

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 28, 2011

The Honorable Ben Nelson
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
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Dear Chairman Nelson,

With our national debt nearing \$15 trillion, we must continue to seek cost savings and strive for efficiency throughout the federal government. We, therefore, welcome the \$353.6 million overall reduction in appropriations for the legislative branch contained within the Fiscal Year 2012 Legislative Branch appropriations bill (H.R. 2551) reported out of your Subcommittee. We are, however, concerned that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) is being unfairly singled out with both excessively deep cuts and overly burdensome new mandates that will consume the agency's more limited resources for no apparent benefit.

While we agree GAO must face the same harsh fiscal realities being applied to every other federal agency and program, the cut to the agency's budget represents more than ten percent of the entire reduction proposed within legislative branch spending. While GAO's budget is being slashed, the bill provides a spending increase for the John C. Stennis Center for Public Service Training and Development and Senators Official Personnel and Office Expenses escape serious cuts with a shave of just 3.17 percent.

As noted in the committee report accompanying the bill, "the number of legislatively mandated studies requested by the Congress increased by over 30 percent from fiscal year 2010 to fiscal year 2011." As the nonpartisan investigative arm of Congress, lawmakers from both parties and taxpayers depend on GAO to identify waste, fraud and abuse and to provide independent analysis and recommendations. GAO issues over 1,000 products annually and provides expert testimony at hearings before every congressional committee.

While GAO has stepped up efforts to meet congressional demands, the oversight conducted by Congress itself has declined dramatically. Congressional committees, for example, held 318 fewer hearings in the 111th Congress than in the 110th Congress. There is no question oversight of the federal government, a primary function of the legislative branch, will suffer as a result of this dramatic cut to GAO funding. Your own committee report concedes "it is evident that many of the services provided by the GAO will be curtailed due to reductions in staff and resources."

As we seek solutions to our nation's fiscal crisis, GAO's nonpartisan expertise has never been more valuable. In fiscal year 2009, GAO documented about \$43 billion in financial benefits—a return of \$80 for every dollar spent by GAO. The \$41.7 million cut to GAO's budget could, therefore, result in \$3.3 billion in federal funds that will be lost to waste, fraud, abuse, and inefficiency. We cannot afford that possibility, especially at this time.

The committee report also “directs the GAO to add a cost analysis to every report requested by a member or a committee including but not limited to the number [of] FTEs that were associated with the production of the report, the number of hours required to produce the report, associated travel expenses, and the number of reports previously conducted on the particular issue.” While this information may be interesting, practically it seems to be an overly burdensome mandate that would further consume GAO's dwindling resources without providing any obvious cost benefit. Furthermore, this mandate is not placed on any other legislative branch entity that prepares reports or other documents, such as the Congressional Research Service, the Congressional Budget Office, the Secretary of the Senate, the Clerk of the House, or any House or Senate Committees. We would appreciate an explanation of the rationale for this mandate, including its total cost to enact, how it will impact the completion of other requested reports, how the findings are expected to be utilized, and why GAO has been singled out.

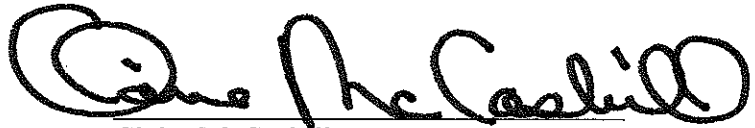
We would like to work with you before this bill comes to the floor to more equitably distribute spending cuts in a manner that will not compromise the work of GAO or Congress.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns. We look forward to working with you.

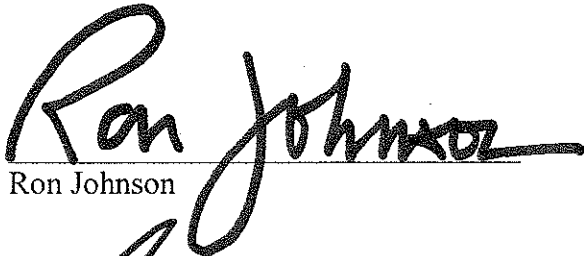
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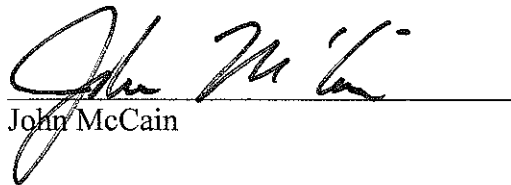
Tom Coburn



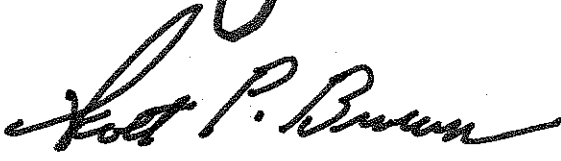
Claire McCaskill



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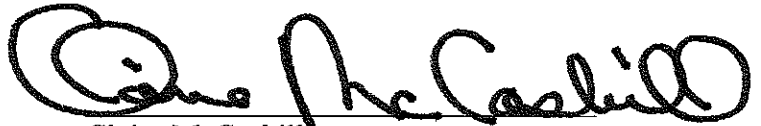
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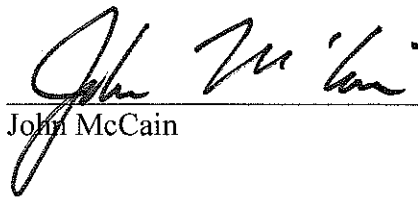
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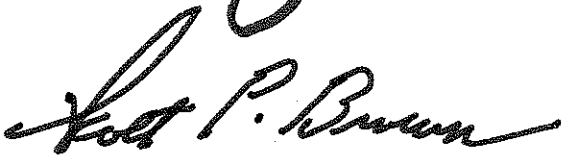
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