

Statement by Senator Tom Coburn
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Hearing
“How to Save Taxpayer Dollars: Case Studies of Duplication in the Federal Government.”

May 25, 2011

I want to thank Senators Collins and Lieberman for holding this important hearing on duplication. Let me make it clear from the get go; it is the fault of Congress that our federal government funds thousands of duplicative programs that are wasting billions of hard earned tax dollars each year.

I want to thank Comptroller General Dodaro for the invaluable report he and his team at GAO released in March of this year. This report is a roadmap for Congress to reduce duplication in our federal government and I look forward to reviewing and acting on the new report they release next year. I also want to thank Mr. Kundra and Mr. Gordon for coming today. It will take commitment from both the Administration and Congress to eliminate these programs and save money.

As mentioned above, the GAO duplication report was released in March and sadly, Congress has yet to act on the many findings.

Federal spending is at an all-time high. Our nation is facing a record 1.3 trillion-dollar deficits and a more than \$14.5 trillion debt, which equals more than \$46,000 per American citizen. This is not sustainable and it should be unacceptable to every American.

Despite our current fiscal crisis, Congress continues with business as usual and refuses to cut spending by eliminating duplicative federal programs.

Congress has ignored its most basic responsibility to conduct oversight and determine if a given federal program duplicates an existing program within the federal government or in many cases simply examine if the program is effective in doing what it was designed to do. Sadly, members of Congress continue funding old ineffective programs instead of eliminating them because they don't want to make the hard choices that are so desperately needed.

While Congress refuses to eliminate programs, they stand ready to create new and costly “press release” programs that will never be measured to see if the programs are actually working.

There is no ineffective, inefficient program that the government can't recreate at an even higher cost.

Congress has created numerous programs and poured billions of dollars into these programs, to address nearly every issue and problem faced by any individual, group, or entity across the country. And yet, many of these problems and challenges still exist today, as if the government never even tried to address it. For Example:

- The GAO found 15 agencies involved with Food Safety.

- The federal government operates 80 separate economic development programs and spend \$6.5 billion a year and the GAO says we can't measure them.
- We spend \$58 billion on 100 separate transportation programs with no accountability to produce results.
- There are more than 20 agencies that run roughly 56 financial literacy programs.
- There are 18 programs across 3 agencies that run food assistance programs.
- There are 7 agencies that run over 20 homeless programs.
- According to the GAO Report, the federal government funds more than 44 job training programs, administered by nine different federal agencies that are costing the American taxpayer \$30 billion.
- The federal government administers at least 20 federal programs across 12 different federal agencies, dedicated to the study of invasive species.
- 10 agencies administer 82 teacher quality programs.
- There are at least 17 offender reentry programs across 5 different federal agencies, costing taxpayers over \$250 million annually.
- There are over 14 programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education related to foreign exchanges and designed to increase opportunities for students to study abroad.
- A May 2007 report of the Academic Competitiveness Council revealed there are at least 105 federal programs supporting science, technology, education, and math education, with aggregate funding of \$3.12 billion in FY 2006.
- There are at least nine federal programs tasked with researching and developing befoils, costing taxpayers nearly \$300 million annually, and over \$800 million was included in the Stimulus bill for these initiatives.
- There are 19 mitigation grant programs and cooperative agreement administered by FEMA.
- FEMA administers 28 grant and cooperative agreement programs relating to firefighters.
- A 2010 report by the DHS Inspector General, which is highlighted in the GAO duplication report, found that "planning" and "interoperable communications" is an allowance or activity that can be funded by many of the preparedness grant programs.

- In 2005, the GAO found that 13 different federal agencies spent nearly \$3 billion from 2004 to 2007 to fund 207 federal programs to encourage students to enter the fields of math and science.

To force Congress do its job of oversight in weeding out duplicative and ineffective programs, I plan to introduce two bills in the coming weeks.

The first bill would simply require the Congressional Research Service (CRS) to issue an analysis for a committee report or conference report accompanying a bill noting whether or not the bill creates any duplicative or overlapping programs along with an explanation from the committee why the creation of duplicative programs proposed by the bill may be needed. This is a common sense bill that will foster more accountability when Congress decides to create new programs.

The second bill will deal with the problem that has resulted from the federal government being too big to manage. The government has grown so large that even federal agencies cannot compile a list of all federal programs within their purview. Although various sources, including USA Spending and documents released by OMB and CBO produce partial lists of various government programs, there is not an exhaustive list of all federal programs. My bill would require agencies to report annually on every program they operate. This report will include the cost and performance of each of these programs and will be posted on the agency website for every American taxpayer to see. We will never be able to get a full picture of the duplication problem until we fully understand what programs are out there.

Congress can no longer ignore failing and duplicative programs. We must act now and eliminate these programs to restore fiscal responsibility back into government and build back the trust of the American people.

I look forward to hearing from our witness.