

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks on Signing an Executive Order to Cut Waste and Promote Efficient Spending Across the Federal Government

November 9, 2011

Well, from the day I took office, one of the commitments that I made to the American people was that we would do a better job here in Washington in rooting out wasteful spending. At a time when families have had to cut back, have had to make some tough decisions about getting rid of things that they don't need in order to make the investments that they do, we thought that it was entirely appropriate for our governments and our agencies to try to root out waste, large and small, in a systematic way.

Obviously, this is even more important given the deficits that we've inherited and that have grown as a consequence of this recession. This makes these efforts even more imperative.

Now, this does mean making some tough choices. It means cutting some programs that I think are worthy but we may not be able to afford right now. A lot of the action is in Congress and legislative and budget. I know the joint committee on trying to reduce our deficits are engaged in a very difficult conversation right now, and we want to encourage them to complete their work. But in the meantime, we don't need to wait for Congress in order to do something about wasteful spending that's out there.

Cutting waste, making Government more efficient, is something that leaders in both parties have worked on, from Senator Tom Coburn, a Republican, to Democrat Claire McCaskill. We haven't seen as much action out of Congress as we'd like, and that's why we launched on our own initiative the campaign to cut waste—not just to cut spending, but to make Government work better for the American people.

For example, we've identified thousands of Government buildings that we don't need. Some have sat empty for years. So we're getting rid of those properties, and that's going to save the American people billions of dollars.

As part of this campaign, I've also asked Federal employees to do their part and share their ideas on making Government more efficient and more effective. And two of them are here today, so I want to introduce them.

Roger Rhoads works at the Department of Commerce. Raise your hand, Roger. There's Roger. He found a way to save the Department almost \$2 million a year on its cell phone bills. And I'm sure that there probably is some consumers out there that would like to talk to him and find out what they can save on their cell phone bills.

Celeste Steele is here. Celeste, raise your hand. Celeste works at the Department of Homeland Security, and she's helping save taxpayers tens of millions of dollars by changing the way the Department buys goods and services.

So we've received nearly 20,000 suggestions from Federal employees. I just completed a videoconference with the four finalists of our annual SAVE Award—20,000 submissions of ideas from Federal employees about how we can reduce waste, eliminate duplication, redundancy, paperwork. And these four finalists have some terrific ideas: putting books that have been ordered every year online instead of continuing to incur the shipping costs, to having

a tool library over at NASA so that instead of buying very specialized tools over and over again for different projects, we actually keep an inventory of those tools.

In addition to soliciting ideas from Federal employees, I've also tasked Vice President Biden to work with the Secretaries of all our agencies to identify some systemic areas of potential improvement—travel, transportation, IT services—all of which we know can save us potentially billions of dollars. And in September, Joe convened the Cabinet and has really pushed them hard in finding savings across all our agencies.

So today I'm signing an Executive order that builds on their good work. It directs agencies to slash spending in each of these areas—travel, printing, IT—because we believe that we can get better results for less using technology. And overall, spending in the areas covered by this Executive order will shrink by 20 percent. And members of my Cabinet will keep reporting on their progress to Joe Biden and ultimately to me. And we're going to hold them accountable for meeting this 20-percent reduction goal.

These are important steps that can save taxpayers billions of dollars over the next several years. It doesn't replace the importance of the work that Congress needs to do in coming up with a balanced, bold plan to reduce our deficit, but it indicates once again that there are things that we can do right now that will actually deliver better Government more efficiently, more consumer friendly, for less money. And we're going to keep on finding every possible way that we can do that even if Congress is not acting.

So with that, I'm going to sign the bill, but I want to thank all the officials who are behind me here today for taking this project so seriously.

[At this point, the President signed the Executive order.]

There you go. Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:40 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Securing Americans Value and Efficiency (SAVE) Award finalists Matthew W. Ritsko, Eileen M. Hearty, Kevin Korzeniewski, and Faith Stanfield.

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