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PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST: BUILDING TRUST IN GOVERNMENT THROUGH CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
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PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST: BUILDING TRUST IN GOVERNMENT THROUGH CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

THURSDAY, JUNE 23 2022

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:15 a.m., in room 342, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Gary C. Peters, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Peters, Hassan, Sinema, Rosen, Padilla, Ossoff, Portman, Lankford, Scott, and Hawley.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN PETERS¹

Chairman PETERS. The Committee will come to order.

I would certainly like to, first off, thank our witnesses for joining us here today.

The purpose of today's hearing is to examine customer experience (CX) strategies in the Federal Government and discuss how government can more effectively deliver critical services and benefits to the American people.

Customer experience has always remained a top priority in the private sector, with many leading companies working to better understand their customers, provide more effective digital services, while also increasing profits.

Profit incentives do not drive Federal agencies. Instead, they are driven by their mission to effectively serve taxpayers and make government work efficiently, including reducing waste and saving taxpayer dollars. This important responsibility requires the Federal Government to continuously look for ways to modernize its information technology (IT), better assess how agencies perform for their customers, and deliver programs and services in a way that increases satisfaction and trust for people receiving services.

Rebuilding trust in our government is essential, and we can help restore the public's confidence in the Federal Government by continuing to strengthen its ability to deliver critical services, whether it is assistance people count on, like Social Security checks or unemployment benefits, or scheduling appointments for critical services like the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care. Restoring decades of lost faith is a monumental task, and I am pleased the Administration has made enhancing customer experi-

¹ The prepared statement of Senator Peters appears in the Appendix on page 27.

ence a top priority by encouraging Federal agencies to modernize programs, reduce administrative burdens, and launch new online tools to provide a seamless and secure customer experience.

However, these efforts must also include examining past setbacks that resulted in service delays, which offer valuable knowledge to help agencies evaluate customer experience at a level of primary importance, strengthen accountability, and deliver better results all across the board. For example, I recently heard from small business owners in my home State of Michigan, who have run into issues assessing the System for Award Management (SAM.gov), the governmentwide registration system for Federal funding awards. Recent changes created unexpected challenges for companies seeking to register for Federal contracting opportunities.

I had the chance to speak with General Services Administrator (GSA) Robin Carnahan about this recently, and I was pleased to hear that thanks to the swift work of GSA's Technology Transformation Services many of these initial setbacks are now being addressed. I will continue to conduct oversight of these challenges and stay in contact with both GSA and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to ensure that the problem is fully resolved and that small businesses are paid for their work and able to pursue new opportunities.

Along with these measures, GSA and OMB are also taking timely efforts to dramatically improve the governmentwide customer experience by a designated \$100 million from the Technology Modernization Fund (TMF) to help secure and modernize government technology and improve online access to government services. Once implemented, these reforms have the potential to not only improve the ability of Federal agencies to deliver modern, effective digital services to citizens but to also improve taxpayer satisfaction with the government.

As Chairman, I have pressed for robust resources to improve the customer experience and promote government efficiency and accountability most recently by passing my bipartisan Federal Agency Performance Act out of this Committee last month. This bill seeks to provide lawmakers and the Administration with the necessary tools and data to measure and evaluate the performance of Federal agencies and ensure that they are meeting their long term strategic goals. This bill, along with other bipartisan efforts to address some of the key barriers to effective Federal service delivery, are an important step, but there is more that Congress can do to implement proven, effective solutions by government agencies.

Today, I am pleased to be joined by our panel of nongovernmental expert witnesses who can discuss how we can better address this well-known problem so that the Federal Government can improve its ability to deliver valuable customer service to Americans more quickly, more securely, and more effectively.

With that, Ranking Member, you are recognized for your opening comments.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR PORTMAN¹

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, everyone, for being here. I look forward to the discussion. We have some real experts with us today, with whom I have worked in the past, and I think this will be a helpful hearing to talk about how to improve the customer experience with government.

I like the idea of looking at it from the customer point of view, the taxpayer point of view, the citizen point of view. In this Committee, we hear the phrase “good government” a lot, and it is usually in the context of accountability and transparency, both of which are important, but good government is also about efficiency and making things work well for people.

