

Statement of Ranking Member Tom Carper
“Government Reform: Ending Duplication and Holding Washington Accountable”

Wednesday, April 27, 2016

As prepared for delivery:

I want to thank Chairman Johnson for holding this hearing today. I also want to thank our witnesses, Mr. Gene Dodaro, and our friend Dr. Coburn for joining us to examine the GAO’s annual ‘duplication’ report.

Let me start off my statement by saying a word about our former colleague. Most people probably don’t know this, but we actually have Dr. Coburn to thank for this hearing and for the attention that GAO and Congress are now giving to duplication and inefficiency in government. In 2010, Dr. Coburn offered an amendment to require GAO to conduct this annual report. That 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.

I had the privilege of working with Dr. Coburn on this committee over the years to do just that. In fact, we spent some time working on many issues highlighted in GAO’s report. By taking on these issues, we tried to find a bipartisan way forward to improve the functioning of government and save taxpayer dollars. So I’m pleased that Dr. Coburn is with us today to provide us with his thoughts on Congress’ role in overseeing the federal government, legislation to improve transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the Executive branch, and also his history and experience with this report. This report continues GAO’s now 6-year examination of the federal government to identify major instances of fragmentation, overlap, and duplication. Throughout each of the reports issued in that time, GAO has provided a number of recommendations for Congress and the Executive branch that, if implemented, have the potential to save money and make our government more efficient.

Some of the issues we will have the opportunity to discuss today have long been of interest to members of this Committee. They include real property management, the root causes of improper payments in Medicare and Medicaid, the functioning of the Internal Revenue Service, and problems with the Post 9/11 G.I. bill overpayments to name a few. We have seen progress on some of these issues and should recognize the work that has been done by agencies and by the Congress. For example, GAO estimates that through addressing its recommendations over the past five years agencies and Congress have realized roughly \$56 billion in financial benefits in fiscal years 2010-2015. And GAO estimates an additional \$69 billion in benefits through 2025 for a grand total of approximately \$125 billion in financial benefits from 2010 through 2025. However, we are seeing some troubling trends, such as increases in the number of improper payments government-wide and a lack of progress in vital programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. In fact, just over the past year or so we’ve seen an increase in improper payments in the Medicaid program alone by just under \$10 billion dollars.

Simply put, there is more work that needs to be done. But in saying that, I should note that many of the challenges discussed in GAO’s reports are complex and difficult to solve. They cut across

various departments and involve programs that each have their own constituencies and, in many cases, provide the public with services they need and rely on. So what GAO does by shining a spotlight on these challenges is call on those of us here in Congress and our partners in the executive branch to show leadership and exercise oversight to determine where unnecessary duplication exists, where it can be eliminated, and where we need better coordination among government programs with similar missions.

With that in mind I would like to highlight a bipartisan, bicameral bill that I introduced with our Chairman and a number of my colleagues that builds on longstanding management efforts to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the federal government and enhance its ability to address many of these issues. This bill, the Getting Results through Enhanced Accountability and Transparency Act, would update the decades-old statutes that govern how agencies manage and review their operations to help them identify opportunities for efficiency and economy in all of their functions, and activities. It would also ensure that agencies address issues of duplication in their strategic planning, including in their annual performance plans they send us along with their budget submissions to Congress. Other provisions would enhance collaboration among agencies through existing management and performance structures, such as the Performance Improvement Council (PIC) and efforts like the cross-agency federal priority goals monitored by OMB. I look forward to working with the GAO, OMB, and members of this Committee to move this bill forward in the near future.

Finally, I want to close by thanking Mr. Dodaro and his team at GAO for the hard work that went into putting this report together. My colleagues have heard me say many times that I think of this report and GAO's High Risk List as our to do lists here on this Committee and in Congress. GAO consistently provides us with information we can use to help get better results for less money so all of us are very thankful for your service. My thanks again to both of you for joining us to discuss these important issues today. I look forward to your testimony.