



January 30, 2009

## **An Open Letter to Chief Performance Officer Nancy Killefer: Ideas for Promoting Government Transparency, Accountability**

Dear Chief Performance Officer Nancy Killefer:

On behalf of the 362,000 members of the National Taxpayers Union (NTU), I'd like to extend our congratulations on your appointment as Chief Performance Officer. You have the exciting opportunity to help deliver better results for each taxpayer dollar spent by the federal government.

Throughout our 40 years advocating on behalf of taxpayers, NTU has been a recognized champion for government reform. We respectfully offer the following performance priorities for your consideration.

### **Spending Transparency.**

As you may know, NTU was a lead champion of then-Senator Barack Obama's legislation to create a searchable database of federal grants and contracts. The resulting website, [www.USASpending.gov](http://www.USASpending.gov), is an important tool for taxpayers. However, there's room for improvement.

We urge you to focus on improving [www.USASpending.gov](http://www.USASpending.gov) by removing the \$25,000 inclusion threshold, listing all federal expenditures (not just grants and contracts), providing more background information on each line item, and creating a database of federal employee compensation information. The Missouri Accountability Portal ([mapyourtaxes.mo.gov](http://mapyourtaxes.mo.gov)) does all of these things and would be an excellent source of inspiration.

### **Program Reviews.**

The award-winning Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) was launched by the Bush Administration to measure the performance of the federal government, and it has since provided numbers-based reviews for over 1,000 programs. During the campaign, we were disheartened to see then-Senator Obama cite critics who claimed that PART was "insular, arbitrary and is used to promote ideological goals rather than true performance standards." This is demonstrably not the case.

President Obama has said that he would instead have programs measured on "congressional intent and feedback from the people served by government programs." While these are certainly factors to be considered, we caution against allowing the same people who benefit from any program's largesse to determine its performance. There's a reason that teachers don't let students grade their own papers.

We urge you to use proven results – and not hopes and wants – as the basis for government performance reviews. Performance reviews should not be hijacked by Congressional boosters, agency heads, or interest groups to clamor for more funding.

### **Improper Payments.**

Our members are acutely aware of the demands that the federal government makes on their finances, and it is a basic expectation that extracted resources go toward their intended purposes and not to inappropriate uses. Thanks to the directives in the 2002 Improper Payments Information Act, we now know that \$55 billion of taxpayer funds went toward improper payments in 78 programs in fiscal year 2007. Because certain programs susceptible to improper payments have not developed methods for measuring funding gone awry, the actual amounts of squandered taxpayer money could be much higher.

You can help eliminate waste and fraud in federal government programs by knocking down resistance to independent recovery audits, demanding lower improper payment thresholds, and requiring agencies to develop action plans to avoid future mismanagement.

### **Federal Employee AWOL Abuse.**

Taxpayers foot significant costs for the salaries, benefits, and pensions of federal employees, but a report issued by U.S. Senator Tom Coburn in 2008 found an unacceptable level of abuse of leave policies by the federal workforce. Coburn discovered that federal employees were absent without leave (AWOL) from their jobs for 3.5 million hours in 2007. Since 2001, the cumulative number tops 19.6 million hours). A well-performing government cannot tolerate this unacceptable behavior. Basic expectations – like showing up for work – must be met.

We strongly recommend you reduce AWOL abuse among the federal workforce.

### **Bailout Transparency.**

To date, the Executive Branch has provided almost no transparency into how taxpayer money is being spent and the decision-making process behind the financial industry bailout. Congress has also provided little oversight of these initiatives.

We strongly recommend you collect and publish information on all lobbying/business contracts for firms benefiting from bailout aid, all lobbying/business contract details for firms servicing bailout transactions, and any instruments used as collateral for loans through the Federal Reserve.

NTU is at your service as you seek to improve government performance on behalf of the tax-paying public. Please don't hesitate to contact us at (703) 683-5700 if we can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,



Kristina Rasmussen  
Director of Government Affairs