

**Tom A. Coburn, M.D.
United States Senate
Written Testimony**

**Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
“Government 2.0: GAO Unveils New Duplicative Program Report”**

February 28, 2012

Chairman Issa, Ranking Member Cummings, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today’s hearing on the release of the Government Accountability Office’s (GAO) second annual report on duplicative federal programs. Director Dodaro and the staff at GAO are to be commended for their excellent work and dedication to such a large endeavor, one few others in Washington are willing to undertake, but the topic of which is of utmost importance.

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. We must eliminate duplication immediately wherever we find it, and stop making the maze more tangled with our shortsightedness by continuing to create new, unnecessary and duplicative programs. If we do not, Congress will be unable to reign in federal spending and our financial situation will only continue to worsen, while thousands of ineffective government programs continue to fall short of meeting the needs of those we intend to help.

My testimony today will examine some of the primary pitfalls of our current state as a nation of duplication, and provide a look at past and present efforts to eliminate duplication including the comprehensive deficit reduction plan I released last year, and also discuss ways Congress can prevent duplication in the future.

DUPLICATION NATION

The findings of GAO’s 2012 report, as detailed by Director Dodaro, are a sobering reminder and a revealing look at a government grown far beyond what many imagined possible, funding hundreds of programs decidedly outside the scope of the Enumerated Powers as enshrined in the Constitution. And like last year’s report, which identified more than \$100 billion in budgetary savings by simply eliminating duplicative programs, 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. Nearly every federal agency runs a program overlapping with a handful of other programs across several additional agencies. Whether carrying out similar missions or funding similar projects, everything the government is doing once it is likely doing twice or three times and often not very well.

In just a few examples from last year's report,¹ nearly 430 programs are listed as part of extensive duplication across dozens of agencies:

- 100+ surface transportation programs;
- 88 economic development programs;
- 82 teacher quality programs;
- 56 financial literacy programs;
- 47 job training programs;
- 20 homelessness prevention and assistance programs;
- 18 food for the hungry programs; and
- 17 disaster response and preparedness programs.

Though some view this permeation of government as success, its enormity may actually now work against original intentions and instead keep those who need the help from finding it. In their 2011 duplication report, GAO noted, "This fragmentation can create difficulties for people in accessing services as well as administrative burdens for providers who must navigate various application requirements." GAO went on to explain, the "lack of coordination" caused by duplication poses a "barrier to the delivery of serves" to those in need.²

Consider how the entirety of federal programs cannot even be compiled in a list for review. No one single inventory of all federal programs exists. Those in Congress tasked with reviewing these programs, since they refuse to do it themselves, cannot even do so in one year's time. Federal agencies and departments have proven themselves incapable of providing a full account of each program in their own jurisdiction.

Who is to blame for this maze of government programs? Very simply, it is Congress. We are all culpable. And to be sure, the blame does not rest on one party or the other, it lies with both. 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.

Though the Executive Branch is not without fault, Congress is the main offender. We set the budget, we pass the appropriations bills and we authorize new activities at the federal agencies. We refuse to apply metrics and standards to the programs we create. We ignore our duty to conduct oversight. And we choose to remain uninformed about existing efforts before creating new ones. Despite the thousands of existing federal programs on the books, nearly every passing week Congress creates more programs and federal efforts, piling new initiatives on top of the old ones, which were created on top of even older programs.

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 be shown to demonstrate

¹ Government Accountability Office, *Opportunities to Reduce Potential Duplication in Government Programs, Save Tax Dollars, and Enhance Revenue*, March 2001, GAO-11-318SP, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/320/315920.pdf>

² Government Accountability Office, *Opportunities to Reduce Potential Duplication in Government Programs, Save Tax Dollars, and Enhance Revenue*, March 2001, GAO-11-318SP, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/320/315920.pdf>

any measurable results. For example, Congress recently rushed to pass the Dodd-Frank financial regulatory legislation, which created three new federal entities, the Financial Stability Oversight Council, the Office of Financial Research, and the Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection. Yet, in January 2009, GAO described the already extensive federal financial regulatory system as “fragmented and complex”, and “ill-suited to meet the nation’s needs in the 21st century,” stating, “Today, responsibilities for overseeing the financial services industry are shared among almost a dozen federal banking, securities, futures, and other regulatory agencies, numerous self-regulatory organizations, and hundreds of state financial regulatory agencies.”³

A 1966 *Nation’s Business* article outlined the issue clearly, and more than four decades later, the problem remains.

