



United States Senate

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Senator Susan M. Collins

Statement of Ranking Member

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“Retooling Government for the 21st Century: The President’s Reorganization Plan and Reducing Duplication”

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Our country has an unsustainable federal debt of \$15.3 trillion. That amounts to \$49,600 for every man, woman, and child in this nation. When difficult decisions on even worthwhile programs have to be made, there can be no tolerance for taxpayers’ dollars being wasted. That’s why the GAO’s work identifying duplication, fragmentation, and overlap of federal programs is so important. The GAO estimates that reforms could save tens of billions of dollars annually.

Wasteful duplication has long been thought to be a serious problem in the federal government, but last year, when GAO released its 300-plus page report, we were presented with overwhelming, quantifiable evidence of just how serious the problem is.

This year, GAO is not only reporting on new areas of duplication, but also providing an update on action taken—or the *lack* of action taken—to fix the problems identified in last year’s report. I am disappointed that, of the 81 areas discussed in the 2011 report, most have had only partial or nominal remedial action taken, and, worse, 18 have not been addressed at all.

At a time when our nation is encumbered by an unsustainable debt, there is no excuse for this persistent waste, duplication, and inefficiency.

Duplication and overlap serve neither the taxpayers nor the intended beneficiaries of the programs in question. To cite just one example, a person with a disability may have to wade through a perplexing morass of some 50 programs providing employment assistance spread across nine agencies.

What is the cause of such duplication? At times, the President, seeking to put his own mark on the budget to demonstrate his priorities, creates a new program, despite the fact that similar ones already exist.

In other cases, it is Congress that creates the new programs without checking to see if something similar already exists. Overlapping Committee jurisdictions may further contribute to the problem.

This is not a case of bad intentions at work – just the opposite – it is the proliferation of *good* intentions that has created the problem. We see a problem and we want to fix it. We introduce a bill. We fight hard to pass it. Then we fight hard to see that our fix is fully funded and implemented.

The problem is compounded by a lack of transparency about what programs even exist. Although various sources, such as *recovery.gov*, *USAspending.gov*, the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, and documents released by OMB and CBO produce *partial* lists of various government programs, there is not an *exhaustive* list of federal programs in one, easy-to-access location.

That's why I have cosponsored Senator Coburn's bill that would require a comprehensive list on a public web site of every federal program, along with its budget and performance information.

The duplication and overlap in green building initiatives are a case study. Right now, there are 11 agencies running 94 initiatives to try to foster green buildings in the non-federal sectors. Improving the energy efficiency of buildings is a worthwhile goal, but surely, overlapping and duplicative programs are not the best way to achieve that goal; there is no consistent oversight, there is no accountability, and it is a virtual certainty that there are millions and millions of dollars wasted. Think how much overhead we're paying for each box on this chart. These programs could be streamlined and achieve the same policy goal in a measurable way, for less money.

There are many other examples. At least nine different agencies are running parallel programs to protect the safety of our food supply from a biological attack. Fifty-three separate economic development programs at four separate agencies claim to support entrepreneurial efforts. The list goes on and on.

We often hear reports of duplicative programs but too rarely see proposals to address the problem. That's why I think it's appropriate that you, Mr. Chairman, have joined today's topic of the GAO duplication report with an evaluation of the reorganization authority the President has requested that might help address some of these problems.

Congress has surely failed more times than it has succeeded at reorganizing government in a major way. I would note, however, that two of the most significant such changes in the past ten years, comprehensive intelligence reform and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, have emerged as a result of this Committee's efforts, not by Presidential fiat.

While I understand that Congress is sometimes an obstacle to speedy reform, it is important that, in considering ways to expedite the process, we do not undermine Congress's ability to carefully consider and amend legislation.

In the current context, I would note that we are being asked by the Administration to develop and vote on the fast-track reorganization authority in the absence of the actual reorganization proposal that we are told will be submitted for consideration using this new authority. That is a mistake.

These are important matters, and I appreciate the serious work that has gone into both the diagnostic efforts at GAO and the efforts by OMB to develop some remedies. I look forward to hearing from our panel.

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