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## **BREAKING NEWS**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Devaney, in Final Column, Urges Taxpayers to Press Data Reforms**

WASHINGTON—Recovery Board Chairman Earl E. Devaney, who is retiring on December 31 after 41 years in government, described the accomplishments of the Board and the challenges that lie ahead in a farewell column to taxpayers.

“Government, quite simply, is an institution of both frustration and opportunity,” Devaney wrote in his final Chairman’s Corner column. “The bureaucracy moves slowly, painfully so, frustrating even the best ideas.”

But, he said, “persistence and good planning can create opportunities for positive change.” He said that the Board had “maximized our opportunities, shining the spotlight on Recovery Act spending and developing a unique oversight program designed to prevent misuse of funds by recipients.”

Devaney said that taxpayers need to act if the Board’s successes are to be implemented across government. He concluded: “I guess it all depends on how badly you want to know how the government spends your money -- more than \$3.5 trillion in fiscal 2011.”

*The text of the Chairman’s Corner, posted on Recovery.gov, follows:*

In a few days, my 41-year career in government ends. Through this column, the Recovery Board has given me a platform from which to address the need for more transparency and accountability in government, an issue of great importance to all Americans. In this farewell column, I am providing a status report on our work and what might lie ahead.

Government, quite simply, is an institution of both frustration and opportunity. The bureaucracy moves slowly, painfully so, frustrating even the best ideas. But persistence and good planning can create opportunities for positive change. In my nearly three years as Chairman of the Recovery Board, we have maximized our opportunities, shining the spotlight on Recovery Act spending and developing a unique oversight program designed to prevent misuse of funds by recipients.

With much appreciation to the 12 other Inspectors General on the Recovery Board and our staff, I can say with certainty that we have accomplished much in our short time.

First, we built [FederalReporting.gov](http://FederalReporting.gov) and [Recovery.gov](http://Recovery.gov) to collect and display data from recipients of Recovery Act funds. Taxpayers can easily find out what projects have been funded in their areas by simply typing their zip codes into [Recovery.gov](http://Recovery.gov).

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The Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board was created by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to oversee the expenditure of Recovery funds and bring transparency and accountability to the process. The Board consists of a chairman, Earl E. Devaney, and 12 federal Inspectors General. The Board runs the [Recovery.gov](http://Recovery.gov) website that provides information on the Recovery initiatives and spearheads an accountability effort that involves both federal and state investigators and enforcement officials.

Interactive maps and other innovative features allow for easy access to information on recipients and funding in states, counties and local communities. We released iPhone and iPad applications, giving those on the run easy access to maps and data on Recovery-funded projects. The Board's staff also developed a vigorous social media program with a Recovery blog and a presence on Facebook and Twitter.

From an oversight perspective, the Board created a strong data analysis program designed to prevent tax dollars from being stolen. In November 2009, we launched the Recovery Operations Center, which is staffed by analysts who use sophisticated software tools, government databases and open source information to search for questionable connections and fraud in the Recovery program. The idea: Shift the focus from detecting fraud to preventing and interrupting fraud.

Based on our analysis, federal agencies have cancelled contracts worth millions of dollars. Other findings have been forwarded to Inspectors General for audits and investigations.

The oversight program, we believe, has been a principal reason why fraud in the \$840 billion Recovery program has been quite low. All told, nearly 275,000 award reports have been filed by recipients of Recovery funds since October 2009. To date, there have been 298 criminal convictions and \$7.2 million in Recovery losses, according to our latest figures.

Part of oversight, of course, is making sure that recipients comply with the law and publicly submit reports on their spending each quarter. When we started collecting data, recipients failed to submit 4,359 reports. This was unacceptable so the Board created what we describe internally as a "Wall of Shame," a listing of those non-compliers on Recovery.gov. The big problem immediately became a little problem: Now, the number of missing reports is down to less than 375 each quarter.

Always — always — we were prudent with taxpayer dollars. In one instance alone, the Board saved an estimated \$750,000 when Recovery.gov was moved to a cloud computing infrastructure. At the close of the fiscal year this past September 30, we returned \$2.9 million in unused funds to the U.S. Treasury.

Looking back, I believe we served the public well. But as I prepare to write an end to my government career, I know more needs to be done. To give taxpayers the transparency and accountability they deserve, the Board's programs need to be expanded throughout the federal government. Spending data for almost all government spending — except, of course, classified programs — should be posted publicly and in a timely manner.

Earlier this year, in a white paper titled "Accountability and Transparency, Template for the Future," which is posted on Recovery.gov, I laid out my plan. It's really quite simple and, by the way, would save taxpayers tens of millions of dollars annually.

First off, our experience shows that spending data can be collected directly from recipients of federal funds with a high degree of accuracy. Under my plan, the Board would be reconstituted to oversee the collection and display of all federal spending. The Recovery Operations Center would be used as the principal oversight arm in this new system.

There is bi-partisan legislation now in the Congress — it's called the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act, or DATA Act — that could accomplish this mission. But the reform bill faces an uphill battle, primarily because some in the bureaucracy prefer the status quo — a hodgepodge of data collection and display sites that, frankly, makes no sense at all unless you believe your government should confuse you.

I stand ready in retirement to do all that I can to help see this reform realized, including testifying before Congress about the merits of the DATA Act. But, really, in the end, it's up to the taxpayers — meaning you, the readers — to force change in your government. I guess it all depends on how badly you want to know how the government spends your money — more than \$3.5 trillion in fiscal 2011.

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