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Lankford ‘Optimistic’ Trump Will Tackle Wasteful Gov’t Spending

Lauretta Brown

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Advocates against government waste gathered on Capitol Hill Wednesday to discuss ways in which President-elect Donald Trump could cut wasteful spending, with some expressing cautious optimism that he may take positive steps once in the Oval Office.

Sen. James Lankford (R-Okla.), who released his second “Federal Fumbles” report earlier this week, citing examples of the misuse of taxpayer dollars through government spending and regulation, was joined by representatives of Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW), the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute.

Lankford’s report highlighted examples of waste and mismanagement such as a regulation requiring convenience stores that accept food stamps to increase their offerings of “healthy” foods (such as tofu and catfish), more than \$3 million spent on a soap opera to raise awareness about AIDS, and a university spending taxpayer dollars for custom snuggies.

“How do I anticipate President Donald Trump will address this?” Lankford asked. “That’s the great unknown because this wasn’t discussed during the presidential debates and because it wasn’t really discussed by either party during the campaign trail.”

However, he noted that a “first optimistic piece,” from the Trump transition team was that “when they’re going through the agencies in the transition right now, one of the things the transition team is doing is they’re looking at the agency top to bottom to see what positions don’t need to be there and what departments don’t need to be there.”

“That’s a significant amount of work,” he emphasized, “but if you start in the executive branch looking at those agencies and saying, ‘we can’t afford to do this,’ that gives me some optimism that they’re going to take on some of the other issues as well.”

CAGW president Thomas Schatz highlighted areas of Lankford’s report which he said the Trump administration should address.

He said the report “exposes numerous examples of the government’s technological ineptitude.”

These included the fact that “more than \$55 billion or 68 percent of the \$80 billion spent annually on information technology goes to support legacy systems some of which are more than 50 years old,” Schatz said.

“The Department of Defense still uses eight inch floppy disks to run a computer system that controls nuclear weapons. The Treasury Department uses a 1960s computer code to catalog taxpayers. The Office of Management and Budget processes federal retirement benefits on paper and has not been able to use electronic systems despite 30 years of trying to do so,” he said.

“The Government Accountability Office since 2011 has made more than 800 recommendations for agencies to update their technology, only 32 percent of them have been implemented by the end of October 2015,” Schatz added.

“Given the billions of dollars wasted on failed IT projects, fixing these problems as soon as possible should be a high priority for the incoming Trump administration.”

Schatz also cited a promise the president-elect made in his RNC acceptance speech – “we are going to ask every Department Head in government to provide a list of wasteful spending projects that we can eliminate in my first 100 days.”

“A good place to start,” he said, would be to look at Lankford’s “Federal Fumbles” report, CAGW’s “Congressional Pig Book” and “Prime Cuts” reports, as well as recommendations from the Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation and others.

Chris Edwards, editor of DownsizingGovernment.org at the Cato Institute, quoted Trump’s remark in a February debate, “Waste fraud and abuse all over the place, look at what’s happening in every agency, waste, fraud, and abuse. We will cut so much your head will spin.”

“Trump didn’t say much about spending in the campaign trail,” Edwards commented, “but what he did say was quite entertaining. I hope he follows through on it.”

“I think Trump will try to follow through on some of the sort of business-oriented reforms like making it easier to fire federal workers, which would be a good step forward,” Edwards said.