Opening Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper:
"Reducing Unnecessary Duplication in Federal Programs:
Billions More Could Be Saved"
April 14, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

I want to thank Chairman Johnson for holding this hearing today. I also want to thank our witness, Mr. Gene Dodaro, for joining us to examine the Government Accountability Office's so-called 'duplication' report.

Let me start off my statement by saying a word about my friend and former colleague, Senator Tom Coburn.

Although he is not here today, I'd like recognize that Senator Coburn attached an amendment to the debt limit increase in 2010 requiring GAO to conduct this annual report. The amendment was approved by a vote of 94 to 0, illustrating the bipartisan desire to look in every nook and cranny of the government for ways to save money. So while Tom Coburn is no longer in the Senate, his dedication to that cause continues here today.

The issuance of today's report continues GAO's now 5-year examination of the federal government to identify major instances of fragmentation, overlap, and duplication. Throughout these five reports, GAO has provided a number of recommendations for Congress and the executive branch that, if implemented, have the potential to reduce significant waste and make our government more efficient.

Unfortunately, many of the topics discussed in GAO's reports are complex and difficult to solve. The issues cut across various departments and long-standing federal programs that each have their own constituencies and, in many cases, provide the public with much-needed services.

I also find it important to bear in mind that while we must be careful to root out instances of unneeded duplication, the fact that more than one agency or program is focused an issue doesn't always mean we're wasting money or duplicating our efforts. Cybersecurity, protecting water quality, and assistance for disabled Americans are just a few areas that come to mind where it makes sense to have multiple federal agencies bringing their expertise to bear in addressing critical needs.

What the GAO report tells us is that we need sustained leadership and oversight in both the executive branch and Congress to decide where there is unnecessary duplication that can be eliminated, or where we need better coordination among government programs with similar missions.

As Mr. Dodaro will testify today, we have had significant success in recent years through this focus on duplication. GAO estimates executive branch and Congressional efforts to address suggested actions from GAO's past reports have resulted in approximately $20 billion in

financial benefits from fiscal years 2011 through 2014, with another expected savings of $80 billion through 2023.

One good example of this success was the passage last year of legislation that this Committee worked on extensively, the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act, or FITARA. Much of this legislation was based on GAO's good work identifying duplication and waste in the federal government's purchase of information technology, which totals roughly $80 billion each year.

FITARA will ensure that agencies continually look across their IT investments to eliminate wasteful spending. It also requires agencies to close unneeded data centers, and it requires the Administrator of the General Services Administration to develop a strategy for the government to leverage its buying power for software. All these efforts should add up to billions of dollars in savings. FITARA is one example of success, but of course there is still much more work to be done.

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.

GAO's duplication report, much like its High Risk report, lays out a road map for Congress and the Administration to work together to effectively implement the tools at our disposal that can mitigate many of these problems.

As we will hear today, if fully and effectively implemented, the Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRA Modernization Act) and the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014 (DATA Act) provide us with a solid foundation to work from to get better results for the American people when we spend their tax dollars.

The GPRA Modernization Act is already having success in moving agencies from simply having a strategic plan on paper to having performance measures that track how well money is being spent. And it provides for better coordination on performance measures when multiple agencies have a role in meeting a mission. For example, the Office of Management and Budget has been actively engaging stakeholder agencies through the 'Cross Agency Priority Goals' or CAP Goals leadership tool. CAP goals facilitate active collaboration between agencies to address key issues facing our nation such as cybersecurity, climate change, and Veterans' mental health.

The DATA Act will standardize spending data and make it comparable across federal programs, providing Congress and the Administration with an unprecedented window into federal spending. Greater transparency and access to data about federal spending will help us as policymakers in eliminating unnecessary duplication, fragmentation, and overlap in federal programs.

I look forward to working with the Administration to ensure that GPRA Modernization and the DATA Act both continue to be effectively implemented in the months and years to come.

I want to close by thanking Mr. Dodaro and his team at GAO for their hard work putting this report together. I look forward to hearing your thoughts as we work towards building a more effective federal government.