I think government has an important, but limited, role in people’s lives and people need to be able to interact with it efficiently and then focus on what they really want to focus on, which is their lives, their families, their jobs, their community, but in order to do that we have to have these interactions work. People deserve it. This involves everything from applying for Federal grants to support for small businesses to applying for veterans’ benefits, making sure your Social Security and Medicare benefits are properly handled, dealing with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Back in the 90s, I was the co-chair of the effort to reform the IRS and involved in that a lot in the Senate Finance Committee, and we still obviously have huge challenges in terms of the customer experience there although we were able to make some improvements by focusing on it.

Waiting in line at the airport, something all of us will be doing in the next week or so, I am sure; I will be this evening or tomorrow, along with Senator Peters. I hear plenty of concerns about our new Transportation Security Administration (TSA) scanning devices, as an example, and the customer service that needs to be improved.

The Department of Transportation (DOT) has found that the Federal Department of Transportation’s common application feature works, as an example of something positive in terms of customer experience. It is convenient because it allows applicants to apply for multiple infrastructure funding opportunities through one application.

Permitting reform is something we have worked on a lot, and that is something that adds to customers being able to, again, interact quickly with the government, get what they need, and move on.

On the other hand, I am concerned about other Ohio interactions with government that have not been so positive. Recently, we have had problems with the General Services Administration, for instance, the GSA website for government contracts. It was developed in-house, apparently. Ohio businesses have had real trouble getting paid for work they did for the government or had agencies stop working with them because the website system for registration renewal was not working correctly. Because the website was not working correctly, Ohio small businesses were the ones who were impacted.

¹The prepared statement of Senator Portman appears in the Appendix on page 29.

In 2018, as some of you know, Congress passed my legislation called the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (IDEA Act). I am glad to see Ms. Dorris and Mr. Lira here today because I know them from working on that bill and I appreciate their expertise.

One of the things this 21st Century IDEA Act requires is an agency to maintain its website or digital service to ensure that it has the ability to interact well with customer, a consistent appearance, is accessible to individuals with disabilities, has a search function, has an industry-standard secure connection, and is generally designed around user needs, all common-sense elements and too often lacking with regard to Federal Government websites and other ways to interact digitally.

It also requires that each agency make available an online, mobile-friendly digital service option for any in-person government transaction or paper-based process in a manner that decreases costs and improves customer service. It is kind of pushing the Federal Government to take it to the next level.

Unfortunately, we know that many of the requirements of this law remain unimplemented. I look forward to a discussion with our witnesses today about why that is and how Congress can increase oversight to ensure full implementation.

White House efforts in both the Trump administration and now the Biden administration have begun to move agencies in the right direction, I believe. In December, President Biden signed an Executive Order (EO) on customer experience with government. I do not agree with everything in that EO, but I do think it is important to prioritize customer service, and I am glad that we are moving in that direction.

I am always open to learning about new legislative ideas, but I think we should focus on using the tools we already have, particularly through increased oversight of the recent mandates from Congress and these initiatives within the Executive Branch.

There is also a lot we can learn from our private sector which is always developing new innovations we can tap into. We have to ensure that we are good stewards of taxpayer money and respect the balance of State and Federal jurisdictions on which our system is designed. I look forward to hearing the witnesses' ideas on how we can prioritize making our Federal Government work better for our citizens.

Thank you, and I look forward to the testimony.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you, Ranking Member Portman.

It is the practice of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee (HSGAC) to swear in witnesses, so if each of you would please stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear the testimony you will give before this Committee will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

Ms. DORRIS. Yes.

Mr. EGGERS. Yes.

Mr. LIRA. Yes.

Chairman PETERS. You may be seated.

Today's first witness is Martha Dorris. Ms. Dorris is the founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Dorris Consulting International (DCI), a consultancy that focuses on improving the lives

of citizens through transforming governmental services by sharing best practices between government and industry.

Previously, Ms. Dorris served as a senior executive at the General Services Administration, where she served for 34 years. Her expertise is in information technology acquisition, digital service delivery, intergovernmental solutions, and citizen and customer experience.

Ms. Dorris is the host of the only government customer experience-focused podcast called the “CX Tipping Point” and publishes a monthly Citizen Services Newsletter.

Ms. Dorris, welcome to the Committee. You may proceed with your opening remarks.

TESTIMONY OF MARTHA DORRIS,¹ FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, DORRIS CONSULTING INTERNATIONAL

Ms. DORRIS. Good morning, Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify today. It is really a privilege to discuss how the Federal Government can improve the experience the American public has when interacting, engaging, and transacting with them.