“Any organization that spends more than \$140 billion a year as the federal government does....is certain to have confusion, duplication, and waste in its operation.” There is no large private enterprise which does not have some of the same.”

“However, the volume of duplication and confusion in federal ranks has now grown so large that even those who claim liberal attitudes toward both big government and centralized superplanning swallow hard at the thought of it all.”

“Scores of others departments, agencies, programs, plans and projects were created either by Congress acting on its own, under White House pressure or through that misty process by which bureaucrats expand and multiply their jobs, their paper work, their agencies and even multiply themselves.”⁴

Not only is the web of government programs placing an enormous strain on taxpayers, and likely reducing the effectiveness of the delivery of many services, it is so interwoven and completely unmanageable, that the goals of many programs now stand in direct contradiction to each other.

Take for example, something as simple as potato chips. The government, namely Congress and the Executive Branch, cannot decide if they like them or not, if fried potatoes are healthy, if we should eat them or if they should be banned, or if instead, we should spend money promoting the chip industry. In their first report on duplication, the GAO found the federal government “spent more than \$62.5 billion on 18 domestic food and nutrition assistance programs in fiscal year 2008.”⁵ While many of these programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) allow federal funds to purchase potato chips, dozens of other government wide initiatives, are aimed at keeping Americans healthy, specifically suggesting food like potato chips should be limited in intake, and perhaps even taken out of public schools all together. At the same time, just this year the Department of Agriculture announced a nearly \$50,000 federal grant was being doled out to a private potato chip company in New York. According the proposal, this money would be used to overhaul their media strategy and “raise

³ Government Accountability Office, *Financial Regulation: A Framework for Crafting and Assessing Proposals to Modernize the Outdated U.S. Financial Regulatory System*, January 2009, GAO-09-216, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09216.pdf>

⁴“Government by Totem Pole,” *Nation’s Business*, October 1966

⁵ Government Accountability Office, *Opportunities to Reduce Potential Duplication in Government Programs, Save Tax Dollars, and Enhance Revenue*, March 2001, GAO-11-318SP, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/320/315920.pdf>

brand awareness and consumer knowledge”—essentially encouraging people to buy and consume potato chips!⁶ Meanwhile, potato chips sales in the United States alone exceed \$6 billion annually,⁷ which begs the question why the taxpayers are now asked to subsidize promotion and marketing for the industry.

The effectiveness of the existing myriad of government programs can scarcely be demonstrated, while Congress refuses to conduct oversight of existing efforts, piling layers upon layers of costly, unneeded bureaucracy. Meanwhile, taxpayers are paying for duplication, contradiction, and getting little in return except confusion, a trillion dollar deficit, and if we do not fix it soon, likely higher taxes in the future.

ELIMINATING DUPLICATION: LOOKING BACK

Proposals to address duplication are not a new trend in Washington. This of course means duplication in the beltway bureaucracy is not new either. Over the course of more than 100 years, Washington has created thousands of government programs, hundreds of which overlap hundreds more. Duplication is a longstanding federal issue, and along the way, many have tried to raise the warning sign. Numerous efforts have been launched by both members of Congress and presidents to eliminate duplicative government programs, and prevent the problem from multiplying, in hopes Washington could stop itself before the problem grew out of control.

Even in 1905, some in Washington recognized government’s bent toward duplication and mismanagement of taxpayer dollars. That year, *the San Francisco Chronicle* editorialized, “It is in the superabundance of officials, the duplication of work growing out of the squabbles of the bureaus and departments, unnecessary travelling and printing, luxurious equipment and the like. No possible retrenchment in this direction will extinguish the deficit, but it can reduce it by some millions.”⁸

By 1909, the Senate Budget Committee adopted a resolution to investigate “the business methods observed” by executive branch agencies because of “a lack of cooperation, duplication of work,” by agencies and independent agencies which costs “hundreds of thousands a year.”⁹

