

# **Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson**

## *“Reducing Unnecessary Duplication in Federal Programs: Billions More Could Be Saved”*

*April 14, 2015*

*As prepared for delivery:*

Good morning and welcome.

This morning, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) will release its fifth annual report on unnecessary duplication, fragmentation and overlap in the federal government. The annual report was mandated by a debt limit amendment Dr. Tom Coburn sponsored in 2010 that was passed by the Senate by a vote of 94-0. This series of reports has proven extraordinarily valuable in identifying opportunities to save taxpayer dollars and make government work better for the citizens it serves.

In its first duplication report, GAO found that the federal government operated 47 different job training programs, almost all of which overlapped with other programs and had little documentation about their effectiveness. A maze of 18 different nutrition assistance programs showed, in GAO’s words, “signs of overlap and inefficient use of resources” that made it difficult for those in need to get help.

In 2013, GAO identified 679 renewable energy programs at 23 federal agencies. These programs cost taxpayers \$15 billion in 2010. What did we get for that money? In one example, GAO highlighted a single wind project that received funding from seven different federal initiatives. Thanks to this overlap, taxpayers covered \$1.2 billion of the project’s \$1.9 billion in capital costs. Worse yet, internal agency memos showed the project probably would have succeeded without any federal money at all.

In its 2014 report, GAO reported that 117,000 individuals collected concurrent unemployment insurance checks and disability benefits in 2010. According to GAO, “One individual ... received over \$62,000 in overlapping benefits in a [single] year.”

Finally, as we will hear today, GAO has identified overlap in areas ranging from consumer product safety oversight – where 20 agencies have some involvement – to federal software licenses – where 22 of 24 agencies have no inventories or policies to avoid purchasing unnecessary software licenses.

According to GAO, implementation of the recommendations it has made has already resulted in over \$20 billion in savings, with another \$80 billion expected by 2023. Yet much more work remains to be done. Of the roughly 440 recommendations GAO has made, only 37 percent have been fully addressed.

GAO's findings demonstrate that simply spending more money and creating more programs is not the solution to society's ills. Well-intentioned legislation is not always well thought out. Too often, Congress creates new initiatives to address a pressing issue of the day without first doing its homework. The result is a hodgepodge of redundant programs, agencies and departments tasked with similar missions but lacking coordination.

In addition to addressing the five years of unnecessary duplication GAO has uncovered, Congress must do a better job of oversight to understand what agencies are currently doing, if it is working and whether a new program is even needed.

This report was intended to help give Congress a blueprint to stop spending money we do not have on things we do not need. Today's hearing is just the first step in our responsibility to taxpayers to be good stewards with their hard-earned money.

Senators Manchin and Ayotte have introduced legislation to require Congress to address GAO's recommendations. Likewise, Senator Lankford has introduced the Taxpayers Right-to-Know Act, which will help Congress identify duplicative programs. I look forward to working with my colleagues to tackle this problem.

Finally, I want to thank GAO for its hard work on these reports. I look forward to hearing from Comptroller General Gene Dodaro about what Congress and the agencies can do to address GAO's findings.