



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on March 3, 2011

Coburn: GAO Report Makes Congress “Look Like Jackasses”

The Government Accountability Office has released a new report that shows 34 areas where the federal government operates hundreds of duplicate programs spread across agencies and bureaucracies. The report also identifies 47 other areas where the government could save money.

GAO prepared its data pursuant to an amendment passed last year, sponsored by Sen. [Tom Coburn](#) (R-Okla.), that required the report as a condition of raising the debt limit.



[According to GAO:](#)

These areas span a range of government missions: agriculture, defense, economic development, energy, general government, health, homeland security, international affairs, and social services. Within and across these missions, this report touches on hundreds of federal programs, affecting virtually all major federal departments and agencies.

In other words, the government wastes money. Coburn calls it a “mother lode of government waste and duplication.”

Hundreds Of Billions Mismanaged

Among the duplicative and wasteful areas [GAO found](#) were 18 food assistance programs that cost \$62.5 billion, 20 homeless programs spread across 20 agencies (\$2.9 billion), 47 job training program in nine agencies (\$18 billion), and 82 teacher-improvement programs involving 10 agencies (\$4 billion). More than a dozen federal agencies regulate food safety, administering nearly three dozen federal food laws.

Even worse, [GAO reported](#), the nation’s bioterrorism defense is worthless. [Coburn notes](#), “At least five departments, eight agencies and more than two dozen presidential appointees oversee \$6.48 billion related to bioterrorism.” [GAO writes](#): “There is no national plan to coordinate federal, state, and local efforts following a bioterror attack, and the United States lacks the technical and operational capabilities required for an adequate response.”

Other waste [Coburn highlights](#) include worthless economic development and surface transportation programs. “The federal government runs 80 economic development programs across 4 agencies at a cost of \$6.5 billion,” [Coburn reports](#), and “The Department of Transportation (DOT) spends \$58 billion on 100 separate programs run by five DOT agencies with 6,000 employees. GAO says the programs have ‘not evolved to reflect current priorities in transportation planning.’”

Irony: Government Teaches “Financial Literacy”

Coburn said the report will make Congress “look like jackasses,” [Politico.com reported](#). By “us” he means the 535 Congressmen and Senators responsible for the taxpayers’ money. The description may also apply to the people who elect them. Coburn added:



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This report confirms what most Americans assume about their government. We are spending trillions of dollars every year and nobody knows what we are doing. The executive branch doesn't know. The congressional branch doesn't know. Nobody knows.

This report also shows we could save taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars every year without cutting services. And, in many cases, smart consolidations will improve service. GAO has identified a mother lode of government waste and duplication that should keep Congress busy for the rest of the year.

[Coburn told](#) reporters that he would "let the report speak for itself. And anybody that says we don't look like fools up here [hasn't] read the report."

Among the ironies of the GAO report is that the federal government actually runs "financial literacy" programs. [The government runs](#) 56 of them across 20 agencies.

As Coburn [put it](#), the advice is "offered by a government with a \$14 trillion debt. Twenty agencies operate 56 programs dedicated to financial literacy but GAO and agencies can't estimate what they cost."



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