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# **Newspaper: FSM Ahead Of Marshall Islands In Transparency**

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**(Marshall Islands Journal)**

**From an editorial in the Marshall Islands Journal: The islands in what was once the U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands have special bonds dating way back. But within these friendly ties, we are also reasonably competitive and like to compare who is doing better in education, health and so on.**

**Here's our contribution to the competition.**

**The Federated States of Micronesia is doing a much better job in government financial transparency than the Marshall Islands. "Government financial transparency" means giving people relatively easy and timely access to financial information about the national government.**

**Why is the FSM ahead of the RMI? Because 1) the FSM Public Auditor has an Internet Web site on which every audit is posted in .pdf format so it can be easily obtained by anyone with a computer and Internet access; 2) all audits are quickly posted to the Web site after they are completed and transmitted to the auditee; and 3) the FSM is producing performance audits in such areas as government travel, customs and tax collection, and the operations of the FSM Congress — in addition to the normal financial audits on government departments and agencies.**

**Contrast this to the Marshall Islands. The RMI Auditor General: 1) has no Internet Web site; 2) obviously posts none of the audits to a Web site,**

meaning they are not easily accessible by the public; and 3) rarely conducts audits of special areas as noted above, and, despite announcing it would begin performance audits, has not conducted any. There are reasons for this: The RMI Auditor General's office has been managed by the Acting Auditor General for going on two years now, and has historically been understaffed.

One of the easy things that the RMI Auditor General could do is make its audits available to the public in a more timely fashion. In the FSM, their auditor officially sends an audit to the FSM President (or head of an agency) and a week later the audit is out for the public to see.

In the RMI, an audit could be done in February or March, but we won't see it until at least late August or September. This is because the RMI Auditor General does not release audits in a timely manner.

The RMI Constitution says merely that the Auditor General "shall report at least once annually to the Nitijela, at its regular session." There is nothing in the language of the Constitution that prevents release of these audits to the public in a timely manner. The RMI Auditor has established the practice of submitting a report to the Nitijela two times a year, during the January and August sessions of the Nitijela. These reports include anywhere from about half a dozen audits to as many as 20 at one time.

There is no reason to change that system. But there is reason to provide audits for the public quickly after they have been issued to the auditees. When the Auditor General transmits the final report of the RMI government's "single" government-wide audit — usually in June — why should the Nitijela and the public have to wait more than two or three months to see this important document?

Transmit it to the President and then release it for public consumption. Same goes for audits of individual agencies.

Holding these documents for many months before public release reduces the value of the information and also reduces the opportunity for the Public Accounts Committee and others to initiate timely responses and corrective action when problems are found.

Transparency does not happen by itself. It takes action and a commitment to the principle that the public has the right to know how the government is spending taxpayers' money, and to receive information in a timely fashion.

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