

ETSO Subcommittee Hearing: Examining the Findings and Recommendations of GAO's 2021 Report on Duplication, Overlap, Fragmentation and Opportunities to Achieve Financial Benefits

May 12, 2021

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Paul

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, for holding this hearing. Thanks to our witness, Comptroller General Dodaro, for joining us.

One thing I always hear from taxpayers is frustration with government waste. Despite Americans' desire for less waste, little around here gets done to fix the problem. To its credit, GAO has made great strides identifying areas for us to work on. I am pleased Senator Hassan shares my commitment to solving the problem but not everybody in Congress shares our zeal. Often, Congress creates waste by wanting to look like we are doing something. But in the end all we are doing is creating new programs to tackle problems without looking to see if we have already got a program on the topic.

We saw this with the recent so-called stimulus bill. It included a new community outreach program in the Small Business Committee's jurisdiction, where I am ranking member, which just copied an already-existing program. We have to do better, and I hope this hearing will help us in Congress realize what Americans intuitively know.

There are times where government waste occurs because government agencies can't coordinate. For years, the FDA and the USDA have been competing over the regulation of different types of food. Ultimately, they've arrived at some strange decisions. For example, for products containing poultry, the FDA regulates items with 2 percent cooked poultry meat while the rest are regulated by USDA. Imagine the cost, not only to the taxpayer but to American businesses, of figuring out which agency's regulations apply? And now, the USDA and FDA are locking horns again, this time over meat grown in a lab, that isn't even on the market yet.

But other times, overlapping programs create waste directly. For years we have known the federal government's IT systems need improvement and two years ago, the OMB directed agencies to streamline their contracting. But they didn't. Instead, GAO found five of seven agencies had not used the strategies both GAO and OMB directed they use to limit waste. So, we are still wasting millions of dollars a year on IT contracts unnecessarily.

That is just two of the many examples of duplication, fragmentation, and overlap causing billions in wasted money.

But it does not need to be this way. Chairwoman Hassan and I have a bill, the Duplication Scoring Act to help fix these sorts of problems. It would have GAO note ways proposed legislation would create waste, and flag it for CBO to include in its scores. Our bill will help Congress make better decisions and save taxpayers billions. I am pleased we have passed this bill in committee and I remain hopeful it will pass the Senate and be signed into law this Congress.

I am interested to learn more about where the federal government has made progress from earlier duplication reports, where we continue to fail, and how the Duplication Scoring Act will help us improve Congress's performance when it comes to wasteful spending.