

## Government Accountability Office "GAO" Cites Billions of Dollars in Duplication, From Military to Highways

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It is one of the inexplicable facets of government: duplication across agencies and departments at a cost of billions of dollars to taxpayers.

One example: Attempts to develop safety measures against improvised explosive devices has seen two parallel groups in the Marine and Army developing their own technologies. Congress has approved \$17 billion for IED research. The Army has a mine roller costing \$77,000 to \$225,000 per unit. The Marines have built similar anti-IED equipment for \$85,000. There is still disagreement on which one works better.

GAO, the watchdog arm of the federal government, has weighed in with a series of suggestions with the potential to save taxpayers billions of dollars simply by eliminating duplicated efforts by government agencies. Spending cuts are at the core of a pitched battle between President Obama and the GOP-controlled House, overshadowed by the specter of a shutdown of the federal government if no agreement is reached by week's end.

"GAO has identified a mother lode of government waste and duplication that should keep Congress busy for the rest of the year," Sen. Tom Coburn of R-Okla. said.

Covering over 30 areas of government spending where program overlap has led to "unnecessary duplication" the report finds that "reducing or eliminating duplication, overlap or fragmentation could potentially save billions of taxpayer dollars annually and help agencies provide more efficient and effective services." The first of what is slated to be an annual series on duplication in government, the report was directed by an amendment from Sen. Coburn during last year's vote on the debt limit.

In some cases the GAO discovered that "financial benefits ranging from the tens of millions to several billion dollars annually may be realized by addressing that single issue," with the report specifically citing the Department of Defense's military health care system, where "broader restructuring could result in annual savings of up to \$460 million."

**Other areas of duplication:**

- The conflict between various branches of law enforcement, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, over jurisdiction of investigations involving explosives. Coburn's office estimated there was \$35 million spent in duplicated efforts related to the issue in fiscal year 2010.
- In programs to aid the poor, Coburn's office estimated that \$2.9 billion was spent in fiscal year 2009 on duplicated efforts among 20 programs to aid to the nation's homeless population. It also cited \$62.5 billion in food assistance programs, spread across 18 programs in three federal departments.
- Highways, a bane to every road warrior in the nation, are criticized for being governed by more than 100 separate programs. "The current approach to surface transportation was established in 1956 to build the Interstate Highway System but has not evolved to reflect current priorities in transportation planning," the report said. Even as the government strives to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels for the federal fleet, the report noted the feds spent \$1.9 billion in new vehicles in fiscal 2009 and gassed up the existing fleet of 600,000 vehicles to the tune of 963,000 gallons of fuel per day.

The report "shows we could save taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars every year without cutting services," Coburn said in a statement.

Entitled "Opportunities to Reduce Potential Duplication in Government Programs, Save Tax Dollars, and Enhance Revenue," the report [is now available](#) on the GAO's website.

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