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Statement of Representative Elijah E. Cummings

Ranking Member, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Before the Committee on House Administration

November 30, 2011

Chairman Lungren and Ranking Member Brady, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Let me start by expressing my strong support for Chairman Issa's statements regarding the Oversight Committee and the funding we need to fully accomplish our goals on behalf of the American taxpayers.

We are different than other House committees in the extent to which our work in shining a light on waste, fraud, and abuse results in significant savings to the taxpayer without the need for legislation. As previous Chairmen and Ranking Members have testified on numerous occasions before your Committee, investing a dollar in prevention can often result in savings that are many times greater.

In addition, although our legislative jurisdiction is smaller than other committees, it includes key transparency initiatives that make government work better for the American people. So far this year, our Committee has passed bipartisan bills to improve the functioning of the Government Accountability Office, ensure that records are preserved electronically under the Presidential Records Act, and close loopholes in the Federal Advisory Committee Act. We are also dealing with legislation to address the financial challenges faced by the Postal Service, an issue that affects every single American.

On the question at issue today, we were forced to make some difficult choices last year when we faced the 5% cut. We had to let staff go, and we had to do more with less. As I said when I appeared before you earlier this year, we recognized that our nation was facing difficult circumstances, and we were willing to do our part to tighten our belts. However, facing an additional 6% cut next year will be very difficult, especially in the minority.

As Ranking Member, I have tried to use part of my resources to bring additional focus to issues I believe are not being addressed adequately. For example, economists have called the housing and foreclosure crisis "ground zero" for the nation's economy and jobs. But as Chairman Issa has heard me say many times, I do not believe our Committee has done enough to address it. And, for the record, I do not believe the Administration has done enough either.

As a result, I have used my position and resources to bring greater focus to this issue, with many positive results. For example, I hosted a forum on illegal foreclosures against U.S. servicemembers. I organized meetings with the head of the Federal Housing Finance Agency to help develop refinancing options. I pressed mortgage banks to turn over documents relating to inflated fees and improper foreclosures. And I have written dozens of letters to federal agencies urging them—and sometimes convincing them—to extend forbearance programs, investigate reports of abuse, and be more transparent about their actions.

Although I have not always been successful, I am certain that no other Member of Congress works harder than I do to protect the interests and rights of American homeowners. My concern with an additional 6% cut is that I will need to curtail at least some of this critical oversight work.

With that, I stand ready to answer your questions.