

Chairman Johnson Opening Statement
“Government Reform: Ending Duplication and Holding Washington Accountable”

Wednesday, April 27, 2016

As submitted for the record:

Good morning and welcome. I want to start by thanking Comptroller General Gene Dodaro and all of the staff at the Government Accountability Office (GAO), who work tirelessly to prepare these reports. I also want to thank Dr. Coburn for coming back to our committee to talk about this important topic.

Every year this committee gathers here to highlight duplicative, wasteful spending by the federal government. But what a lot of people may not know is how this GAO report came about. Dr. Coburn, then a relatively new senator, was fed up with seeing legislation that, while well-intentioned, was spending money to create new programs to address perceived problems where federal programs already existed.

So Dr. Coburn tasked his staff with a monumental mission: to compile an inventory of all duplicative federal spending. I understand they came up with a pretty good list, but it was impossible for them to make it a complete inventory on their own. Undeterred, Dr. Coburn offered a very simple amendment during the 2010 debt ceiling fight, requiring the GAO to report annually on duplication. It passed unanimously.

I would venture to guess that had the Congressional Budget Office scored Dr. Coburn’s amendment, it would have estimated a cost of several million dollars for the report each year. What the score would not have shown is all the taxpayer money those reports would save. Six years later — with less than half of the GAO’s recommendations implemented — the GAO estimates that its recommendations have resulted in savings of \$56 billion. The latest report identifies 37 new areas of waste and 92 recommendations for Congress and the executive branch.

Each year serves as another reminder that there is still much more work to be done and savings to be had. While our committee cannot solve federal waste and duplication on its own, there is a lot we can do. First, we can continue to perform oversight and pressure the administration to implement the GAO recommendations. Second, we can work to pass laws that reform wasteful government spending.

Our committee has approved more than 20 bipartisan bills this Congress to address wasteful government spending. For various reasons, some of these bills will never achieve unanimous consent. But we cannot let that stop us.

Today, I made public a discussion draft of a bill that would combine 15 bills this committee has already approved with overwhelming bipartisan support. The legislation makes government more efficient, improves transparency, cuts duplicative and wasteful spending and strengthens our federal watchdogs. Together, these bills make up a package of common-sense government

reforms. I've heard from the majority leader that he is very supportive of moving bipartisan government reform legislation through the Senate.

By focusing on these areas of agreement, we can pass legislation that makes a real difference in addressing government waste. I look forward to discussing this bill further with my colleagues.

I am grateful for Senator Coburn being here today to call attention to duplication and waste, and I look forward to hearing from him and the Comptroller General about what more we can do.