Less than ten years later, in 1920, a group of senators started a war on duplicative spending in the federal government with the intent to cut “through the entanglements of red tape, the outer defense of the bureaucrat and his battalions of pencil-pushers and typewriters to put the United States Government, with its war debts of more than \$20,000,000,000 on a businesslike basis.”¹⁰ At the time, the *New York Times* opined on the topic noting in 1920, “The cynics at the national capital laugh and say that all attempts to make genuine reform in Congress and in the departments will fail as they have in the past. But many men of reputed wisdom predict that Congress, now at a low ebb in the esteem of the people, much at last act with deep-cutting thoroughness to regain a position of respect.”¹¹

⁶ Press Release, Office of Senator Gillibrand, “Gillibrand Announces Nearly \$50,000 in Value-Added Producer Grant for Long Island Farm,” February 8, 2012, <http://www.gillibrand.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/gillibrand-announces-nearly-50000-in-value-added-producer-grant-for-long-island-farm>

⁷ Snack Food Association, A Century and a Half of Crunch: The Potato Chip Turns 150!, <http://www.sfa.org/potato150.aspx>

⁸ Editorial, “Economical Administration: The President’s Task on Overhauling the Government Departments,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 28, 1905

⁹ O’Laughlin, John Callan, “Committee Seeks Federal Economy: Senate Body Will Investigate Departments to End Useless Expense,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 5, 1909

¹⁰ Tiller, Theodore, “Congress Starts Drive on Waste in Governmental Departments,” *Baltimore Sun*, April 18, 1920.

¹¹ “Will Congress Stop Federal Wastefulness?” *New York Times*, March 14, 1920

Even presidents were involved in the effort, and in 1925, President Calvin Coolidge initiated an investigation of government “red tape and duplication of effort in the smaller departments of the federal government.”¹²

In 1950, Senator Styles Bridges designed an eight-point proposal to cut \$6 billion from the federal budget. Senator Bridges included a proposal to abandon creating new programs “until we could afford them,” and also to eliminate duplication from the federal budget. Meanwhile, the Joint Committee on Reduction of Non-Essential Federal Expenditures found that 37 agencies were conducting activities related to public health, 64 in business relations and 24 in mapmaking.¹³

In his book “With No Apologies,” former Senator Barry Goldwater detailed one account of duplication discovered during the Roth investigation. “Congressman William Roth, a young member from Delaware had spent two year trying to determining how many public assistance programs were available in the federal establishment. He found there were 1,300 programs administered by a variety of agencies. They operated separately. There was no communication in between them, and they were unknown to many of the people they were established to help.”¹⁴

In the 1970s, Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine explained the proliferation of federal programs, accompanied by duplication and inefficiencies had created “a bumper crop of public disenchantment with government so unresponsive that it cannot even perform simple day-to-day tasks that need to be done.” He pointed out in 1975 the government listed 1,030 aid programs (including 228 for health) and 1,249 advisory boards, committees, commissions and councils¹⁵

Current Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, acknowledged in 1997 the prolific duplication that exists in our government, including the Defense Department, which as today’s GAO report clearly outlines, little has changed 15 years later. “Sometimes, in all the confusion about budgeting, programs that have become inefficient or simply irrelevant get rubber-stamped, surviving many years beyond their usefulness. The waste and duplication show up in civilian and military programs alike, and for the citizen it boils down to more red tape – and more taxes.”¹⁶

ELIMINATING DUPLICATION: TODAY IN WASHINGTON

Though these examples remind us duplication has long been a problem in the Washington bureaucracy, we have little to show in the win column when it comes to specifically addressing and eliminating duplication. Throughout history, these efforts 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.

