

**Opening Statement**  
**Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member**

**Hearing on “Why Reshuffling Government Agencies  
Won’t Solve the Federal Government’s Obesity Problem”**

**February 15, 2012**

I would like to welcome all of our distinguished witnesses here today. Let me thank the Chairman for agreeing to my request to invite Senator Warner, who has been a champion of government reform efforts for many years, both as Governor of Virginia and now as head of the Senate Budget Committee’s Task Force on Government Performance.

I would also like to thank the Chairman for agreeing to my request to invite our witness on the second panel, Max Stier, the President and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service, which issued a very good report on government efficiency issues last year.

Now, on the topic of today’s hearing, I confess I am a little confused. The hearing title suggests that the federal government has an “obesity problem” that somehow caused the nation’s budget deficit. But according to economists and financial experts, the most significant causes of the federal deficit are (1) the Bush-era tax cuts for the wealthy, (2) the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and (3) the fallout from the 2008 financial crisis. Unfortunately, we will not be addressing any of these issues today.

Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a *Washington Post* column published yesterday titled, “Government Continues to Shrink Despite ‘Obesity Problem’ Rhetoric.” The column addresses today’s hearing and describes how the size of the federal workforce has decreased and the government is doing more with less.

The hearing title also refers to a recent proposal by the President to reorganize and consolidate a number of our nation’s trade agencies into a single department that will be more effective and save billions of dollars in the process. Unfortunately, we will not be addressing the details of this proposal today either.

Instead, today’s hearing appears to be a survey of proposals to reduce the size of government and cut the pay and benefits of federal employees, without focusing on the negative impacts of these proposals on core services that the American people depend on.

I think it is safe to say that every Member of this Committee, and this Congress, agrees that the federal government can and should work better. We should always strive to ensure that agencies work more effectively and efficiently on behalf of the American taxpayers. Our differences come in figuring out how we get there.

I do not believe the way to reform government is to attack millions of middle-class workers who are already contributing \$60 billion toward deficit reduction as a result of the existing two-year pay freeze. Yet, the House is scheduled to vote this week on a bill approved by this Committee that would take an additional \$44 billion out of their pockets by slashing existing pension benefits for new, current, and retiring federal workers.

This is the wrong approach. We should not try to solve our budget problems on the backs of middle-class federal workers while we refuse to ask the wealthiest Americans to contribute even a penny toward these goals.

Instead, we should reform government by cutting waste. For example, there are billions of dollars waiting to be saved through contracting reform. The Commission on Wartime Contracting identified between \$31 billion and \$60 billion in waste in U.S. contingency contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan. And Congressman Tierney has introduced a bill to enact one of the Commission's recommendations by creating a Special Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations.

Congress should also promote greater competition in federal contracts. Federal agencies awarded about \$170 billion in noncompetitive contracts in 2009 alone.

The Administration is also taking a number of actions, such as improving agency systems to reduce improper payments by the federal government by \$50 billion by the end of this year.

One key tool that we already have in place is the GPRA Modernization Act. On the House side, this new law came out of this Committee, and it was signed by the President on January 4, 2011. It requires the Administration to develop cross-cutting agency priority goals and to track progress toward meeting those goals.

I know Senator Warner was one of the biggest proponents of this law on the Senate side, and I understand he has been pressing the Administration to fulfill each and every provision of the new law. I look forward to hearing his testimony, as well as the testimony of Senator Johnson and all of our witnesses who are here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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