Statement of Ranking Member
Senator Susan M. Collins

"How to Save Taxpayer Dollars: Case Studies of Duplication in the Federal Government"

May 25, 2011

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There has never been any doubt that wasteful duplication is a serious problem in the federal government. But it was not until GAO released its March report that we had such overwhelming, quantifiable evidence exposing just how serious the problem is.

I am grateful to GAO and also to Senator Coburn, who sponsored the amendment requiring the report and its subsequent annual updates.

The findings of the report are not surprising – we've always known there was waste and duplication. Still, GAO's conclusion that the 81 areas quantified have opportunities for eliminating duplication, reducing operational costs, or enhancing revenue is an urgent call to action. At a time when our country has an unsustainable debt of $14 trillion, there simply can be no excuse for such waste, duplication, and inefficiencies.

This duplication and overlap serve neither the taxpayers nor the beneficiaries well. To cite just one example, a low-income person with a disability may confront a bewildering maze of some 80 programs providing transportation assistance.

What is the cause of such duplication?

At times, the President, seeking to put his own imprint on the budget to demonstrate his priorities, proposes a new program, despite the fact that similar ones already exist.

In other cases, it is Congress that creates the silos without checking to see if a similar silo already exists. Committee jurisdictions contribute to the problem as each committee carves out its own programs to respond to its constituency.

There are no bad intentions at work here. Just the opposite - it is the proliferation of *good* intentions that has created the problem. We see a problem and we want to fix it. We introduce a bill to fix it. We fight hard to pass that bill. Then we fight hard to see that our fix is fully funded and implemented.

Some of this duplication is happening within one agency. In such cases, the agency head can help sound the alarm and request a legislative fix. To address cross-agency redundancy, the President announced a plan to consolidate and reorganize programs in order to reduce duplication, but that important work appears to be proceeding at a snail's pace.

Perhaps the greatest irony of all is the fact that 20 agencies, housing 56 different programs, are all redundantly trying to improve financial literacy of the American people. The American people can teach the government a thing or two about financial literacy: in difficult fiscal times, we should pay for something once, not dozens of times.

And that's far from the only problem. The GAO found duplication across the government in a wide range of programs.

This duplication is hardly trivial in a financial sense. The duplication in programs to promote ethanol production, for example, deprives us of almost $6 billion every year. Not only is that unacceptable when we have a $14 trillion debt, but also think of what that means for other competing priorities for scarce resources. Thousands of Americans with HIV/AIDS right now are on wait-lists for lifesaving medicine because the federal program for people who can't afford those medicines has run out of money.

One topic to be covered today by Comptroller General Dodaro is the role of Enterprise Architecture as a tool that agencies should use to help identify and expose areas of duplication and waste. Enterprise Architecture sounds like something out of Star Trek, but really, it's a blueprint that visually lays out the critical mission of an agency. On top of that skeleton, agency officials then overlay the activities and programs that the agency is *actually* operating to see if they adequately address those core missions.

I would note, however, that Enterprise Architecture is being implemented only on an agency-by-agency basis. It can't help eliminate duplication across *multiple* agencies unless someone is looking at all the blueprints at once.

Another issue we'll hear about today is the use of interagency contracts and strategic sourcing in procurement. When properly used, interagency contracts provide important benefits to the American taxpayer. By allowing agencies to order from other agencies' existing contract vehicles, the federal government is able to leverage its enormous purchasing power. In many cases, interagency contracts provide for a streamlined and more cost-effective method of contracting.

I have, however, long been concerned that there are too many interagency contracts across government for the same goods and services. Unchecked proliferation limits the potential to maximize purchasing power and increases the cost of doing business with the federal government. This past December, the Federal Acquisition Regulation was amended to require agencies to develop a business case to justify the creation of any new contracting vehicle designed for interagency use. My hope is that these reforms will minimize duplicative contract vehicles.

I look forward to hearing more about these issues from our witnesses, as well other opportunities for the elimination of duplication to save taxpayers' dollars at a time of unsustainable debt.