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Contact: House Oversight and Government Reform Press Office (202) 225-5051

Chairman Towns Calls on Vice President Biden to Convene IT Roundtable, Establish Uniform Approach to Track Stimulus Funds

Washington, D.C. – U.S Representative Edolphus "Ed" Towns (D-NY), the Chairman of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, today announced that he is calling on Vice President Joseph R. Biden to convene a high-tech roundtable of information technology (IT) leaders to develop a uniform approach to track and account for ARRA funding. Chairman Towns is concerned that Recovery.gov, the Administration's primary transparency tool, is not yet capable of tracking funding from each federal, state, and local agency that receives stimulus funds.

Chairman Towns urged the Vice President, who was tapped by President Obama to coordinate oversight of stimulus spending under ARRA, to form the IT roundtable immediately and begin to identify business models, best practices, proposals, and solutions that can be used to meet the transparency goals of the Recovery Act.

During a full committee hearing today titled, "Preventing Stimulus Waste and Fraud: Who Are the Watchdogs?", Chairman Towns said:

"I have major concerns about the Administration's primary transparency tool, Recovery.gov. The fact of the matter is that Recovery.gov is currently not a useable database¦ I will be sending a letter to the Vice President, urging him to convene a high-tech roundtable of federal, state and private sector IT leaders to come up with a uniform approach to track and account for Recovery Act funding. We need to come up with a workable solution to what information is needed, in what form that information is needed and how that information should be displayed."

Full text of the letter:

March 19, 2009

The Honorable Joe Biden
 Vice President
 1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
 Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Vice President:

I understand the President has asked you to play a leading role in coordinating oversight of stimulus spending under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Accordingly, I would like to bring to your attention an issue that should be resolved as soon as possible to facilitate effective oversight of this important program.

As you know, an unprecedented level of federal funds will flow rapidly to numerous federal agencies and entities which will then channel the funds through existing federal programs to states and institutions. In order for this complicated recovery effort to work, taxpayer money must be spent effectively and efficiency. That means there must be a well-coordinated effort to conduct oversight and implement controls at all levels of government to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse. For my part, I have directed the Committee to aggressively oversee all matters relating to implementation of the Recovery Act.

Although transparency and accountability is a hallmark of the Recovery Act, great emphasis should be placed on openness, flexibility, and innovation. We must tap America's ingenuity and explore ways to better leverage technology in reshaping our economy. While portions of the Recovery Act will be used for various technology initiatives, such as Health Information Technology and Smart Grid Technology, we need to further explore the use of information technology for optimal administration and management of all stimulus-related programs and activities.

In that regard, I have major concerns about the Administration's primary transparency tool, Recovery.gov.   At this point, Recovery.gov is not a useable database. I fully recognize the difficulty confronting the Administration in administering the economic stimulus program, including the need to track funding from each federal, state, and local agency involved, and the need to determine how many jobs have been created. In order for this to work there must be uniform standards for the collection and reporting of this information.

Therefore, I request that you convene a high-tech roundtable of federal, state, and private sector leaders in the field of information technology to identify business models, best practices, proposals, and solutions for harnessing the power of technology to meet the goals of the Recovery Act. This group could establish a uniform approach to track and account for Recovery Act funding, including a workable system for determining what information is needed, in what form that information is needed, and how that information should be reported and displayed. The goal should be to develop a centralized, searchable system for storing and tracking accurate stimulus information.

Please be assured that this Committee looks forward to assisting oversight of this critically important program as we go forward.

Sincerely,
 Edolphus Towns
 Chairman

Documents and Links

- [Letter to Vice President Joseph R. Biden](#)