

November 29, 2012

Via Electronic Transmission

Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear General Dodaro,

The first two duplication reports issued by GAO were hundreds of pages in length and packed with millions of dollars in commonsense reforms that could be achieved. I cannot understate how valuable these reports have been to help us better understand the extent of duplication, overlap, and fragmentation within the federal government as we begin the process of streamlining government operations. It is clear these reports have been significant undertakings for the entire GAO team.

As GAO moves forward, the process for complying with the intent and instructions of the mandate could be simplified in a number of ways.

First, the required annual report should begin providing an abbreviated listing all of the previous findings. Each area previously reviewed could be summarized, possibly on a single page, without the lengthy background information already provided. This annual comprehensive report ideally would list each of the areas of duplication reviewed to date, identifying the specific departments, agencies and programs where overlap exists, along with the total annual cost of each such program and a total cost estimate of duplication by area. Further, routinely updating the existing list by adding new programs created by Congress or the president or removing those that have been streamlined, consolidated, or eliminated would also be helpful.

Second, the law also requires the annual report to contain "recommendations for consolidation and elimination to reduce duplication identifying specific rescissions." GAO staff indicated such recommendations and guidance would be forthcoming in the 2013 report. These nonpartisan recommendations will be very valuable if Congress chooses to finally begin untangling the web of duplication GAO continues to find.

Third, even after the 2013 report is issued, GAO should continue to identify additional areas of duplication, overlap, and fragmentation within the federal government. While there has been a general understanding GAO would review the entire scope of the federal government over three years, there will still be smaller or new areas of duplication in need of examination. These would not necessitate several hundred pages of new findings each year, but it should remain a GAO priority to continue identifying areas of duplication and making recommendations to address each. Please also provide an estimate of the percentage of government activities covered in the breadth of the first three reports, as well as those areas of federal involvement yet to be examined for overlap.

Finally, a searchable online database containing all of this information and the findings of other GAO reports related to duplication would be an extremely valuable tool to prevent and address duplication as well as for setting appropriations amounts and conducting oversight activities. The database should include every overlapping program and tax expenditure, as well as corresponding costs and revenue losses for each, within each area of overlap identified by the GAO. The database should be updated regularly to account for the creation or elimination of new federal efforts. In addition, GAO should consider maintaining a user-friendly duplication summary table, listing each area as well the total number of overlapping federal efforts, programs, tax expenditures and activities, the number of agencies involved, and the total spending on these efforts within each area.

This approach to GAO's work on duplication and overlap, combined with the continued annual status update on congressional and administrative action taken to address each area outlined in all previous reports, will continue to prove invaluable to Congress and the administration.

Thank you again for your attention and the contribution of each member of the GAO team to this ongoing effort.

Sincere Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Coburn". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "T" and a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

Tom A. Coburn, M.D.

United States Senate