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THE INTRODUCTION OF THE PROGRAM ASSESSMENT AND RESULTS ACT

HON. TODD RUSSELL PLATTS

of pennsylvania

in the house of representatives

Tuesday, January 4, 2005

Mr. PLATTS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce important legislation to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our Federal government--the Program Assessment and Results Act, or PAR Act, which establishes a statutory requirement that the Office of Management and Budget, OMB, working with agencies, review and assess the effectiveness of each federal program at least once every five years. As elected representatives of the people, we have a responsibility to use taxpayer dollars in the most effective way possible. As Congress formulates its budget each year, we must have the best information available to us on which to base our spending decisions.

The Government Performance and Results Act, or GPRA, has laid a solid foundation for agencies working with Congress to set strategic goals and begin to utilize performance based information. Building on GPRA, we must take the next step toward reforming the way the government conducts business.

One of the key aspects of any reform effort is to change the prevailing mindset. If our emphasis is on creating a more results-oriented government, then we must change our mindset from outputs to outcomes. It takes time to achieve this type of cultural shift. The reforms of the early 1990s--the CFO Act, GPRA and others--are just beginning to work as intended.

Prior efforts to make the federal government more effective--the Hoover Commission, Zero-Based Budgeting, the Planning-Programming-Budgeting System, Reinventing Government--have come and gone with little lasting effect. Federal managers have learned that if they wait, each new administration is likely to attempt yet another broad based reform. From a management standpoint, it is difficult in that type of environment to make long-range plans; and it's next to impossible to achieve the kind of cultural shift needed to reform the management of the federal government.

By enacting GPRA, Congress put government reform in statute. Because of this statutory framework, federal managers now look at the requirements for performance plans and strategic plans required by GPRA and know they are here to stay regardless of changes in Congress and the Executive Branch. When the first agency strategic plans fell short of expectations, the reform effort was not scrapped--it was improved. Now, ten years after GPRA was enacted, we have strategic plans that are more in line with what was envisioned. We have seen slow, sustainable improvement.

GPRA requires that agencies focus attention on program evaluation as one of six aspects of their strategic plans. Unfortunately, according to a 2004 report from the Government Accountability Office, program evaluation is the one area where departments consistently come up short. Not only have agencies failed to comply with this requirement, the valuable information that stands to be gained from these evaluations is not culled, coordinated, or presented in a useful way.

We have seen great progress in meeting other objectives set out in GPRA. In 1997, only 76 percent of federal managers had developed performance measures. By 2003, that number had risen to 89 percent. It is now time to strengthen GPRA to address the shortfall we see in program evaluation.

By creating and using the Program Assessment Rating Tool, or PART, this Administration has gone a step beyond the strategic plans required by GPRA and implemented a system for evaluating the performance and results of federal programs. The next logical step is to codify the requirement for a coordinated evidence-based review of programs.

The PAR Act does not seek to codify the use of the PART specifically. Rather, this bill amends GPRA by establishing a requirement for program reviews. Specifically, the Office of Management and Budget, working with agency heads, would be required under the Act to review each program activity at least once every five years. By requiring OMB to coordinate this effort with the agencies we will take a great step forward in making the federal government more efficient and results oriented.

Information gleaned from these program reviews needs to be useful across the board to all stakeholders. Members of Congress, taxpayers, federal managers and the Executive Branch need to know if programs are being managed effectively and if they are achieving the desired result. Further, this legislation, once enacted, will allow us to compare data among different agencies, to see how different programs with similar goals are achieving results. Members of Congress can use the information to make informed budget decisions and conduct more effective oversight. It will help the taxpayers see what they are getting for their money. Most important, federal managers will use the information to improve the way they manage programs. The results will be a more effective and efficient government for the good of all Americans.

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