¹² “To Investigate Government Red Tape,” Wall Street Journal, April 10, 1925

¹³ “Bridge Proposes Slash in Spending: Offers an 8-Point Program for Cutting \$6,000,000,000 From Appropriations,” New York Times, May 16, 1950

¹⁴ Barry Goldwater, “With No Apologies, The Personal and Political Memoirs of United States Senator Barry Goldwater,”

¹⁵ “How to leash runaway U.S. Programs,” The Christian Science Monitor, May 17, 1976

¹⁶ Panetta, Leon E, “A Blueprint for Fiscal Disaster” Los Angeles Times, December 6, 1997

Even today, we're witnessing the same. The second report released today by GAO is a report card, outlining what Congress and this administration have and have not done to address the dozens of areas of duplication GAO exposed last year. While no one in Washington is without fault, Congress has done virtually nothing to implement the 176 specific recommendations included in last year's report. In nearly half of the areas listed as requiring congressional action, Congress has done nothing. Of the 81 general areas reviewed in the report, only four have been completely addressed by Congress and the president, while 17 have not been addressed in any way GAO could identify.

For example, the 2011 GAO report outlined there are more than 173 tax expenditures, many of which have related mission areas to spending programs in the discretionary budget. Yet, Congress continues to ignore tax reform, refuses to eliminate any duplicative tax credits, and instead is set to extend them once again, at a cost of hundreds of billions of dollars.

Even though the current administration has not done enough to address duplication, they are taking steps to propose eliminations and consolidations, and have done so with little help from Congress. In fact, their efforts to simply propose a draft framework for consolidating the six primary departments and agencies focused on business and trade in the federal government were met with opposition in Congress. It is clear they will have little help from those in Congress with jurisdiction over these programs, who are instead are waging a turf war and holding tight to their parochial interests.

Despite an overall lack of interest or action by Congress to address last year's duplication findings, one notable and promising exception, worth highlighting today, is legislation introduced in December by Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training.

A year ago, GAO identified a sprawl of federal job training and employment programs that only politicians and government bureaucrats could dream up. GAO found 47 federal job training programs, with separate administrative structures, costing \$18 billion annually. All but three programs were found to duplicate at least one other program, providing similar services to similar populations.

Given the dearth of meaningful program evaluations, GAO found "little is known about the effectiveness of these programs." Only five of the 47 programs have had an impact study since 2004, and only half have had a program evaluation. What's more, GAO identified another 51 programs that potentially could have been identified as job training programs but failed to meet GAO's narrow definition of a program. For example, the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program was not considered by GAO to be a "job training and employment program."

A year after publication of this report, Congress has not acted to meaningfully consolidate programs and has all but ignored GAO's findings. However, Chairwoman Foxx introduced the [Streamlining Workforce Development Programs Act \(H.R. 3610\)](#), legislation that consolidates 33 of the 47 job training programs identified in GAO's 2011 report. This legislation also seeks to increase accountability of the programs and create an outcome driven job training system. I am wholeheartedly in support of her effort, and grateful for the work she has done in this area. Now, it is Congress' job to finish this work and pass this legislation, and put it on the president's desk to be signed.

Even more, it is time for the rest of Congress, and every congressional committee to do the same. Every committee must begin addressing the areas of duplication in their jurisdiction and putting forth creative and commonsense proposals to consolidate, streamline, eliminate, downsize, and make the government more efficient. It is time to do more with less, not less with more.

BACK IN BLACK: A \$9 TRILLION DEFICIT REDUCTION PLAN

As part of my own efforts to address duplication throughout the federal budget, in July 2011, I released *Back in Black*, a comprehensive deficit reduction plan scrutinizing every corner of the federal budget for savings.¹⁷ *Back in Black* listed hundreds of specific proposals which together would eliminate more than \$9 trillion of deficit spending over ten years.

Back in Black was the culmination of many years of work in my office that began with smaller iterations of lists of government waste, mismanagement and duplication, divided by agency. I remained unsatisfied with answers received when requesting lists of federal programs for purposes of determining duplication, and disappointed there was not a single depository for areas of potential savings to taxpayers from elimination of waste and duplication. At the same time, my staff had for years, on a daily basis, found examples of waste and duplication at nearly every since federal agency. Compiling this information into a comprehensive look at the government would give us a full picture of just exactly how bad the mess is Washington has created. As such, this summer I asked my staff to dedicate six weeks to compiling everything we had on every government program, office, task force, commission, entitlement program, agency and department.

