Opening Remarks by Senate Budget Committee Task Force
on Government Performance Chairman Mark Warner (D-VA)
Data-Driven Government: Using Technology to Deliver Results
December 10, 2009

This hearing will come to order. Thank you for being here today to discuss data-driven performance and technology's impact on results.

I want to start by thanking Chairman Conrad and Ranking Member Gregg for starting this Senate Budget Committee Task Force on Government Performance. This Task Force is taking a broad look at how we can improve the effectiveness of new and existing programs within the federal government. As a part of that charge, our first hearing—and I'm glad to see a few folks back— examined our current performance information base and we concluded that we need more meaningful, outcome data from across government agencies and programs.

If we're going to make sure we are collecting and assembling the right information, how do we make sure that we get that important data? Do we have the technology in place to deliver that information in a way that is user friendly to all of our constituencies: the Congress, the American people and the federal workforce? Today's hearing will examine the government's information management challenges and factors that inhibit the ability to get that valuable performance information.

We've got two great panels. On panel one, we will hear from President Obama's technology leaders: Aneesh Chopra, the federal Chief Technology Officer, and Vivek Kundra, the federal Chief Information Officer. They will share information about their plans to increase the availability and use of data, and the new open government directive that was released by OMB Director Peter Orzag earlier this week.

We will also hear from two leading practitioners—folks who are trying to get it right from the technology sector. Mr. Roger Baker, the CIO from Veterans Affairs, who recently halted 45 IT projects at the VA and is making progress towards increasing the use of data to improve IT organizations. Nothing sends a shockwave across the system like bringing some projects to a halt to see what's working and what's not. And someone who is delivering more effective services at the state level, and there are things we can learn from the states—as a former Governor, I clearly feel that way. Mr. Brad Douglas, the Commissioner of Administrative Services from the State of Georgia, will discuss his work using data to transform the state and how he got the right people, processes and technology in place to get results.

But before we hear from our witnesses, I'd like to talk for a few minutes about our Task Force's progress since our last hearing. I want to particularly thank all our staff who are a small band of metrics-focused, system delivery, and program savings activists who, while small in number, will hopefully develop some good things in the coming months and years.

One, we've continued our examination of federal performance reporting requirements and are developing recommendations on what to eliminate and what data is needed.

One of the things we really want to do with this effort is not simply add, from the congressional standpoint, a whole lot of new requirements without first giving some relief to the federal workforce by saying maybe there is some of this that we don't really need. Let's focus on what we truly need—not just simply volume.

In fact, we want to get some additional thoughts on this subject, and in the spirit of Tuesday's news from the White House about open government, I've actually developed a new feature on my Senate website that will collect suggestions from federal employees and the public on how to reduce and improve our existing reporting requirements. So we want to hear from our constituency. I hope this new site will open a dialogue with the public and the federal workforce on what they want and need in terms of how government is performing.

This Task Force also has a separate challenge—one that Senator Bunning raised at our first hearing—and that is how do we find some savings? We have been reviewing OMB's terminations, reductions and savings list. We've been looking at this list not only from President Obama's budget cycle, but also from President Bush's budget cycle. President Bush proposed 190 programs for termination, reduction or savings, and President Obama proposed 121. My problem with this is that OMB takes these programs out of context and puts them on this list without explaining what that program actually does in relation to other programs in the same policy goal area.

One of the things we talked about at our last hearing is that we are taking a few broad policy areas, such as food safety, higher education, and workforce training, and doing some program mapping to see where overlap is for these various programs. Generally speaking—and Senator Bunning raised this at the last hearing—OMB puts out this list each year and Congress, for the most part, proceeds to ignore it. Again, one of the reasons why this list is ignored is that the programs that are to be terminated or reduced or where there might be some great savings from are placed on the list without any context of other programs in the policy area.