As you mentioned, my name is Martha Dorris, and I am the founder of Dorris Consulting International, a small business consultancy that helps government and industry transform government services. I have been in my current role for almost seven years. I previously served for 34 years at the U.S. General Services Administration, including 12 years as the Deputy Associate Administrator for the Office of Citizen Services. These experiences have made me acutely aware of the challenges and opportunities confronting Federal agencies as they pursue improving public services.

Every day, millions upon millions of people are interacting with the U.S. Government. According to Analytics.USA.gov, there is over 4.98 billion visits to government websites in the last 90 days. People depend on government information to make important decisions every day and during the most critical times of their lives.

Democracy is built on a system of trust. The experience people have with their government when they need it most is critical to building that trust. Over the past five years, the Department of Veterans Affairs has increased the veterans’ trust in VA by over 20 percent through their focus on veterans’ experience.

Customer experience is a business discipline that can improve the delivery of services to the customer from the time someone has a need through the completion of the transaction. Customer experience includes knowing who your customers are, understanding their expectations, listening to real-time feedback, designing services through human-centered design techniques, and making continual improvements through measures that matter. Creating a customer-focused culture is core to ensuring that customers’ needs are met. Customers mean the public, employees, businesses, and other agencies.

The public expects to access government information anytime, anywhere, on any device. They should be able to obtain consistent

¹ The prepared statement of Ms. Dorris appears in the Appendix on page 33.

information and services whether they are online, through a website or mobile app, a call, e-mail, chat, social media or in person. That experience should be easy, transparent, secure, reliable, and timely.

The Biden-Harris administration has focused on delivering excellent, equitable, and secure Federal services through their management agenda and Executive Order. A management agenda that specifically highlights customer experience signals to the political and career officials that improving government services is a priority. Together, they set the vision and road map for designing services during key life events by putting people first, identifying short-term commitments for agencies, and strategies for incorporating customer experience into the business of government.

The government has unique challenges when implementing customer experience due to the large and diverse population we serve, quantifying the benefits of customer experience, including increased efficiency, employee engagement, voluntarily compliance with government mandates, simplifying the lives of Americans, and building trust in government. Meeting the needs of customers requires starting with the customer and working your way backwards.

Customer experience is not about technology alone. The time is now to modernize government services. To transform digital experiences, we need to modernize secure technology infrastructures, including broadband, cloud, artificial intelligence (AI), and collaborative technologies; modernize government websites and contact centers to create a full end-to-end digital experience; ensure identity management is easy to use and secure; understand their customers by listening to feedback, using analytics and human-centered design techniques; and hiring and reskilling the talent needed to transform these importance services.

While improving services has its challenges, the government has demonstrated many successes. A couple of notable accomplishments include: The VA went from 2,500 telehealth appointments per day in March 2020 to 45,000 per day in March 2021 and improved trust by 24 percent over the past five years. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) created a contact center concierge service called AskUSDA to reduce the public's burden in navigating the USDA's organizational structure. The IRS has released a taxpayer experience strategy and established a Chief Taxpayer Experience Officer reporting to the Commissioner of the IRS. The IRS has expanded the customer callback service and is reaching more people in other languages.

What can Congress do? Congress has the opportunity to ensure that improving government services is a priority that is sustainable over time. A Federal Chief Customer Officer needs to be established that is responsible for establishing the vision and strategy for improving the end-to-end customer experience. Each agency with high impact services needs an organization or executive in charge of customer-focused initiatives, reporting to the head or deputy of the agency or department. Congress should closely monitor service-level improvements and internal CX capabilities for all agencies through a CX report card based on a CX maturity model.

The government's role is to serve the people. Reimagining how the public interacts with the government will improve the lives of the American people, make the government more efficient, and increase the public's trust in government.

I look forward to your questions.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you, Ms. Dorris.

Our next witness is William Eggers, Executive Director of Deloitte's Center for Government Insights, where he is responsible for the firm's public sector thought leadership. Mr. Eggers has authored numerous books and published a commentary that has appeared in, and gained recognition from, dozens of major media outlets, including the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Guardian, and the Washington Post.

Mr. Eggers is also a former appointee to the Office of Management and Budget's Performance Measurement Advisory Council and former Director of the Texas Performance Review e-Texas Initiative that was charged with developing recommendations to save tax dollars, increase the use of technology, improve customer service, and include competition in State services.

Mr. Eggers, welcome to our Committee. You may proceed with your opening remarks.

**TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM EGGERS,¹ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CENTER FOR GOVERNMENT INSIGHTS, DELOITTE, LLP**

Mr. EGGERS. Thank you so much. Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing.

My name is William Eggers. I am the Executive Director of the Deloitte Center for Government Insights. It is a research institute which has published hundreds of studies on public management, including dozens on CX and trust in government. I also serve as a fellow at the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), and as mentioned, I have authored numerous books on government reform, digital transformation, and public-private partnerships.

Deloitte is the world's largest professional services provider with more than 120,000 U.S.-based colleagues, including 25,000 who work with government agencies all over America on modernization and digital transformation.

I want to start off with a thought experiment. Imagine a baby girl is born in a hospital. Once given a name, her birth certificate and Social Security Number (SSN) are generated automatically. Her parents immediately receive information about tax credits they are eligible for and other resources for new parents. Their services are all activated the moment the hospital registers the birth.

Now imagine similar services being triggered through not so happy events in a citizen's life: unemployment, a mental health crisis, the loss of property due to a natural disaster or the death of a loved one. The United Kingdom (UK) citizens coping with the death of a loved one used to have to notify multiple departments up to 44 times about the death. Not anymore. In a single interaction, the U.K.'s "Tell Us Once" process triggers notifications to all the relevant agencies in all levels of government. This is precisely

¹ The prepared statement of Mr. Eggers appears in the Appendix on page 38.

what state-of-the-art government service delivery can, and should, look like. In fact, many governments around the world are already delivering services this way: proactive, frictionless, seamless, and structured around critical life events.

Now CX is not a new concept for the U.S. Government. A series of Executive Orders, OMB circulars, and initiatives developed over the past three decades have focused on improving the customer experience in government, and most recently, President Biden's Executive Order emphasized improving customer experience by focusing on their life experiences as a way to build trust in government.

The good news is that the Federal Government has made strides in improving the citizen experience, as Martha mentioned. One standout is the Department of Veterans Affairs, which having made customer experience and trust a major priority seven years, has dramatically improved veterans' satisfaction and trust.

Despite some bright spots, however, low scores on citizen services on both trust in government and on CX show that the Federal Government still has a long way to go. One problem is that too often attempts to improve CX have focused on improving government operations from the lens of government, not citizens. For example, only half the government managers we surveyed said their agencies consistently collect feedback from constituents about their experiences accessing government services. To truly enhance the citizen experience, government agencies must place citizens at the center of service delivery and ask how to meet their needs.

Protecting government services around life events, like the birth of a child or starting a business, is one way to provide citizens with exactly what they need regardless of how many services or agencies are involved. This approach cannot only improve citizen satisfaction but also cut costs, enhance mission effectiveness, and slash the invisible tax resulting from the friction of interacting with siloed government systems.

Focusing on CX can be a powerful tool for improving declining trust in government. Our research demonstrates a very strong link between customer experience and public trust, and because digital is now often the first point of interaction many Americans have with government, a good online experience can generate a positive impression from users and enhance overall trust in government.

World-class CX in government will entail linking services and funding across multiple agencies and levels of government. This poses significant challenges to how agencies operate today because it means overcoming silos in governance, culture, processes, and budgeting.

The good news is that the experiences in numerous other countries show that such changes are possible. We have gleaned five principles that have guided these efforts. No. 1, put the user at the heart of service integration. No. 2, design a governance model that facilitates cross-agency collaboration. No. 3, incentivize agencies to work together through shared funding. No. 4, prioritize user trust by addressing privacy and security concerns. Finally, build the required infrastructure to deliver improved customer experience. Such shifts are difficult but possible with sustained effort, resources, and leadership.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you, Mr. Eggers.

Today's final witness is Mathew Lira. Mr. Lira is a partner at Hangar Capital, an investment firm dedicated to leveraging emerging technology to find solutions to the nation's toughest challenges. Mr. Lira brings a unique mixture of experiences from government, national campaigns, and the private sector.

Previously, Mr. Lira served as the Special Assistant to the President for Innovative Policy at the White House Office of American Innovation, and he has also served as a senior advisor to then House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy and then House Majority Leader Eric Cantor.

Welcome, Mr. Lira. You may proceed with your opening remarks.

TESTIMONY OF MATHEW LIRA,¹ PARTNER, HANGAR CAPITAL

Mr. LIRA. Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for holding today's hearing and for the opportunity to discuss this important topic.

