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Senator Thompson Unveils Agency Performance Report Grades

Says Most Annual Performance Reports "Don't Tell Us What Agencies Are Doing or How Well They're Doing It"

Washington, DC - Senate Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Fred Thompson (R-TN) today released grades for the Fiscal Year 1999 Performance Reports submitted by the 24 largest federal agencies under the Government Performance and Results Act (the Results Act).

"These Performance Reports are supposed to inform Congress and the public about what agencies are doing and how well they're doing it. Most of them don't do that," Senator Thompson said. "Unfortunately, in many cases, agencies did not have goals for things that we assumed were in their primary mission. For example, reducing the availability of illegal drugs was clearly a part of the mission of seven different agencies, yet none of them had a specific performance target for actually doing that."

The grades issued by Thompson are based on analysis of the 24 FY 1999 Performance Reports conducted for the Committee by the General Accounting Office, the Congressional Research Service, and agency IGs of the 24 largest agencies. The Mercatus Center, at George Mason University, also conducted an analysis of the Performance Reports for the same 24 agencies.

"Overall, the grades and underlying assessments show how far we still need to go to get results from the Results Act," Thompson said. "We graded the reports on a curve. Even so, we could only grade four of the 24 agencies above a 'C'. On the other hand, seven agencies got 'D's or 'F's."

Of the agencies, Thompson said Transportation, Social Security Administration, and Veterans Administration clearly demonstrate a commitment to results-oriented performance and accountability. Other agencies--such as Energy and Justice--offer no evidence of taking performance-based accountability seriously. Thompson pointed to GAO's analysis of Energy's Report, which stated, "[W]e could not determine what the Department was trying to accomplish or how it planned to get there." With respect to Justice, GAO said, "Overall, DOJ's progress in achieving desirable program outcomes cannot be readily determined since the agency has yet to develop performance goals and measures that can objectively capture and describe performance results." The grades focus on three criteria. (1) Performance: What do the reports tell us about how well agencies deliver key performance results our citizens expect of them? (2) Management: What do they tell us about progress in resolving major management problems that waste billions of tax dollars and impede performance? (3) Usefulness: How useful are the Reports in understanding what agencies are accomplishing?

To review an agency's performance, the Committee identified key goals that related to the primary mission of the agency and had GAO review whether the reports demonstrated progress toward achieving them. There were 97 key goals in all for the 24 agencies. The reports demonstrated definite progress toward achieving only 13 of these key results, and some progress toward achieving another 26. The reports demonstrated a clear lack of progress for another four. But for 54 key goals, GAO was unable to determine whether or not an agency was making progress.

According to the Governmental Affairs Committee analysis, agency performance reports demonstrate few results in areas of direct and primary federal responsibility such as: fairly and effectively administering federal tax and immigration laws; preventing fraud and waste in the use of taxpayer dollars; and providing timely and accurate services to the public.

Governmental Affairs Committee's Assessment of FY 1999 Annual Performance Reports

Agency	Grade
Department of Transportation	A
Department of Veterans Affairs	A
Department of Education	B
Social Security Administration	B
Department of Housing and Urban Development	C
Department of the Interior	C
Department of Labor	C
National Science Foundation	C
Department of Defense	C-
Environmental Protection Agency	C-
Federal Emergency Management Agency	C-
General Services Administration	C-
Department of Health and Human Services	C-
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	C-
Nuclear Regulatory Commission	C-
Department of the Treasury	C-
U.S. Agency for International Development	C-
Department of Agriculture	D
Office of Personnel Management	D
Small Business Administration	D
Department of Commerce	F
Department of Energy	F
Department of Justice	F
Department of State	F

These grades are based on reviews of the FY 1999 Performance Reports by the Mercatus Center, the General Accounting Office, the Congressional Research Service, agency Inspectors General, and the Committee's own staff analyses. The principal criteria are (1) the extent to which the Reports demonstrate whether agencies are achieving mission results; (2) the extent to which the Reports demonstrate commitment and progress to resolve major management challenges; and (3) the overall usefulness of the Reports.