

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
“Government 2.0: GAO Unveils New Duplicative Program Report”
Senator Tom Coburn, Testimony Highlights, February 28, 2012

Federal duplication and the mismanagement of taxpayer funding in the current labyrinth of government programs is one of the most critical matters currently facing Congress.

The findings of GAO’s 2012 report, as detailed by Director Dodaro, are a sobering reminder and a revealing look at a government duplication. Today’s findings are a testament to failed congressional efforts of oversight and a reminder Congress continues to shirk its duty to address even blatant areas of waste and mismanagement of taxpayer funding.

Not one corner of our daily life remains untouched by a government program or federal effort. From what we eat and drink, to where we live, work, and socialize, nearly every aspect of human behavior and American society are addressed by multiple government programs. .

Who is to blame for this maze of government programs? Very simply, Congress. Duplication in this country has been created by the ruling class of career politicians seeking to slap short-term fixes on problems in order to claim credit at home and recognition in Washington.

In an often frantic effort to claim credit for addressing the latest social or economic problem of the day, members of Congress propose and pass legislation, while the president signs into law, new programs and even new federal agencies, duplicating existing efforts, few of which can demonstrate any measurable results.

Throughout history, efforts to address duplication have continually been met with opposition from career politicians, congressional staff and lobbyists, and defenders of special interests entrenched in a culture that screams Washington knows best and places personal ambition and comfort above doing what is right for the country.

The problem in Congress today is not an issue of ignorance—it is one of indifference and incompetence. We know we have a problem. We know we have cancer. Yet, we refuse to stop making it worse, we refuse to apply the treatment, and we refuse take the pain of the medication for the long-term benefit of a cure.

It was said last year by both Republicans and Democrats that GAO’s first report on duplication would serve as a roadmap for extensive federal savings, to help put us on a path of fiscal solvency and begin reducing our deficit. These pledges were quickly set aside, and exchanged for partisan bickering and a refusal to find even the simplest areas of commonality.

But, before us today, we have part of the answer to our mounting debt and deficits. This report provides a roadmap for savings. If we are unable to agree on eliminating even one small duplicative program or tax credit, when clearly we know there are hundreds, we have little hope of coming to a comprehensive compromise for fixing our floundering budget.

How many more housing programs do we need before we have solved the homeless problem? How many food assistance programs do we need to ensure the hungry are fed? How many education programs do we need to improve our schools? Ten? Twenty? Hundreds? Just remember, next time someone in Congress proposes a bill to create a new program to address a problem, ask yourself, are we not addressing this problem already? Instead of creating a new program, we must demand results from the ones that already exist.

For the sake of our future as a nation, in the coming days and weeks, as we once again hear similar promises from Washington to address the issues exposed by GAO today, I can only hope Congress will this time work together to implement these recommendations and heed the advice found in the pages of this report.