The result was a 622-page document with hundreds of specific recommendations for savings, based on our findings of rampant duplication, mismanagement, fraud, and waste throughout every single government entity. Beginning with discretionary spending, the plan calls for \$4 trillion over ten years in savings from this portion of the budget, with no department left untouched, from the Defense Department to the Congress and the White House, and every agency in-between. In addition, *Back in Black* includes detailed proposals reforming Medicare and Medicaid to save \$2.6 trillion over ten years, while also reforming Social Security, making it fully solvent for the next 75 years. *Back in Black* also makes a large down payment on comprehensive tax reform with a thorough examination of the tax code. The plan calls for eliminating and reforming more than more 40 tax credits and deductions, many of which are little more than socialist spending programs masquerading as tax cuts that allow certain groups and companies to pay lower taxes simply because they are well-connected in Washington. If all of these reductions and reforms are implemented, federal borrowing will decrease dramatically, saving taxpayers an additional \$1.3 trillion in interest payments on the national debt.

Instead of relying on arbitrary across-the-board reductions in spending, which show little deference to programs that may be working and do little to target spending to those in need, the approach of *Back in Black* was meant to be thoughtful, comprehensive, and hopefully a path toward compromise, that left no sacred cow of Washington un-tipped, as it looked at the Defense budget, the tax code, Social Security, and every other corner of the budget. As stated in the first pages of *Back in Black*, “This plan recognizes all spending is not created equal by asking those with more to take less to ensure those who gave more will not be left with nothing. It ensures health care for wounded combat veterans, while ending

¹⁷ Office of Senator Tom Coburn, *Back in Black*, June 2011, <http://1.usa.gov/qCwHD8>

unemployment benefits for jobless millionaires.”¹⁸ I set out to find the most commonsense places for reductions and eliminations, hoping to make the case based on evidenced waste, fraud, and duplication, that members of Congress on both sides could not deny, but instead would join together to eliminate.

Many of the proposals in *Back in Black* are closely intertwined with GAO findings, as well as our own, on duplication throughout the Washington bureaucracy. In fact, the word duplicate is found 322 times throughout the plan. In every agency, in every section of the report, we found and compiled hundreds of examples of duplication, including many from the GAO report. The more we dug, the more we found. Every single agency is participating in nearly every activity one could imagine. Eradicating duplication was a large part of the savings found throughout *Back in Black*, and the plan assumed a conservative estimate of \$50 billion in savings over ten years from addressing duplication in many different areas including job training, economic development, STEM programs, financial literacy, housing assistance, Department of Justice programs, Homeland Security grants and dozens more.¹⁹

I understand few may agree with every single recommendation of *Back in Black*. But, if on a list with hundreds of ideas, we could find even half on which to agree, then Congress would be \$4.5 trillion further along in addressing our country’s debilitating deficit and rising debt.

Examples of Proposals in *Back in Black*

Eliminate Sweet Heart Deals for Government Contractors

Savings: At least \$2 billion over ten years

Collect Unpaid Taxes Owed by Federal Employees

Savings: \$1 billion over ten years

Reduce Congress’ Spending on Itself

Savings: \$3.82 billion over ten years

Stop Overpaying Drug Companies

Savings: \$480 million over ten years

End Unemployment Payments to Millionaires

Savings: \$186 million over ten years

Reduce Advertising by the Federal Government

Savings: \$5.6 billion over ten years

Use Better Measure of Inflation to Determine Increases in Benefit Payments

Savings: Approximately \$180 billion over ten years

End Payments for Coal Cleanup When Projects Have Been Certified as Being Completed

Savings: \$1.23 billion over ten years

¹⁸ Office of Senator Tom Coburn, *Back in Black*, June 2011, <http://1.usa.gov/qCwHD8>

¹⁹ Appendix A includes a series of charts summarizing the overall recommendations in *Back in Black*, as well as highlights of proposals from several specific areas of concentration.

Get the Department of Defense Out of Education and the Grocery Store Business

Savings: \$19 billion over ten years

Terminate HHS's Community Economic Development Program

Savings: \$38 million over ten years.

End Federal Subsidies to Wealthy Doctors and Hospitals for Health Information Technology

Savings: \$15.6 billion over ten years.

Stop Medicare Payments for Uncovered Services

Savings: \$1.97 billion over ten years.

PREVENTING FUTURE DUPLICATION

Since release of GAO's first report on duplication, the Senate has twice rejected bipartisan legislation aimed at preventing future duplication.

