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Sen. Carper Releases Administration Response Regarding Cuts to Fund Promoting Transparency and Accountability for Federal Government

WASHINGTON – Today, Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.), Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, released the Administration's response to a letter he sent last month, regarding his concerns about the deep cuts to the Electronic Government (E-Gov) Fund enacted last week as part of the Fiscal Year 2011 funding agreement.

In the Administration's response, Federal Chief Information Officer Vivek Kundra indicated that as a result of the reduced funding level, most of the E-Government (E-Gov) funded websites – including USAspending.gov, the IT Dashboard, Data.gov and Performance.gov – will continue to operate, but will forgo further improvements or developments. Due to budget constraints, however, the Administration determined to terminate FedSpace, an integrated suite of collaboration tools for federal staff to support government programs, and Citizen Services Dashboard, a website designed to display customer service data on top federal services and provide information on service quality (such as timeliness, accuracy, ease), and customer satisfaction.

"I appreciate Mr. Kundra's swift response and attention to this important matter," said Sen. Carper. "It is a prudent decision to keep as many of the E-Gov Fund websites operational as possible. These websites are an important resource and a critical part of the effort to make the government more open and transparent, while at the same time, cutting wasteful and duplicative spending throughout federal agencies.

"In a recent report detailing potential sources of duplication and overlap in

government, the Government Accountability Office cited data center consolidation as an effective way the federal government could streamline its operations and save taxpayer money. The E-Gov Fund not only pays to operate these important websites, but also to help agencies manage and consolidate these data centers.

"At a time when government needs to look in every nook and cranny to cut spending and find savings, we can't afford to end a powerful tool like the E-Gov Fund. One possible solution may be to identify opportunities for us to consolidate the functionality of these sites to not only cut costs, but make them more user-friendly. I will continue to monitor the work of the E-Gov fund and work with my colleagues in Congress and the Administration to find the necessary resources for proven methods – like the E-Gov Fund -- that make the government more transparent and cost-effective."

In his April 21 letter to Mr. Kundra, Sen. Carper noted that, while the E-Gov Fund pays for a number of important public websites and initiatives – such as USAspending.gov, Data.gov, and the IT Dashboard – that have been credited with promoting transparency of government information, program performance, and federal spending, the fund only received \$8 million of the \$34 million the President requested for its operations in the funding bill for Fiscal Year 2011 that was passed last month.

Sen. Carper expressed apprehension about the impact of these cuts on the E-Gov Fund's ability to continue its progress in making government more open and transparent, as well as harming efforts to cut wasteful and duplicative spending in the federal government. He also asked Mr. Kundra to provide additional information about the impact of the cuts to the E-Gov Fund's efforts to enhance transparency and ensure the effective use of taxpayer funds.

A copy of Federal Chief Information Officer Vivek Kundra's response to Sen. Carper follows:

May 24, 2011

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Carper:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the transparency and information technology management initiatives funded through the Electronic Government (E-Gov) Fund. Projects funded by the E-Gov Fund serve to continuously improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency of Federal operations, as well as increase citizen participation through the use of information technology (IT). For example, the IT Dashboard has helped identify at risk Federal IT projects and rigorously review them. As a result of this work, we reduced planned IT budgets by \$3 billion in 2010 alone. As you know, for FY 2011 the Administration requested a total of \$35 million for the E-Gov Fund, but received an appropriation of only \$8 million. As a result we have revisited our plans for the Fund for FY 2011 and altered the scope of several projects. While we believe that we can make progress on several important initiatives, several projects will experience a sharp decline given the limited amount of funding. No project will go unaffected.

We will maintain important initiatives such as USASpending.gov, the IT Dashboard, Data.gov and Performance.gov at their current levels of operation. As a result of the reduced funding, there will be no enhancements or other development to address needs for improvement. While we will continue to work with agencies to improve the quality of data on the IT Dashboard and USASpending, we will not be able to fund development efforts to improve data accuracy through automation and streamlining, nor will funds be available to increase transparency. For example, we have postponed plans for IT Dashboard enhancements that would have allowed better integration with agency systems for investment monitoring. Limited funding will increase delays in getting new datasets posted to Data.gov, and will limit our ability to stand up new communities of interest on that platform.¹ Further, the reduced level of appropriations will impact the ongoing implementation of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA). For example, there will be a marked reduction in technical support provided to the contractor and grantee communities who enter data on Federal spending into the FFATA portal.

For detailed information on the specific projects funded through the E-Gov Fund, please refer to the FY 2010 E-Government Act Report submitted on March 30, 2011.² Section 1 of the report summarizes the important activities and accomplishments of Federal IT projects under the E-Gov Fund over the last year.

Going forward, we have decided to terminate the following projects given the reduced

funding level:

FedSpace: Platform for Federal staff and knowledge management to support government programs. It provided a space for collaboration among communities, allowing users to explore, discuss, meet others in the same field, and develop the data and apps in a common forum. This also includes a common library for resource materials across the Federal Government. The project is currently in beta testing.

Citizen Services Dashboard: Website providing relevant data on top Federal citizen-facing services including data on service quality (such as timeliness, accuracy, ease), and customer satisfaction. Additional potential features include the ability to gather feedback on top citizen-facing services and the ability to use that data to inform decision making and make improvements.

We have requested \$34 million for the E-Gov Fund in FY 2012, and if we receive that level of funding, we will revisit each of these initiatives to the appropriate path forward. We appreciate your interest in efforts to increase transparency and citizen participation in the Federal Government through the use of information technology and would be happy to provide your office a briefing on the E-Gov Fund. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Vivek Kundra
Federal Chief Information Officer

¹Communities allow users to explore, discuss, meet others in the same field, and develop the data and apps in a common forum. Current communities include Open Data, SemanticWeb, Health, and Law:

<http://www.data.gov/communities>.

² FY 2010 Report to Congress on the Implementation of The E-Government Act of 2002:

http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/ego_v_docs/FY10_E-Go_v_Act_Report.pdf.

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