

Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper
*“Governing Through Goal Setting:
Enhancing the Economic and National Security of America”*
June 17, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

I want to thank Chairman Johnson for holding this hearing today. I also want to thank our witnesses for joining us to discuss how the federal government can more effectively set major goals, and then how those of us who serve here in Congress can work together to accomplish those goals.

Before we begin, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge and thank one of our Committee’s longest serving staff members, Janet Burrell, for her tireless dedication to the Senate and our nation. Janet is retiring this week after serving for 30 years in the Senate and 37 years in federal service.

Janet’s patience, her willingness to go above and beyond, and her service as a mentor to so many staff members are just some of the things about her that will be sorely missed. Thank you, Janet, for everything you have done here and continue to do to this very day. We wish you many blessings and great happiness in the years to come, and if you ever get a hankering to come back, we’ll leave the light on. I promise!

Let me now say a few words about two of our witnesses, one of whom many of us have had the pleasure to work with closely in the past. Senator Joe Lieberman is known to all of us on this Committee, in the Senate, in this town and to many around this nation of ours. He served with distinction as our Chairman just a few years ago and as a mentor to me and to many others. It’s great to welcome you back to 342 Dirksen, Joe, and to have you join us in this hearing room.

I am also delighted to welcome former U.S. Ambassador to China and Governor of Utah, Jon Huntsman. I often say that while I am serving in the U.S. Senate, I am also a ‘recovering governor.’ I look forward to hearing today from Governor Huntsman about his private and public sector experiences and how they might inform us about ways to make this government of ours more effective. I understand that during your time as Governor, Utah was ranked as one of the best managed states in the nation. I look forward to hearing about what drove your success as Governor of the ‘Beehive State.’

In particular, I look forward to hearing from Senator Lieberman, Ambassador Huntsman, and our private sector witnesses about the role that strategic planning plays in large organizations and how that planning can help improve the work we do here in Congress and in the Executive branch.

Clearly, those of us who serve in Congress have an obligation to improve the way federal programs work, while bringing accountability and effectiveness to the way that agencies provide critical services to all Americans. Much, but not all, of what we need to do in order to improve the way that our federal government runs has to start here in Congress. Those of us who are privileged to serve here can always do a better job in the way we legislate and oversee federal spending.

For me, one of the lessons from the most recent elections is that the American people want us to work together to solve big problems.

A major problem facing our country in recent years has been our very harmful and wasteful habit of ‘crisis governing.’ Too often we let our annual budgets and appropriations bills await passage until we are up against a major deadline. And we’ve even gone past those deadlines, creating program, agency, and federal-wide shutdowns.

The uncertainty we create by going about our jobs in this way hurts not only the workings of federal agencies, but also state and local governments, as well as the private sector. Whether you’re someone looking for a job or looking to grow your business, the uncertainty we create here in Washington makes things harder for you.

While we will never completely agree on how to fix the numerous challenges we were sent to Congress to address, I’ve always believed we could and should focus on the 80 percent of issues where we do agree. The remaining 20 percent is important, but we should not let the goal of perfection get in the way of accomplishing what is good. This goes for the budget challenges we face, too. I have often said that we need a ‘grand bargain’ approach to budgeting which puts everything on the table.

I believe we need to do three things to get our country back on the right fiscal track:

1. Enact comprehensive tax reform that lowers rates, broadens the tax base and enhances revenue to reduce the debt and deficit;
2. Reform and improve our entitlement programs in a way that is humane, saves money, and preserves these programs for future generations; and finally,
3. For all of our federal programs, ask how we can get better results for less money in everything that we do.

We can find common ground in these areas. This Committee continues to focus significant attention under Chairmen of both parties in rooting out waste, fraud and abuse in federal programs. I hope we can replicate this bipartisan approach both on this Committee and others in the coming months and years.

I’ll close by quoting Winston Churchill, who once said, ‘Democracy is the worst form of government devised by wit of man, except for all the rest.’ He also said, ‘You can always count on Americans to do the right thing – after they’ve tried everything else.’

I applaud the No Labels group for their efforts to push us to do the right thing, and thank our witnesses for their testimony today. It’s often said that, if you don’t try, you will always fail. I hope we take that to heart today as we think about how to tackle some of the tough issues we’ll be discussing today.

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