Let us begin with the good news. Momentum is building, and progress is being made. The Federal Government's institutional capacity for change management has been strengthened by the bipartisan work of this Committee. The Tested Ability to Leverage Exceptional National Talent Act (TALENT Act), the Modernizing Government Technology Act, the Centers of Excellence Act, and the 21st Century IDEA Act are reforms which continue to provide direct benefits to the American people, a fact demonstrated as recently as last week's announcement of dedicated CX funding in the Technology Modernization Fund.

Yet, despite this progress, why does the challenge of improving customer experiences remain so pervasive across the Federal Government? Quite simply, we live in a time of exponential change, and far too often agencies are making linear progress. Over time, this means even as meaningful progress is made the gap between a customer's expectation and the experiences is getting worse.

The only way to close this gap is for the pace of improvements to match or exceed the pace of change. Agencies must implement solutions which are capable of scaling to the size of the problem. Toward that end, I recommend the following initial steps be taken.

One, efforts should initially focus on high impact service providers, the 35 Federal programs dedicated by OMB as having public-facing services with the greatest scale and impact. The prioritization of improvements to high impact service providers in the President's management agenda and recent Executive Order are welcome developments that should be supported by this Committee.

Two, agencies should leverage commercial technology at scale. The technology to solve this problem exists. It exists today. In fact, it is largely commoditized across our economy. We do not need to hire Thomas Edison to invent the light bulb. We simply need to be smart enough to go into the marketplace and buy it. From robotic process automation, the digitization of citizen-facing forms, the use of electronic signatures, and other standards-compliant, Software as a Service (SaaS) platforms and products, proven commercial

¹ The prepared statement of Mr. Lira appears in the Appendix on page 52.

technologies exist that provide truly exceptional experiences and can solve so many of the customer experience problems facing agencies.

Three, as my fellow witnesses have stated, CX needs a guaranteed seat at the table. There must be increased accountability within agencies for customer experiences. Too often the prioritization of CX improvements within agencies are driven by the ad hoc actions of a single advocate rather than as empowered equity in the organization's design. I believe this Committee should direct agency heads to designate and empower a senior official with Chief Experience Officer (CXO) responsibilities for every high impact service provider within their respective agencies, with a budget and operational authorities to match that responsibility.

Four, agencies should leverage the authority they have been given. Far too many authorities given to agencies by Congress, and this Committee in particular, remain underutilized. Specifically, this Committee should encourage OMB to issue implementation guidance for the provisions outlined in the 21st Century IDEA Act and to leverage the requirement that all agencies comply with the design standards of the U.S. Web Design System. In all candor, as we have seen with success of similar efforts in the United Kingdom and various State governments, I believe the proper implementation of this single provision would do enormous good for the customer experiences across the government.

Five, quantitative measurement of results. The Committee should explore requirements to collect and publish quantitative metrics of Federal service delivery. While qualitative metrics provide valuable insights, the direct measurement of customer experiences—wait times, backlogs, time to resolution, and other key performance indicators—are essential to meaningfully measuring the net effectiveness of agency efforts.

In conclusion, while the issue of agency customer experiences does not grab headlines every day, it does impact millions of Americans every single day, people for whom broken links and poorly implemented web forms equate to sleepless nights and stolen time away from their families, millions of people who often in their most vulnerable moments deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. By leveraging modern technology, our government has the potential to deliver exceptional customer experiences and in the process restore the public's faith in our national institutions once again.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before this Committee, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you, Mr. Lira.

Mr. Eggers, according to the Pew Research Center, trust in government has remained low for most of the 21st century. Only two in 10 Americans say they trust the government in Washington to do what is right. Based on your research, could you share with the Committee the most prevalent factors that have contributed to such a low level of confidence in the Federal Government?

Mr. EGGERS. I think there is a number of things that can be done to rebuild that trust. Why do we not see that trust always? First of all, trust starts with making people feel trust. Much of this happens when citizens interact with government. By focusing on interactions and improving this experience is a really important first

step, and when those interactions are not good interactions, then people have declining trust. So making the interactions empathetic, inclusive, and very human can have a positive experience, and this can have a cascading impact on the rest of government.

Second, it is about transparency. Trust can be improved by having much greater transparency around government policy decisions, technology decisions, by openly sharing information on data collection, security measures, privacy controls, and around trustworthiness.

The other finding that we found was that while the overall level of trust in government has been declining, when you actually look at trust in individual agencies, there is very big discrepancies. There are some Federal agencies that are actually highly trusted, and oftentimes those are the agencies that people have the most interactions with.

