

## Opening Statement of Senator Tom Coburn

### **“Performance Management and Congressional Oversight: 380 Recommendations to Reduce Overlap and Duplication to Make Washington More Efficient”**

**May 22, 2013**

Today the committee welcomes our distinguished guest from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), who is here to discuss a topic of great importance to me, to this committee, and to our nation’s long-term fiscal health.

The GAO recently released its third annual report detailing extensive duplication in government programs and other areas of billions of dollars in potential taxpayer savings.

Comptroller General Dodaro and his staff should be commended for their excellent work and dedication to such a large endeavor, one few others in Washington are willing to undertake. Just as a gardener’s weeding never ends, the only way to be rid of duplication in government is through constant oversight and action.

Some historical perspective is useful. In 1909, the *Washington Post* reported that “the government was spending thousands of dollars unnecessarily; that work was being duplicated in various departments and the introduction of some system was badly needed.” Now a hundred years later, the only difference is the thousands have transformed into tens of billions.

GAO’s three reports have identified a quarter of a trillion dollars in duplication. In one example, GAO found that the National Technical Information Service, NTIS, was selling reports to other federal agencies that are available for free on the Internet. In fact, 75% of the reports that NTIS sold to the government could be found with a simple search on Google, for free. Not only is the government purchasing reports that are free, there is an entire department with administrators and overhead that run it.

GAO has made 380 recommendations for actions that Congress and the Administration can make today to address or mitigate the problems it has identified. Though the Executive Branch can do better, Congress is the main culprit in creating and continuing countless duplicative programs. We create programs, refuse to apply metrics to them, and then ignore our duty to conduct the oversight needed to ensure programs work.

Worse still, we don’t bother to learn about existing programs before creating new ones. Despite the thousands of federal programs, when programs don’t work, Congress’s response is just to create a new program.

The GAO series of duplication reports found dozens of areas ripe for reform, if only members on both sides of the aisle will find solutions. And yet, the GAO report released last month, as our report card shows, demonstrates Congress' unwillingness to do the work to address duplication.

Of the 131 areas outlined in the first two GAO reports, Congress and the Administration have only fully addressed 16 areas, only 12 percent of the areas identified. When I was in school, getting a 12 percent on anything meant you got an "F".

Even more, since release of GAO's first report on duplication, the Senate has twice rejected bipartisan legislation aimed at preventing future duplication. I recently reintroduced this legislation, with Senator Mark Udall. It would require the Congressional Research Service to identify all similar existing federal programs whenever Congress proposes creating new ones.

I would also urge every congressional committee to eliminate the duplication, waste and overlap identified by GAO within their committees' respective jurisdictions.

This administration also has to do its part. So far the president's budget proposes eliminating several the duplicative catfish programs exposed by GAO. Good start but they need to go further.

Finally, the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 required OMB to compile a list of all government programs. Amazingly, the federal government doesn't have a list of all government programs. In this year's duplication report, GAO indicates that this list will be an invaluable tool to identify duplication. Unfortunately, OMB did not require agencies to use a common definition of what the word "program" even means.

This nation is staring into a future of trillion-dollar deficits and a national debt quickly headed toward \$20 trillion. We are not on the verge of bankruptcy—we are bankrupt. We have maxed out our own credit cards and are now living off our children's credit cards.

Despite countless bipartisan discussions about how to address our debt and deficit over the last three years, there has been little agreement. But, before us today, we have part of the answer. In essence, the GAO's work has become Washington's new GPS system to start finding savings, potentially hundreds of billions of dollars. That is if only Congress can start following directions.

For the sake of our nation's future, in the coming days and weeks, it is my hope Congress and the administration will this time work together to implement these recommendations and heed the advice found in the pages of this report.