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# Congress of the United States

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### Opening Statement Rep. Elijah E. Cummings

#### Subcommittee on Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations and Procurement Reform

#### “Transparency through Technology: Evaluating Federal Open-Government Efforts”

March 11, 2011

Thank you, Chairman Lankford and Ranking Member Connolly.

I am grateful for this opportunity to examine the Administration’s ongoing efforts to bring increased transparency to the federal government. This is an issue of critical importance, and the federal government must be held strictly accountable for its expenditure of taxpayers’ hard-earned money.

The passage of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 and the establishment of USAspending.gov, as required by the Act, have given the average American an unprecedented ability to track federal contracts and grants. This transparency increases the public’s ability to hold elected representatives and the federal government accountable for the distribution and use of federal funds. Further, the Act and the government’s experience with USAspending.gov paved the way for the creation of additional websites that allow the public to track specific types of spending, including Recovery.gov and Data.gov.

The Administration’s ongoing efforts to improve the quality and breadth of data being reported are to be commended. In particular, I am pleased that in October 2010, the Administration began publishing sub-awards on USAspending.gov for the first time.

However, the Sunlight Foundation’s September 2010 report shows that there is an opportunity to continue improving transparency and make additional information publicly available. During the last Congress, I supported legislation that moved through this Committee to enhance the usability and interoperability of Federal financial data. I look forward to working together in a bipartisan manner to advance such legislation in this Congress.

OMB must also work to ensure that USAspending.gov implements mechanisms to improve the timeliness and accuracy of its reporting to the public. However, we should also be mindful that the pursuit of perfection in the reporting of spending data imposes real financial

costs both in dollars and manpower – and such costs must be weighed against the benefits they will yield. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses on these issues.

Finally, any accounting of the cost of government spending is inherently incomplete unless it also includes data detailing the revenue lost to the government through tax breaks and incentives to the wealthiest individuals and businesses, including businesses that move jobs overseas.

I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses and to working with Chairman Lankford and Ranking Member Connolly to identify and address areas where federal transparency efforts can continue to be improved.

Thank you.