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2008 JAMES MADISON AWARD RECIPIENT ANNOUNCED

DALLAS – The Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas will present the 2008 James Madison Award on Oct. 24, in Austin, Texas, to John Washburn, a software tester and citizen activist from Wisconsin, who challenged the Texas governor's policy of deleting E-mails after only seven days. The James Madison Award was created to honor individuals whose appreciation and respect for the First Amendment and open government have been demonstrated by exemplary actions, words or deeds.

Washburn's interest in election procedures and open government began in 1992 when a friend asked for his help in researching the book, "Votescam: The Stealing of America," because of Washburn's extensive experience in software quality and test tracking. The book alleged ongoing, persistent election fraud perpetrated in the Florida counties of Broward, Dade and Miami between 1970 and 1989. It alleged particularly persistent fraud committed with punch cards to which the system is singularly vulnerable. His friend asked Washburn to determine if any frauds alleged in "VoteScam" were possible in Wisconsin.

Washburn's interest in election integrity was renewed when several municipalities in southeast Wisconsin experienced irregularities during the November 2, 2004 election. Washburn filed a number of open records requests in his attempts to audit the November 2, 2004, and subsequent elections in 2005 and 2006.

It was this need to request, examine, and copy election records and records related to testing the equipment which sparked a passion for open records and open government in Washburn. Three of his achievements in the area of open records have been:

- Successfully suing for the release of the City of Milwaukee election records for the November 2, 2004, election after 30 months of hiding by the City Election Commission, the U.S. Attorney, and the County DA.
- Requesting the email records of the Office the Governor of Texas twice a week as a practical means to thwart the destruction of those public records.
- Offering a pep talk and advice to the participants of first annual Blogger Sunshine Project. This project resulted in the first survey of email retention policies of the Office of the Governor for several states.

Washburn will be presented the award during the John Henry Faulk Awards Luncheon at the new AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center on the University of Texas at Austin campus.

The State Bar of Texas Gavel Awards also will be presented at the luncheon. The State Bar of Texas Gavel Awards recognizes journalistic excellence that helps foster public understanding of our legal and judicial system.

Lucy Dalglish, executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, will be the keynote speaker at the John Henry Faulk Awards Luncheon. She will give an update on the state of open government at the federal level.

The luncheon is part of the 2008 Bernard and Audre Rapoport FOI State Conference "View from the Summit." Admittance to the John Henry Faulk Awards Luncheon is included with the conference registration fee. For more information on the conference or the luncheon, call 214.989.3215 or visit www.foift.org.

The purpose of the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas is to encourage, sponsor and facilitate a greater appreciation, knowledge and understanding of the First Amendment. Working to ensure that the public's business is conducted in public, the FOIFT has successfully helped citizens access open meetings and documents that should be a matter of public record.

Since 1978, the Foundation's goal has been to educate media and legal professionals, educators, students, public and business officials and individual citizens about their rights and responsibilities as citizens in our democracy.

The Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas is a nonprofit 501 (C) (3) organization supported through grants and tax-deductible donations from private citizens, corporations and foundations. For more information, call 214.989.3215, or visit our Web page, www.foift.org.

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