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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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November 17, 2017

The Honorable Wilbur L. Ross
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to request information from the U.S. Department of Commerce regarding efforts to implement recommendations identified as priorities by the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Of 135 recommendations that are currently open, GAO prioritized recommendations related to entrepreneurial assistance programs.¹ GAO has found that dozens of “programs designed to support entrepreneurs” exist within numerous federal agencies, including the Small Business Administration, the Departments of Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, and Commerce.

In 2012, GAO recommended that the Department should consistently collect information to track specific types of assistance programs and those they serve to help better administer the programs, to expand the use of program evaluations to better understand why underperforming programs have not met performance goals, and to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the programs.² In 2017, GAO found that the Department has taken some action in support of these recommendations, but that further action is needed. GAO reiterated that analyzing which programs are most effective will allow the Department to allocate federal resources more efficiently.³

In order to better understand the Department’s efforts to implement GAO’s outstanding priority recommendations regarding entrepreneurial assistance programs, please provide a written response to the following questions no later than December 8, 2017:

¹ Letter from Comptroller General Eugene Dodaro, Government Accountability Office to Secretary Wilbur L. Ross, Department of Commerce (Aug. 3, 2017).

² Government Accountability Office, *Entrepreneurial Assistance: Opportunities Exist to Improve Programs’ Collaboration, Data-Tracking, and Performance Management* (GAO-12-819) (Aug. 2012).

³ Letter from Comptroller General Eugene Dodaro, Government Accountability Office to Secretary Wilbur L. Ross, Department of Commerce (Aug. 3, 2017).

1. How do the Department's entrepreneurial assistance programs differ from those of other agencies?
2. Have these programs have been analyzed for duplication? If so, please provide the results of that analysis.
3. What data is the Department collecting about the programs in order to establish performance metrics?
4. GAO's 2012 report stated that the Department's Native American Business Enterprise Centers and Minority Business Centers only provide technical assistance and not financial assistance or government contracting assistance, as other programs do. Do these programs still only support technical assistance? What specific areas of technical assistance is the Department providing that other agencies are not?
5. GAO's 2012 report identified certain issues regarding overlapping programs, which impact their effectiveness. What steps has the Department taken to ensure its programs run efficiently and cooperatively with similar programs from other agencies?
6. How is the Department implementing GAO's recommendation to evaluate the program's lack of effectiveness and improve performance, and what is the status of implementation?

If you have any questions, please contact Sarah Garcia with my Committee staff at (202) 224-2627 or Sarah_Garcia@hsgac.senate.gov. Please send any official correspondence related to this request to Lucy Balcezak at Lucy_Balcezak@hsgac.senate.gov. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Claire McCaskill
Ranking Member

cc: Ron Johnson
Chairman