We cannot address the issue of trust and confidence issues in the Federal Government with a one-size-fits-all approach because strategies to build greater trust between citizens and law enforcement will entail a bigger focus on looking at humanity in terms of that as a trust signal while most important for service agencies like the Postal Service are reliability and competency.

The key thing is that agencies really need to focus on what are the signals looking at in terms of where trust is high or low and what the citizen experience looks like and actually really focus on improving that in the same way that we saw with the VA over the last six years.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you.

This next question is to Mr. Lira and Ms. Dorris. We will have you go first, Mr. Lira, then Ms. Dorris. You both have significant experience in government agencies and have tried to address a number of issues while you were there. I would like you to share with the Committee some of the obstacles that you faced when you were trying to drive customer experience transformation to regain the trust that we have just talked about with Mr. Eggers. What are the obstacles that we have to overcome, Mr. Lira?

Mr. LIRA. Thank you for the question, Mr. Chairman. I would put it in two categories. The first and the most dominant are the process blockers. It is the stated policy of the government, oftentimes supported by statute. It is the willful intent of agency leaders through Executive Orders and agency planning.

It is inside the process, where agencies either get bogged down or move too slowly, things like, logistical matters such as authorities to operate or going through a procurement process that takes months or even years instead of weeks and days. These are known issues, and the agencies that were able to move the fastest and to make the most progress were where they constructed what I would call a leadership spine, essentially a core team of advocates and stakeholders at every level of the organization. It was not enough simply to have a well-motivated Chief Technology Officer (CTO). You needed to have equally well-motivated procurement officer and equally well motivated counsel so that you can manage the process of getting an agency to move forward.

Very rarely, if at all, it was a technology problem. It was not, as I said in my testimony, a need to create technology or to invent it

or, even in some cases, to build it. It was getting through a process that is tied to a different era.

But that leadership spine, I think, is constructive as the second big blocker, which can be cultural. Oftentimes when agencies were resistant to change, it was not a result of anything more than fear of what it would mean for the workforce or fear of what it would mean for how they operate through their daily lives as professionals. When you can address those concerns, it was amazing how quickly all the reasons and blockers could sort of melt away.

Again, that is where I would go back to the principle of a leadership spine and how can we structurally include stakeholders at every level of the organization because much like the human spine, if even a single layer is missing, you have an enormous impact on mobility, and the agencies that are able to move the fastest built that with a lot of purpose.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you.

Ms. Dorris.

Ms. DORRIS. Thank you, Chairman Peters, for that question. As you know, I spent many years in the government trying to get the government to embrace customer experience, and I think in some ways it is very complex but in some ways it is very simple. That is making customer experience a priority at all levels in the government and actually understanding what customer experience really means, and that is why I spent so much time on kind of definitions and the differences between customer service, customer experience, and user experience.

Customer experience really does take into account everything that everybody has mentioned, so making that understanding, making people accountable, leadership to drive that home, putting the customer at the center. Once you have it as a priority, then you can figure out how do you put the customer at the center, how do you have outside-in thinking rather than inside-out thinking.

I think the comments made around silos. Agencies do not think of things from an enterprise perspective. People think about customer experience, and they go right to technology. Contact centers are a critical component to delivering like an end-to-end digital experience, which does not get very much air time, but the integration of contact center data and in-person data and what people are calling about, interested in, and have problems with can actually driving improvements to the digital experience.

With that, I think it starts at the top and works its way down.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you.

Ranking Member Portman, you are recognized for your questions.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again, thank you all for your expertise you are bringing to this. It is frustrating because it seems like we make progress and then one step forward, sometimes one or two steps back. One of the realities is that we live in, as some of you have acknowledged, an increasingly complicated world with more and more digital experiences, and with that digitization comes a great opportunity to make things more efficient but also a great opportunity to make things more complicated.

I mentioned the GSA website as an example and the problem that Ohio small businesses are having with it. It was done in-house. One of my general approaches to this is that do not do it in-house if you can buy it off the shelf. It is more efficient, it is better for the taxpayer, and you know, those commercially available products tend to work better. It does not mean that there are not some specialized functions.

Any thoughts about that from the three of you? Ms. Dorris.