The other thing we thought we would do is zero in on those programs where there is overlap between both President Bush and President Obama so there is no question about partisanship about picking a particular President's agenda item. We have found that there are 29 programs that overlap between these two administrations, and we really want to zero in on those and see if we can secure some savings.

Additionally—and this might be a more sensitive subject to our first panel—I've been looking at the Recovery.gov reporting and talking with Earl Devaney, the head of the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board, to learn from his experience about the quality and transparency of federal data. I know there have been some efforts to get the Recovery Act information out and it's had some fits and starts. Mr. Devaney has been talking to me about challenges he's seen as a result of different reporting requirements, different time periods and varying data definitions. For example, USASpending.gov and the Federal Procurement Data System both provide reporting on essentially the same information on federal contracting—and this is a big universe.

Just to give you a sense of the scope here, there are about 600,000 registered vendors that create more than 7 million transactions, and the spend is over $500 billion in annual contracts. So we are talking about a huge universe of federal spend across the whole government and it's basically reporting the same information in different time periods. I think it causes confusion amongst the workforce and sometimes great fodder for the press. We need a better system. Why do we have two sites? We need to look into ways to standardize this so we have a reference point where we can at least start the debate from.

I've also been looking at our current IT operational structure and planning capacity. It appears that we need a stronger government-wide technology infrastructure to support the growing demands for a more open and transparent government. This is a subject matter that both Aneesh and Vivek are very familiar with because this is an effort we took on in Virginia. We tried to consolidate more than 93 separate CIOs. We literally had hundreds of different systems that were not interoperable and we tried to bring then under a single source or contract and oversight. I'm anxious to hear from our colleague from Georgia. I know that's it's hard to implement—we still continue to have some bumps in Virginia—but that doesn't mean we shouldn't go down that path.

To my understanding -- and I'm anxious to hear from Aneesh and Vivek to make sure my understanding is correct -- agencies have primary authority for IT planning and acquisitions. And OMB's role is to provide overall oversight. And there's an interagency CIO Council led by OMB to promote cross-agency collaboration. Some of the questions I have are: does the CIO Council offer enough government-wide planning capacity or do we need to strengthen planning for government-wide IT investments? Do we make sure we have systems that are interoperable and truly cutting-edge and to make sure we approach this from an enterprise wide basis – rather than agency by agency.

I'm also curious about the overlap between agency investments and how we can leverage savings by consolidating some of this spending. Bulk purchasing is a common factor that most businesses and, candidly, most households use. Can we do a better job on the federal IT side by better leveraging our purchasing power across all these systems? And is there a system for tracking what agencies spend on IT software and hardware and are there cost controls in place?

I know our witnesses today will share how we can improve the availability of government-wide data and provide examples about how we use this data for better performance, and to deal with program overlap for some of those programs that OMB has pointed to for potential savings and terminations. We'd like to show some tangible early results and I'm sure that's what Aneesh and Vivek want as well.

Senator Bunning is not here yet, so why don't we go to the testimony. First we will hear from Aneesh Chopra. And personally it's great to have Mr. Chopra here with us today. He's been a good friend and colleague of mine for many years. Mr. Chopra is the Chief Technology Officer of the United States. He previously served as Virginia's fourth Secretary of Technology. Prior to his government service, Mr. Chopra was Managing Director for the Advisory Board Company, a health care think tank for hospitals and health systems.

Next we will hear from Vivek Kundra, the federal Chief Information Officer and the Administrator of the Office of E-Government and Information at the Office of Management and Budget. Mr. Kundra formerly served in Mayor Fenty's cabinet as the Chief Technology Officer for the District of Columbia, responsible for technology operations and strategy for 86 agencies. Perhaps more important from my eyes, he served previously as Assistant Secretary of Commerce and Technology for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

I want to thank you both for being here today and I want to thank you not only for your commitment to this Administration, but for taking on this very challenging prospect of how we get technology usage right and develop more efficient and effective ways. So we will start with Mr. Chopra.