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**SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT, GOVERNMENT  
 INFORMATION, FEDERAL SERVICES, AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY**

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

**HEARING: "Removing the Shroud of Secrecy: Making Government More  
 Transparent and Accountable"**

**Opening Statement of Senator Thomas R. Carper, Chairman**

My thanks to our guests and witnesses for being here today. For the next hour or so we are going to discuss ways that President Obama and his team of "Open Government" experts can reshape old and inefficient bureaucratic agencies into lean, mean, citizen-focused machines. I have also invited a panel of outside experts to testify on areas that the Administration is doing well, what areas may need some more attention; and more importantly, how making agencies more open and transparent will make the lives of 300 million Americans better.

I am told that Albert Einstein once said that "Information is not knowledge." I think that statement is as true today as it was then. In the twenty-first century, information is power. In fact, some would say the United States economy has experienced a surge in job and wealth creation over the past three decades because of the information revolution and advances in technology. But like any other tool, information unto itself doesn't do us any good unless we know how to use it. For example, just because we simply possess a hammer doesn't mean a house will build itself. But if we know how to use the hammer, then we begin to see how a house can be built. The same is true with government information.

So I called this hearing not only to see what agencies need to do to open up their treasure troves of information. Instead, I want to learn how releasing this information will reduce wasteful agency spending, make senior leaders more accountable, and improve the lives of everyday Americans. On his first day in office, President Obama took an extraordinary step and signed an "Open Government" directive which instructed agencies to open their operations to the public. The idea behind the directive is that a more open government allows members of the public to contribute ideas and expertise to government initiatives. This collaboration will hopefully improve the effectiveness of government by encouraging partnerships and cooperation within the federal government, across levels of government, and between the government and private sector. Further, providing more

government information by default, instead of by exception, will help reduce the financial and administrative burden of the FOIA process and spur innovation in the private sector.

But as the Administration moves forward on these new and exciting initiatives, I want to make sure that we are sticking to the fundamentals. For example, I am told that, despite the fact that legislation such as the Presidential Records Act and Federal Records Act have been law for decades, agencies have done an abysmal job when it comes to preserving their physical and electronic records. In fact, it was only two years ago when I held a hearing that touched on the fact that the Bush White House could not locate millions of e-mails – including those from the three months leading up to the invasion of Iraq. That type of situation is simply unacceptable and we need to make sure it's never repeated again.

Further, as our witnesses may know, I joined Senators Coburn, McCain and then-Senator Obama a few years ago to pass the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act. My colleagues and I put forward this legislation to increase the transparency and accountability of the federal government by providing access to information on federal spending through a single, searchable, publicly available web site. However, GAO recently released an evaluation of USAspending.gov - the web site created as a result of our bill – and it seems there have been some problems. For example, GAO stated that there were widespread inconsistencies between the information provided on USAspending.gov and the actual physical records of transactions. Further, OMB apparently does not hold agencies accountable for ensuring that information placed on the site is accurate and reliable. So before we start pushing agencies to spend time and money on releasing more information, let's make sure the information we have is reliable and accurate.

In closing, then, I'll add that, as we discuss all of the new and exciting initiatives that the Administration has underway - or plans on undertaking in the near future - we should keep our eye on the ball. Our job doesn't just end at making information freely available, but in making sure the information can be effectively used to improve services to every American, reduce wasteful spending, and enforce accountability.

Again, my thanks to our witnesses for taking their time to be here today and for sharing their ideas on this important issue.

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