

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

Hearing on “Achieving Transparency and Accountability in Federal Spending”

June 14, 2011

Thank you, and welcome to our distinguished witnesses today. Let me begin by congratulating Earl Devaney, who has had an amazing record as Chair of the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board.

Democrats in Congress created the Board as part of the Recovery Act in 2009 to put in place some of the strongest transparency and accountability measures ever enacted. As a result, the ability to track federal spending has improved by leaps and bounds. In addition to promoting job creation, economic activity, and long-term growth, the Recovery Act fostered unprecedented accountability and transparency in government spending.

Under the Administration’s implementation and Chairman Devaney’s oversight, the Recovery Act has had historically low levels of waste, fraud, and abuse. Today more than 80% of Recovery Act funds have been awarded, and less than half of one percent currently have open investigations. I look forward to hearing more from him on the Board’s successes, lessons learned, and best practices that could be applied elsewhere in government.

I would also like to commend President Obama for his unprecedented efforts to increase transparency and accountability in government spending. Yesterday, the President signed an Executive Order that takes the model work of the Board and extends it across the federal government.

The President’s Executive Order establishes a new Government Accountability and Transparency Board to provide strategic direction for enhancing federal spending transparency and eliminating waste, fraud, and abuse in federal programs. The President directed the Board to report on guidelines to integrate systems that collect government spending data, improve data reliability, and capitalize on the proven success of fraud detection technologies.

The Executive Order also directed the Vice President to convene Cabinet-level meetings on agency efforts to make government work better, faster, and more efficiently under the White House Accountable Government Initiative.

We have also seen remarkable improvements in other federal transparency efforts over the past several years. Websites like USASpending.gov, Recovery.gov, and the IT Dashboard have put more information online than ever before about how federal dollars are being spent. I applaud President Obama for continuing to advance the goals of transparency and accountability in government.

Unfortunately, budget cuts may force the White House to scale back plans for several open government initiatives. The recently passed FY 2011 continuing funding resolution slashed the Electronic Government Fund from a proposed \$35 million down to \$8 million, putting some of those very websites I just mentioned at risk.

I know that a number of transparency advocates and good government groups have criticized these cuts, including some of our witnesses here today. I look forward to hearing more from them on the potential impact of these cuts on open government initiatives and efforts to root out waste, fraud, and abuse.

Mr. Chairman, I have said it many times already this year, and I'll say it again: transparency and open government should not be a partisan issue. Protecting taxpayers' hard-earned money from waste, fraud, and abuse is one of the most important issues that we deal with on this Committee.

I want to acknowledge the legislation you introduced yesterday, which would do many of the same things directed by the President's Executive Order. I understand Democratic staff of the Committee had worked cooperatively with your staff in the last Congress on legislative efforts to improve federal financial data standards, and I supported those efforts.

In addition to your bill, every Member on this side of the aisle joined together in March to introduce H.R. 1144, the Transparency and Openness in Government Act, a comprehensive compilation of five component pieces of legislation that passed the House last Congress with broad bipartisan support, including your own. Since we introduced this legislation, 17 organizations supporting transparency and openness in government, including some testifying here today, have endorsed the bill and called for swift, bipartisan action by our Committee.

I look forward to reviewing your proposal and to working together on these issues moving forward.