standards and Safeguards

America’s health and safety standards are the envy of most of the world and the primary reason we have such a high quality of life. Federal regulatory safeguards not only ensure everyone’s health and safety, by protecting the water we drink and the air we breathe, but also encourage industry to innovate and pave the way for economic prosperity.
“By creating and enforcing strong public protections, the government is able to ensure that each and every one of us is protected — from contaminated food, faulty products, and exposure to hazardous chemicals — regardless of who we are, where we live, or what we do for a living.”

– Randy Rabinowitz, Director of Regulatory Policy
Our system of public protections suffered a series of attacks in 2011. Conservative politicians, using recycled rhetoric from the past, tried to blame regulations for sluggish economic growth. We’ve seen these kinds of attacks before, and the response from the public interest community came swift and strong.

The Regulatory Policy Team at OMB Watch worked on various fronts throughout 2011 to tell a different story. We provided research, fact sheets, and talking points on these issues to educate Hill staff. We spread the word about the positive role that federal regulations play in protecting our health, safety, and environment by providing commentary and information to the media.

We tracked regulatory activity in various agencies with a particular eye toward monitoring efforts to improve the use of science in regulatory decision making. We reported on the progress of anticipated environmental rules and examined the crucial role of regulatory safeguards in the wake of foodborne illness outbreaks.

The Regulatory Team also tracked the repercussions of the January executive order that directed federal agencies to develop plans to “look back” at existing rules and determine if any of those standards should be modified or repealed. We highlighted the need to look forward and to build a regulatory system for the 21st century — one that will protect our families from harm, encourage industries to innovate, and strengthen our economy.

The Regulatory Policy Team also evaluated how agencies have implemented President Obama’s January 2011 memorandum on regulatory compliance — a memo that demands better disclosure of how public firms and enterprises are following existing workplace health and safety standards. We provided recommendations for improving the way compliance and enforcement information is released to the public, and we suggested concrete ways in which agencies can improve the public’s understanding and use of important enforcement information.
In 2011, the Coalition for Sensible Safeguards:

Mobilized progressive activists in defense of a strong regulatory system that has the resources and political will to protect our health, environment, and communities.

Performed valuable research that uncovered the human costs of irresponsible deregulation, the many societal benefits of oversight of industry, and the cost of regulatory delay.

Provided key insight and expert advice to policymakers and legislators working on regulatory reform.

Stopped numerous attacks on the regulatory process that threatened to undermine the government’s ability to protect our health and safety.
The federal budget is about choices. Where we choose to spend our money is a reflection of our national priorities. Who and what we choose to tax shapes our economy and the level of inequality in America.
“The difficulty is that many of us don't recognize how federal spending benefits us on a daily basis. As Americans, we’re accustomed to so many privileges — driving on safe highways or trusting the safety of the food we buy in the grocery store — that we forget how many federal dollars made that peace of mind possible.” – Craig Jennings, Director of Fiscal Policy
The “deficit mania” of Tea Party activists rose to a boil in 2011, misrepresenting the conversation and steering it toward an early discussion of drastic trade-offs, rather than a more reasoned discussion of how to address the nation’s long-term fiscal health.

At OMB Watch, we are committed to fostering productive conversations about federal spending and letting the public know that our country is not “broke.” We can still afford to invest in the protections and public structures that make America a great place to live.

This past year, we condemned budget negotiations conducted in secret and process changes that would keep budget decisions hidden from the public. We spoke out against the Super Committee and the across-the-board cuts in important federal programs required by the debt ceiling deal. Even as the Super Committee was failing to reach a compromise, we began researching alternative ways to raise enough revenue to make needed investments in the economy and to begin to reduce the deficit.

We also engaged in rapid response analysis of policy riders on appropriations bills, highlighting for congressional staff, journalists, and the federal advocacy community the potentially damaging policies proposed. In many cases, simply making the content of the riders the subject of public scrutiny succeeded in getting them removed.

In the coming year, the national conversation about deficits and spending priorities will intensify. But at OMB Watch, we’ll continue to foster productive conversations about the choices we have on both spending and revenue — choices that ensure everyone contributes to the vital public structures that benefit all Americans and help to maintain and grow the middle class.
In continuing our history of developing online tools that improve access to information, we partnered with the Transportation Equity Network, Good Jobs First, and the Center for Social Inclusion, as well as Esri, a leader in geographic information systems mapping software, to build a web tool that maps and displays federal spending in communities across the country. The first use of the Equity in Government Accountability and Performance (EGAP) tool joins spending data with national population characteristics and allows local advocates to track grants and loans that came to their communities through the stimulus.

We trained advocates nationwide on how to use the tool — in person and online — in order to expand opportunities for data-driven advocacy. Visit http://www.equitygap.net/ to access the EGAP tool, which gives advocates, the media, and the public a new way to evaluate where and how federal spending has been used.
The Coalition for Sensible Safeguards
www.sensible safeguards.org
The Coalition for Sensible Safeguards is an alliance of more than 70 public interest groups, as well as concerned citizens, joined in the belief that our country’s system of regulatory safeguards provides a stable framework that secures our quality of life and paves the way for a sound economy that benefits us all.

FedSpending.org
www.fedspending.org
Created by OMB Watch in 2006, FedSpending.org continues to provide journalists, citizens, and activists with access to a searchable database of federal spending and contract information.

Right-to-Know Network
www.rtknet.org
Since 1989, OMB Watch’s Right-to-Know Network has provided free access to the Toxics Release Inventory and other databases of environmental information.

Charity and Security Network
www.charityandsecurity.org
A project of OMB Watch, the Charity and Security Network seeks to protect U.S. and international nonprofit organizations that fight poverty, provide essential services in underserved communities, and promote human rights and peace.

Regulatory Resource Center
www.ombwatch.org/regresources
Designed to provide citizens with avenues for participating in the regulatory process, the Regulatory Resource Center also serves as a library of information about the rulemaking process.
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Financials

Total Assets: 2,190,124
Total Liabilities: 85,769
Net Assets on June 30, 2011: 2,007,195

Revenue
7/1/2010 - 6/30/2011

- Grants and Contributions: 1,943,301
- Contributions and Donated Services and Facilities: 240,281
- Professional Fees: 193,015
- Reimbursements: 98,375
- Investment Income: 127,477
- Publications: 2,142

Total Revenue: 2,604,591

Expenses
7/1/2010 - 6/30/2011

- Program Expenses: 2,131,214
- Management and General: 179,900
- Development: 196,317

Total Expenses: 2,507,431
### Revenue

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Thank You.

To all those who made our work possible throughout 2011.

Anonymous  American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees

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