

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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<http://oversight.house.gov>

April 2, 2015

The Honorable Jacob J. Lew  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Treasury  
401 14th Street, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20227

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On March 31, 2015, a revised version of USASpending.gov went online. Among other things, the website no longer allows users to search multiple years or multiple agencies simultaneously and the keyword function has been removed.<sup>1</sup> These changes severely diminished the utility of the website, which was created “to give the American public access to information on how their tax dollars are spent.”<sup>2</sup> One news report described the new search function as “virtually impossible, akin to finding a needle in a haystack.”<sup>3</sup>

The Department of the Treasury assumed responsibility as program owner of USASpending.gov in February 2014 and quickly developed plans to update the website, which were well received by the public.<sup>4</sup> In December 2014, Fiscal Assistant Secretary David Lebryk testified before the Committee about the planned changes to the website. During the hearing, he stated that the updates would include “improvements to the site navigation, geo-coding the data to enable interactive mapping capability, a ‘get started’ guide to orient users, displaying prime and sub-awards in one view, and expanded search capability.”<sup>5</sup> Mr. Lebryk gave no indication that the changes to USASpending.gov would actually reduce the website’s capabilities.

USASpending.gov is a critical tool for transparency in federal spending data. In fact, then-Senator Obama joined Senator Tom Coburn to sponsor the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, which created USASpending.gov. The website’s reduced functionality raises concerns with respect to the Department’s commitment to the President’s pledge to “creat[e] an unprecedented level of openness in Government.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Id.*

<sup>2</sup> USASpending.gov.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Harrington, *Obama administration’s new spending website rolls back transparency*, FOX NEWS (Apr. 1, 2015), available at <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2015/04/01/obama-administrations-new-spending-website-rolls-back-transparency/> (last accessed Apr. 2, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Jason Miller, *Treasury’s fixes to USASpending.gov begin with mapping, navigation*, FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (Sep. 26, 2014) available at <http://www.federalnewsradio.com/533/3709944/Treasurys-fixes-to-USASpendinggov-begin-with-mapping-navigation> (last accessed Apr. 2, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> *Transforming Federal Spending: Implementing the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act: Hearing before the H. Comm. on Oversight and Government Reform*, 113th Cong. (Dec. 3, 2014) (statement of David Lebryk, Fiscal Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of the Treasury).

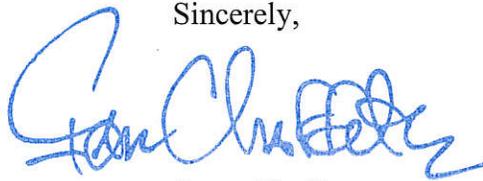
<sup>6</sup> Memorandum from President Barack Obama for the Heads of Executive Agencies and Departments (Jan. 21, 2009).

To address the concerns about the changes to USASpending.gov, please provide a staff briefing regarding the newly designed USASpending.gov design as soon as possible, but no later than April 8, 2015.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and may at “any time” investigate “any matter” as set forth in House Rule X.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Troy Stock or Katy Rother of the Committee staff at (202) 225-5074. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jason Chaffetz", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jason Chaffetz  
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Minority Member