

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 16, 2019

The Honorable Mick Mulvaney
Director
Office of Management and Budget
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Mulvaney:

We write to you regarding implementation of the requirement in the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA) for the Office of Management and Budget to make publicly available, on a central government-wide website, a list of all federal programs. Successful implementation of the requirement is critical to helping Congress make informed budgetary decisions and ensuring that we are able to identify – and take appropriate steps to eliminate – duplication, fragmentation, and overlap in federal programs.

As you know, GPRAMA requires OMB to issue guidance to agencies for implementing the inventory requirement and further requires agencies identify and provide to OMB for publication information about each program—including how they defined their programs in line with OMB’s guidance.

In October 2014, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that an initial 2013 effort to develop a program inventory had fallen short, and GAO made a number of recommendations to OMB to update relevant guidance, develop a more coherent picture of all federal programs, and better ensure information is useful for decision-makers.¹ Specifically, GAO recommended that OMB:

- 1) Revise relevant guidance to direct agencies to (a) collaborate with each other in defining and identifying programs that contribute to common outcomes; (b) consult with relevant congressional committees and stakeholders on their program definition approach and identified programs when developing or updating their inventories; and (c) identify in their inventories the performance goal(s) to which each program contributes;
- 2) Revise relevant guidance to provide a time frame for what constitutes “persistent over time” that agencies can use as a decision rule for whether to include short-term efforts as programs;
- 3) Define plans for when additional agencies will be required to develop program inventories;

¹ GAO, *Government Efficiency and Effectiveness: Inconsistent Definitions and Information Limit the Usefulness of Federal Program Inventories*, GAO-15-83 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 31, 2014).

- 4) Include tax expenditures in the federal program inventory effort by designating tax expenditure as a program type in relevant guidance, and develop, in coordination with the Secretary of the Treasury, a tax expenditure inventory that identifies each tax expenditure and provides a description of how the tax expenditure is defined, its purpose, and related performance and budget information; and
- 5) Ensure, during OMB reviews of inventories, that agencies consistently identify, as applicable, the strategic goals, strategic objectives, agency priority goals, and cross-agency priority goals each program supports.

In September 2017, GAO made two additional recommendations that could further ensure the usefulness of the inventory.² Specifically, GAO recommended that OMB:

- 1) Revise and publicly issue guidance—through an update to its Circular No. A-11, a memorandum, or other means—to provide time frames and associated milestones for implementing the federal program inventory; and
- 2) Consider—as OMB determines its strategy for resumed implementation of the federal program inventory—using a systematic approach, such as the information architecture framework, to help ensure that GPRAMA requirements and GAO’s past recommendations for the inventory are addressed.

GAO highlighted these recommendations in its most recent open priority recommendations letter, which noted that, as of March 2019, OMB staff had not updated information on actions taken to address these recommendations.³

To ensure OMB is taking the necessary steps to ensure the effective implementation of federal program inventory requirements and that Congress has the data it needs to make timely and informed budgetary decisions, we request your response to the following:

- 1) OMB recently updated its Circular A-11 guidance related to a government-wide federal program inventory. Please describe your current timeline and strategy for addressing the statutory directive for OMB to make available a list of all federal programs identified by agencies, including how the updated guidance will allow OMB to implement this requirement, and how this strategy differs from previous attempts to develop a federal program inventory.
- 2) OMB has previously said it was delaying updates to the program inventory in order to merge that effort with efforts to implement the DATA Act. However, in over six years since the initial program inventory was published in May 2013, there have been no updates. Why is this effort taking so long?
- 3) What is the status of implementing GAO’s recommendations included in GAO-15-83? When does OMB plan to complete the implementation?

² GAO, *Managing for Results: Further Progress Made in Implementing the GPRA Modernization Act, but Additional Actions Needed to Address Pressing Governance Challenges*, [GAO-17-775](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sep. 29, 2017).

³ GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: Office of Management and Budget*, [GAO-19-323SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 10, 2019).

- 4) What is the status of implementing GAO's recommendations included in GAO-17-775? When does OMB plan to complete the implementation?
- 5) In September 2017, GAO issued a report identifying information architecture as a potential approach for development of a federal program inventory.⁴ What principles and practices of information architecture has OMB incorporated in its approach to developing a federal program inventory?

Ensuring successful implementation of the inventory requirement is a key component of ongoing efforts to improve the federal budgeting process, including by better incorporating performance metrics into budget decision-making and eliminating duplication, fragmentation, and overlap in federal programs.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this important matter. Please provide written responses to this request by no later than July 31, 2019. If you have any questions about this request, please have your staff contact Ian Macbeth on the Senate Budget Committee staff at 202-224-0642.

Sincerely,



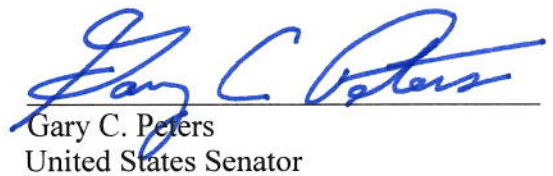
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⁴ GAO, *Federal Programs: Information Architecture Offers a Potential Approach for Development of an Inventory*, GAO-17-739 (Washington, D.C.: Sep. 28, 2017).



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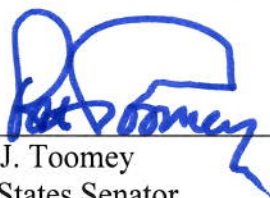
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