

DARRELL E. ISSA, CALIFORNIA
CHAIRMAN

DAN BURTON, INDIANA
JOHN L. MICA, FLORIDA
TODD RUSSELL PLATT, PENNSYLVANIA
MICHAEL R. TURNER, OHIO
PATRICK McHENRY, NORTH CAROLINA
JIM JORDAN, OHIO
JASON CHAFFETZ, UTAH
CONNIE MACK, FLORIDA
TIM WALBERG, MICHIGAN
JAMES LANKFORD, OKLAHOMA
JUSTIN AMASH, MICHIGAN
ANN MARIE BUERKLE, NEW YORK
PAUL A. GOSAR, D.D.S., ARIZONA
RAUL R. LABRADOR, IDAHO
PATRICK MEHRAN, PENNSYLVANIA
SCOTT DESJARLAIS, M.D., TENNESSEE
JOE WALSH, ILLINOIS
TREY GOWDY, SOUTH CAROLINA
DENNIS A. ROSS, FLORIDA
FRANK C. GUINTA, NEW HAMPSHIRE
BLAKE FARENTHOLD, TEXAS
MIKE KELLY, PENNSYLVANIA

LAWRENCE J. BRADY
STAFF DIRECTOR

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
FACSIMILE (202) 225-3974
MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS, MARYLAND
RANKING MINORITY MEMBER

EDOLPHUS TOWNS, NEW YORK
CAROLYN B. MALONEY, NEW YORK
ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DENNIS J. KUCINICH, OHIO
JOHN F. TIERNEY, MASSACHUSETTS
WM. LACY CLAY, MISSOURI
STEPHEN F. LYNCH, MASSACHUSETTS
JIM COOPER, TENNESSEE
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, VIRGINIA
MIKE QUIGLEY, ILLINOIS
DANNY K. DAVIS, ILLINOIS
BRUCE L. BRALEY, IOWA
PETER WELCH, VERMONT
JOHN A. YARMUTH, KENTUCKY
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY, CONNECTICUT
JACKIE SPEIER, CALIFORNIA

Opening Statement of Congressman Gerald E. Connolly "Transparency Through Technology: Evaluating Federal Open-Government Initiatives"

March 11, 2011

Chairman Lankford, I applaud your decision to hold this hearing to focus on an area where the government has demonstrated remarkable improvement over the last couple years. Too often, oversight focuses only on failures, when our role should be to rectify failures while publicizing and encouraging the dissemination of best practices. In the case of federal transparency and technology, consider where we were four short years ago. There was no centralized site for citizens to read about federal spending, projects in their Congressional district, or summaries of investments from major bills like the Recovery Act. Today, citizens can access comprehensive federal spending information at usaspending.gov. As a result of House rules adopted under the previous Congress, all earmark requests have been posted on each member's website for each of the last two years. Finally, thanks to Recovery.gov all Recovery Act investments have been readily accessible to anyone with the internet.

These reforms have been a collaborative effort. Then-Senator Obama and Senator Coburn wrote legislation to consolidate information on federal spending, the result of which was usaspending.gov. The House adopted rules to require public disclosure of earmarks to be posted online. President Obama has undertaken an unprecedented effort to make public his administration's implementation of the Recovery Act as well as information technology and other investments. Finally, nongovernmental organizations have monitored the accuracy of these reporting instruments, and their efforts have identified and suggested ways to improve the reliability of reported data.

As we continue to expand these transparency initiatives, I believe we should demand that we are receiving the greatest possible utility from these programs. Resources dedicated to reporting should lead to greater public understanding and promote accountability. As the government works toward achieving transparency goals, we need to consider any impact that greater reporting costs may have on the infrastructure and educational investments this country needs. During this period of budget uncertainty, these potential trade-offs are real considerations that I hope all of the witnesses will address. Another question is how we report and consider the benefits of federal spending programs. It is as important for our constituents to understand what they are getting from federal investment as it is to understand how much money is being spent, because not all spending has the same impact on our quality of life or economy.

In addition, as we consider the results of different expenditures, it is important to treat all federal expenditures equally, including those buried in the tax code. Tax expenditures account for over \$1 trillion in foregone revenue annually. While tax expenditures differ from other spending in form, in reality, these are simply spending and policy programs administered by the IRS. Of course, many tax expenditures have a valid purpose. But, as a whole, they do not receive the same scrutiny as direct expenditures, even though they have the same impact on the

federal budget. They are not listed on [usaspending.gov](https://www.usaspending.gov), and are not subject to the accountability mechanisms that apply to other forms of spending. The Fiscal Commission recommended that Congress carefully consider the impact of tax expenditures on the budget, and I believe that this committee should look into those opportunities to make sure these IRS-administered spending programs are working for all Americans, and not just those receiving a tax break.

I look forward to working with members of the Subcommittee to ensure that we are working toward this comprehensive presentation of federal expenditures and their impacts.