



News from:
COMPTROLLER KEVIN LEMBO

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COMPTROLLER LEMBO OPENS THE STATE'S FINANCIAL BOOKS WITH "OpenBudget"

*ONLINE PORTAL ALLOWS PUBLIC TO COMPARE STATE SPENDING AND
REVENUE TRENDS TO ACTUAL STATE BUDGET THROUGHOUT THE YEAR*

Comptroller Kevin Lembo today launched "OpenBudget," a new online portal that allows the public to view how state spending and revenue is tracking against the state's actual budgeted amounts throughout the year.

For the first time in Connecticut, online users can now easily search among the branches of government – by department, fund and line-item – to find out how much the state is spending in these areas and compare it to the actual budget amounts.

"OpenBudget is about destroying the barriers between the public and state government," Lembo said. "It's about opening the books, delivering timely financial information to the public – and giving everyone an opportunity to join the policy conversation. OpenBudget is the latest return on my promise of greater government transparency and recognizes that open government is always a work in progress, with no finish line.

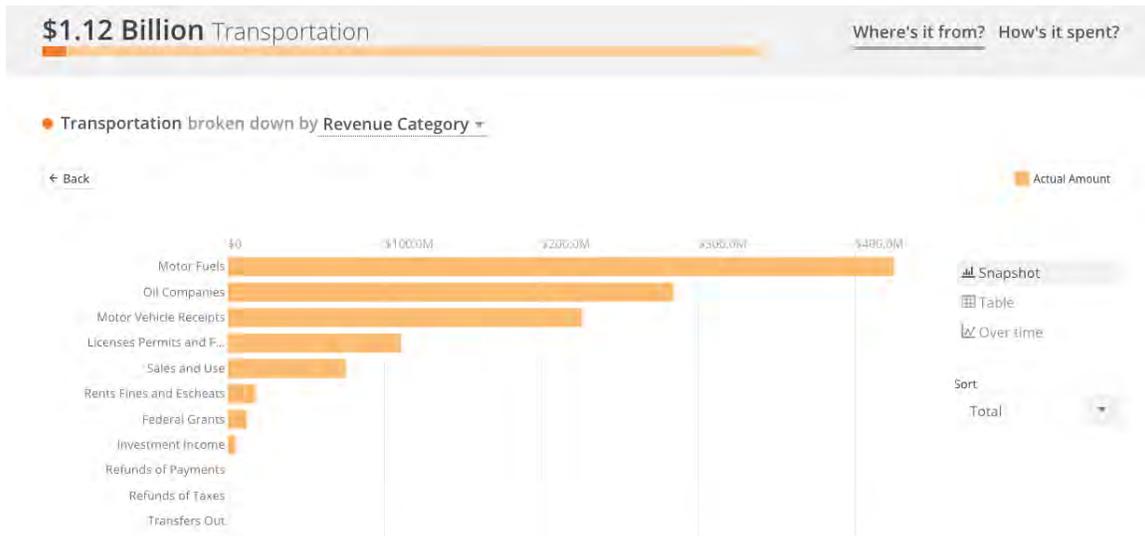
"Don't have time to print off PDFs and comb through endless pages of government financial reports? We didn't think so – and now you don't have to," Lembo said.

Here's a snapshot of what the OpenBudget feature achieves:

