

December 4, 2023

Speaker Mike Johnson
568 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson:

The Project On Government Oversight (POGO) and National Taxpayers Union (NTU) write to urge you to repair and revitalize the federal spending reporting system, USAspending.gov, because it is not up to the task of tracking federal spending. Congress recently passed a measure funding some departments through mid-January and other departments through early February; however, both Congress and the public will ultimately have limited visibility into how and where much of that money is spent. To truly demonstrate fiscal responsibility, Congress must prioritize legislation that aims to ensure federal spending data is readily and fully available.

Congress authorizes agencies to spend trillions of dollars in contracts, loans, grants, and other forms of financial assistance every year. Taxpayers contribute to the federal budget, and they expect a return on their investment. Congress must ensure that appropriated funds can be accounted for to better expose wasteful spending and fight fraud. But there are significant flaws in the system meant to collect data about this federal spending, including data gaps and missing information.¹

In USAspending.gov, award descriptions are frequently duplicative or unclear, and subaward reporting is incomplete and unreliable. The federal government does not track as much information about assistance awards (grants, loans, direct payments, insurance awards, and others) as it collects for contracts. Further, several agencies are simply not required to report their awards through the system. Those that do also present challenges. For instance, a November 7, 2023, Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that 49 out of 152 agencies (about 32%) did not report data when they were required to, or reported inconsistent spending data to USAspending.gov.² And a November 16, 2023, GAO report specifically evaluating subaward data found that 25 percent of grant subawards found in USAspending.gov were likely duplicate records.³

These are just a few of the issues executive branch watchdogs, Congress, and accountability focused organizations have consistently highlighted. As critical as these issues are, they are

¹ Sean Moulton, "Blueprint to Fix Reporting of Federal Spending," Project On Government Oversight, August 2, 2021, <https://www.pogo.org/analysis/blueprint-to-fix-reporting-of-federal-spending>.

² Government Accountability Office, *Federal Spending Transparency: Opportunities to Improve USAspending.gov Data*, GAO-24-106214 (2023), 4, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-106214>.

³ Government Accountability Office, *Federal Spending Transparency: Opportunities Exist to Improve COVID-19 and Other Grant Subaward Data on USAspending.gov*, GAO-24-106237 (2023), 9, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/d24106237.pdf>.

solvable, and fixing them would lead to improved data-driven oversight and effective measurement of the impact federal investments have in our communities.

We've learned from discussions with administration officials over the past decade that USAspending.gov must be fixed by legislation. Trillions of taxpayer dollars are at stake, and the federal government owes it to the American public to diligently pursue accountability measures and proper oversight to ensure greater transparency in federal spending data.

We are eager to work with you to accomplish these necessary reforms. If you have questions or want to discuss further, please contact Brandon Arnold, Executive Vice President at NTU (barnold@ntu.org), or Sean Moulton, senior policy analyst at POGO (sean.moulton@pogo.org).

Sincerely,

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Pete Sepp
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