

Opening Statement of Chairman Thomas R. Carper

“Performance Management and Congressional Oversight: 380 Recommendations to Reduce Overlap and Duplication to Make Washington More Efficient” May 22, 2013

As prepared for delivery:

Good morning. My thanks to our witness and guests for joining us today to examine the Government Accountability Office’s (GAO) latest overlap, duplication, and fragmentation report and the Administration’s implementation of the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act. My thanks as well to Dr. Coburn and his staff for their help in putting this hearing together, and for his 2010 amendment that originally tasked GAO with this important work.

Before we turn to the topic of today’s hearing, I want to welcome to the hearing a group of participants in the Acquisition Career Development Program at the Department of Homeland Security. This is a terrific program that is training the next generation of acquisition specialists at the Department. I want them to know that this Committee will be very supportive of the job they will be doing to make DHS a good steward of taxpayer dollars.

I’m also pleased to welcome members of GAO’s International Auditor Fellowship Program to today’s hearing. There are 15 countries represented among this year’s Fellows. The program provides training to officials from other countries’ auditing organizations and contributes to government accountability across the globe.

Last month, the GAO released its latest report identifying 17 areas where agencies may have overlapping objectives, are providing potentially duplicative services, or where government missions are fragmented across multiple agencies or programs. The report also identified 14 areas where opportunities exist to either reduce the cost of government operations or increase revenues.

The issuance of this report completes GAO’s 3-year examination of the federal government to identify major instances of overlap, duplication, and fragmentation. In the three reports, GAO has provided hundreds of recommendations for Congress and the Executive Branch that, if implemented, have the potential to reduce waste significantly and make our government more efficient.

Some issues identified by GAO are relatively easy to fix. For example, in last month’s report GAO found that, when the Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety and Inspection Service begins its catfish inspection program as mandated in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, the program will be performing the same work already conducted by the Food and Drug Administration and by the National Marine Fisheries Service.

The President's Fiscal Year 2014 Budget, as well as legislation introduced in both the House and Senate, would eliminate the duplicative programs and could potentially save taxpayers millions of dollars annually. Unfortunately, most of the issues discussed in GAO's three reports are much more complex and difficult to solve. The issues cut across various departments and long standing federal programs that have entrenched constituencies and, in many cases, provide the public with much-needed services.

Addressing these issues will require sustained leadership and Congressional oversight. It is time, then, for Congress and the executive branch to roll up our sleeves and get to work solving these issues. Each Committee in the House and Senate should be using these reports as a roadmap to help plan its oversight for this session. I can tell you that is what we are doing on this Committee.

To help us in this task, GAO has also created an 'Action Tracker' to monitor the progress that has been made by the executive branch and Congress to address the issues that GAO examined in its first two duplication reports. Unfortunately, results have been mixed. For example, the executive branch 'partially or fully addressed' approximately 80 percent of GAO's recommendations while Congress 'partially or fully addressed' only 32 percent. I would say to my colleagues here in Congress and my friends in the executive branch that we can must do better if we are to walk the walk and not just talk the talk.

At a time when we're fighting to create jobs and grow our economy while also grappling with historic budget deficits, the American people deserve a government that is smarter and more effective and efficient with the tax dollars they entrust to us.

In addition to examining the issues identified in the new report, another goal of today's hearing is to examine how the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act, signed into law in 2011, can help Congress and the executive branch address inefficiencies, poor performance, and overlap, duplication, and fragmentation across the federal government. In all three of its reports, GAO highlighted how effective implementation of the Performance Act could help Congress and federal agencies do just that.

The Performance Act established a framework for performance management, goal setting, and transparency. This improved transparency is desperately needed in the federal government, where in so many areas neither Congress nor the general public knows everything that federal agencies are doing or how much programs cost.

Let me give you an example:

In GAO's 2011 report, GAO identified 44 federal employment and training programs that potentially overlapped. GAO then examined the three largest programs and found that it was impossible to determine the extent to which individuals receive the same services from these programs. GAO was unable to do its work because the agencies lacked good information about the programs themselves, including basic funding and performance information.

As a former Governor, I know that you can't manage what you can't measure. That's why the successful implementation of the Performance Act is so important. The Act requires agencies to set short term priority goals, to continuously evaluate whether these goals are being met, and to address any problems that arise. This should help agency leadership identify low performing programs and come up with solutions.

A few weeks ago, this Committee held a hearing on improper payments. The reason I bring up that hearing is I see what we have done with improper payments in Congress and in the executive branch as being similar to what this Committee must do with the Performance Act. Now, improper payments are still high, but they are trending in the right direction – downwards. This hasn't happened by accident, it has taken sustained effort on the part of successive administrations and significant Congressional oversight.

Agencies have done an adequate job in implementing certain parts of the Performance Act such as setting attainable short term goals and giving quarterly progress reports on whether they are moving towards achieving those goals. However, there is a lot of work that still needs to be done to realize the full potential of the Act. I plan on using this Committee to fulfill our part of Congress's role in that shared effort.

Finally, while this report is often referred to as the 'duplication' report, there are some significant savings that GAO has identified in the second part of each of these reports, including several areas under the Committee's jurisdiction. These savings opportunities touch on areas such as contracting, cloud computing, and ways of improving agency management of information technology systems. I am interested in hearing from the GAO about what oversight this Committee should be doing in these areas as well.