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Statement of Senator Thomas R. Carper, Chairman

Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

"Getting to Better Government: Focusing on Performance"

September 24, 2009

Eight months ago, we inaugurated a new President. Since coming into office, President Obama has faced a complicated set of urgent challenges, both domestic and international.

Our new President has faced soaring federal deficits projected to reach \$9 trillion over the next decade; an economic crisis that required unprecedented international cooperation to jumpstart the world's economies; and dangerous security threats from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran and North Korea.

These are but a few of the exceptional challenges that the federal government must be prepared to address. As the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has pointed out, the federal government's performance and the results it achieves have a profound effect on the most important issues to the American people – creating jobs, providing health care, overseeing financial markets, reducing pollutants and sending additional troops to war.

While the strength of our democracy rests on the ability of our government to deliver its promises to the people, we in Congress have a responsibility to be judicious stewards of the resources taxpayers invest in America, and ensure those resources are managed honestly, transparently and effectively.

It has been more than 16 years since Congress passed the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) to help us better manage our finite resources and improve the effectiveness and delivery of federal programs. Since that time, agencies across the federal government have developed and implemented strategic plans and routinely generate a tremendous amount of performance data. The question is – are federal agencies using their performance data to get better results?

Producing information does not by itself improve performance.

The GAO has shown time and again that federal managers have significantly more performance information available today than they did a decade ago. However, the GAO findings also reveal that federal managers have shown little or no progress in increasing their use of performance information to manage results.

Several years ago, Senator Tom Coburn and I asked the GAO to examine how performance information was being used to better manage federal agencies and how managers could employ it more frequently for better results.

We also asked the GAO to consider the Clinton Administration's implementation of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) and the Bush Administration's implementation of the Performance Assessment Rating Tool (PART).

Today, I look forward to GAO's discussion of its final report, particularly key management practices that can promote the use of performance information in decision-making to improve results.

We have a new administration, with fresh ideas and a renewed commitment to getting results. To demonstrate that commitment, President Obama announced early this year the creation of a chief performance officer (CPO), a post designed to improve government efficiency and reform budget practices. I am pleased that the Chief Performance Officer, Jeffrey Zients, is here to discuss how his team will assist and motivate federal agencies to maximize the productive use of performance information to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and transparency of our government.

I would like us to focus our discussion on several crucial questions:

One. How will the Obama Administration design and structure its new performance improvement and analysis framework?

Two. What strategies are necessary to support a government-wide transformation to a more results-oriented and collaborative culture?

Three. For agencies that appear to be using performance information the least, to what extent do they employ practices GAO has identified that could facilitate or encourage the use of performance information?

Four. How can federal agencies make better use of performance information to improve results?

Five. What are some specific things that we, in Congress, can do to bring about a greater focus on performance in the federal government?

Finally, how can we use performance information to identify where the federal government is not performing well so we can make better decisions about where we should not be putting our resources?

Today we face unparalleled challenges both here and abroad, and these require a knowledgeable and nimble federal government that can respond effectively. With concerns growing over the mounting federal deficit and national debt, the American people deserve to know that every dollar they send to Washington is being used to its utmost potential. Performance information is an invaluable tool that can ensure just that. If used effectively, it can identify problems, find solutions, and develop approaches that improve outcomes and produce results.

Thanks again to our witnesses for taking this opportunity to talk with us today about the challenges before us and how best to address them.

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