The amendment would require for every bill before consideration in the Senate:

- an analysis by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) to determine if the bill creates any new federal program, office, or initiative that would duplicate or overlap any existing federal program, office, or initiative with similar mission, purpose, goals, or activities;
- a listing of all of the overlapping or duplicative federal program or programs, office or offices, or initiative or initiatives; and
- an explanation provided by the committee as to why the creation of each new program, office, or initiative is necessary if a similar program or programs, office or offices, or initiative or initiatives already exist.

This CRS "duplication score," similar to a Congressional Budget Office cost analysis also required before congressional consideration, would serve as a tool to further inform members and the public of the impact and ramifications of a bill.

The measure received 63 votes in June of last year, but fell a few votes shy of the 67 votes required for passage of any change to Senate rules.²⁰ The Senate voted on the measure a second time this year, and again, it failed to garner the votes necessary for passage.²¹

I plan to offer this amendment to every moving vehicle considered in the Senate until it is accepted. The House should also immediately pass similar legislation requiring a rules change to provide for a CRS duplication score on any legislation before consideration in the House.

²⁰ 112th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Roll Call Vote #102, June 29, 2011, S. Amdt. 521 to S. Res. 116, http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=112&session=1&vote=00102

²¹ 112th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Roll Call Vote #10, February 2, 2012, S.Amdt. 1473 to S. Amdt. 1470 to S. 2038, http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=112&session=2&vote=00010

Requiring a duplication score before Congress votes on legislation, will help guard against our own worst tendencies, ensuring full knowledge and disclosure when duplicative programs are created in the future.

Further, members of Congress should begin to find government waste and duplication in their own states and bring it to light. In July 2011, I released a 41-page report detailing 30 specific programs and projects funded by the federal government within my own state of Oklahoma, costing taxpayers at least \$170 million.²² The “Oklahoma Waste Report: Exposing Washington’s Wasteful Spending Habits in our Own Backyard” exposed several areas of government duplication, in Oklahoma, including state grant awards from duplicative Department of Agriculture programs assisting in the development of farmers’ markets, and more than \$1 million in FY 2010 from the duplicative Resource Conservation and Development program, which was targeted for elimination by both President Obama and President Bush alike. I strongly encourage members of Congress to bring to light examples of duplication from their own states, and use this as a foundation to consolidated overlapping federal efforts.

GAO’S REPORT ON DUPLICATION: THE PATH FORWARD

With the release of today’s GAO report, combined with last year’s recommendations, Congress and the administration have been given extensive details in 132 areas of government duplication and opportunities for significant cost savings, with dozens recommendations for how to address the duplication and find these savings.

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.

The GAO report released today provides a very clear and concise listing of dozens of areas ripe for reform and in need of collaboration from members on both sides of the aisle, to find solutions to address these issues. And yet, the second GAO report released today, our report card, demonstrates the clear unwillingness of Congress to do any work to address duplication, even when the information, background, and even specific recommendations, are delivered to directly to our door.

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.

We are looking into a future of trillion dollar deficits and a national debt quickly headed toward \$20 trillion. Our nation is not on the verge of bankruptcy—it is already bankrupt. We have maxed out our own credit cards and are now living off our children’s credit cards, while funding a government with so many duplicative programs they cannot even all be written down in a more than 420 page report.

²² Office of Senator Tom Coburn, “Oklahoma Waste Report: Exposing Washington’s Wasteful Spending Habits in our Own Backyard,” July 2011, http://www.coburn.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File_id=4f875398-b8bd-4fff-a37a-2cfe984bc3ec

Over the last two years, there have been countless discussions and bipartisan talks about how to address our debt and deficit, turn our country around, and get the economy back on its feet and growing. Yet, there has been little agreement, and at the end of this year we will be faced with another tax extenders package and another increase in the debt limit, all while sequestration will be poised to kick in and achieve the savings Congress has been unable to muster the courage to pass.

But, before us today, we have part of the answer. GAO's work presents Washington with literally hundreds of options for areas in which we could make a decision now to start finding savings, potentially hundreds of billions of dollars. If we, as members of Congress, 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 ever 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.