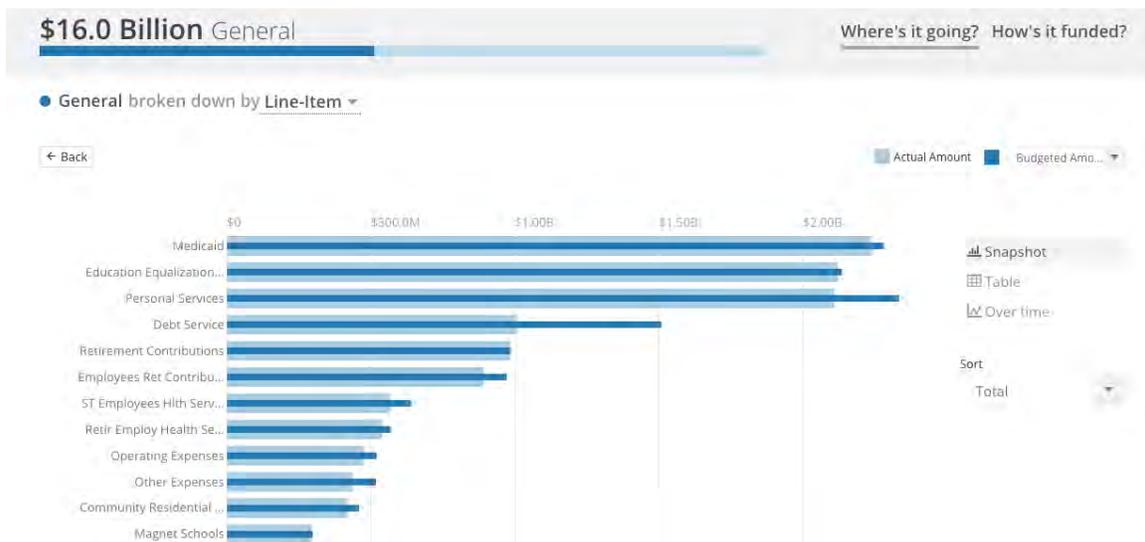
- It ends the public's reliance on complicated, hard-to-understand budget documents (usually non-searchable PDFs) for timely state budget information.
- It allows the user to interactively explore the approved budget.
- It allows the user to review how state spending is tracking against budgeted amounts.

- It allows the user to track state revenue streams (state income) throughout the fiscal year.
- It allows the user to quickly and easily look at budget and spending trends for each line item or higher-level spending category over the last five years.
- Users can also download the raw datasets by clicking “get this data” link at the bottom of the page.

Here’s just one example of a dataset that users can search on the OpenBudget application – a breakdown of the revenue that feeds the Transportation Fund:



In this example, you can see how some General Fund line-item expenses performed against their budgeted amounts:



The new OpenBudget feature is the latest upgrade to “Open Connecticut” – an online hub of state financial information that Lembo first launched more than two years ago in an ongoing effort to simplify and centralize public access to important information about state revenue and spending. Both the OpenBudget and OpenCheckbook applications are delivered through Socrata’s government transparency platforms.

Since first launching the site, Lembo launched additional features, including “OpenCheckbook,” which went live earlier this year. OpenCheckbook allows users to search real-time information, updated nightly, about who received payments from the State of Connecticut for goods or services and how much they received.

OpenBudget is different from the OpenCheckbook feature in that it allows the user to see spending trends in comparison to budgeted amounts. While OpenCheckbook is designed to show the user the fine detail of individual payments made by the state, OpenBudget allows the user to better understand expenditures in the context of the state budget, Lembo said. How much have we spent in comparison to what was appropriated? How is that trending over time?

“OpenCheckbook brings greater oversight and transparency to individual payments made by the state, while OpenBudget makes the state’s approved budget more accessible – allowing for greater public engagement,” Lembo said. “This may be particularly helpful for public advocates and academics – allowing those outside of government easier means to analyze and weigh in on the effectiveness of government policies.”

The information on OpenBudget features much of the information that the Office of the State Comptroller distributes in its monthly financial reports in an easy-to-use and easy-to-access online format that is updated each month. OpenBudget can be accessed directly at openbudget.ct.gov – or through the full Open Connecticut transparency site at the Office of the State Comptroller’s main page at www.osc.ct.gov (once there, click on “Open Connecticut”).

Lembo, who serves on the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Foundation for Open Government, Inc. (CFOG), has been hailed by advocacy groups and the media as a “champion of transparency” for his efforts to promote public access to state financial information – and was recognized by the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information with its Bice Clemow Award in 2013 for his efforts towards open government.

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