Ms. DORRIS. Thank you, Ranking Member Portman. I have a lot of thoughts about it. I think, first, websites—we will tackle the one question about buying versus building. I agree. I spent many years at GSA building things internally to provide to Federal agencies, and we could never really sustain it over time with the resources and the expertise that we needed.

I know that we are leading toward building a lot, and today that could be purchased off the shelf. I agree with you 100 percent. I think that there is room for building things that are pilots that can be used and tested internally to know what you really need and then buying more commercial products.

In terms of the website piece, I think that websites are a critical component to delivering digital services, but they really—taking a website strategy only does reduce equity and access, and so that is why I like the customer experience piece of—

Senator PORTMAN. Yes, talking in terms of call centers and so on is part of it, too.

Ms. DORRIS. Exactly. Yes.

Senator PORTMAN. So quickly on that question on in-house, out-of-house, any very quick responses from the two of you because I have so much I want to talk to you about?

Mr. EGGERS. Yes, I would just say really quickly I completely agree with you. Let us look at call centers, contact centers. There is a lot of best-in-class technologies right now, about 15 of them, when you look at AI and when you look at robotic process automation, and so on and so forth. Actually bringing those together and integrating those into a whole, that is the key to really having a great call center experience.

Call centers should not be a back-office function anymore. They should be really at the center, at the heart of a lot of citizen experience with government, and we have a lot of great technologies now, off-the-shelf technologies that can be integrated to provide that experience.

Senator PORTMAN. Yes. Combined with the higher technology we now have, so it is not telephone trees anymore. It is AI.

Yes, Matt.

Mr. LIRA. Senator, I completely agree. I believe very strongly that we need to leverage the technology that is in the marketplace rather than try and invent it in the government for two reasons. One, the one that was already mentioned is about the core competency and the sustainability of that change. Even if you can build an exceptional team to build a product in a moment, can that sustain over the decades?

Senator PORTMAN. Yes, can you sustain it?

Mr. LIRA. The second is about scale. We are dealing with major programs that touch, in some cases, hundreds of millions of Ameri-

cans, and it is very unlikely that a small team in an agency could ever scale to the size of the problem.

Senator PORTMAN. Yes. I think that is an interesting observation from all of you and we need to keep it in mind.

You talked about quantitative measurements of results, Mr. Lira, and I could not agree with you more. One of the challenges we have with regard to the 21st century IDEA Act, as an example, is measuring it. I told you earlier I am disappointed in the implementation. I, frankly, am not sure because I do not know how to measure it very well and our team has had some issues on that.

There is this Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA) measurement that is not related as much to the customer service generally but to IT improvements, and they have a measurement, a metric, that they have put together. Do you think that on things like—you mentioned wait times as an example and other ways to measure government service, including, by the way, answering the telephone or getting the right answer in terms of the IRS, to measure that.

But, should we incorporate customer service metrics into something like the FITARA scorecard? Would that make sense, Ms. Dorris?

Ms. DORRIS. I think for the FITARA scorecard, since that is targeted to Chief Information Officers (CIOs), having a digital services component to that scorecard that measures that because it is a critical piece to service delivery. I think customer experience on its own should have a scorecard that has, a whole group of measures around, building internal capacities, and do they have strategies and governance, and do they actually measure things, and how do they set targets. I do think FITARA should include that, but I also think CX needs its own report card.

Senator PORTMAN. Mr. Eggers.

Mr. EGGERS. I would just speak to overall CX and look again at the VA. They launched VSignals to measure customer experience across the VA. They collected more than 4 million survey responses, 1.8 million comments from veterans, and then they started measuring what matters. They measured the attributes that drove trust, and they have been able to improve their ability to create a world-class experience.

It was not a once-a-time thing. They continued to look at this, and one interesting thing the data showed was that the veterans' most common complaint was not about health care; it was about scheduling, visiting a hospital, lack of facilities in the waiting room. By measuring it this way, they were able to evolve into a more empathetic and trusted organization.

Senator PORTMAN. They took the time to do the survey, to find out what the customer experience really was and what the needs were.

Mr. Lira, I suppose that you are going to answer the previous question saying, yes, we should have more quantitative measurements, and I am going to ask you something else.

IDEA. Why has it not been implemented more effectively? One of my concerns, as you know perhaps, is that OMB has not issued the guidance that they are required to do under this law and until that guidance is issued it is very difficult to get the agencies to im-

plement this integrated digital experience legislation. What is your view on it?

You helped me a lot in writing the bill and advocating for it. What is the problem, and what is the solution?

Mr. LIRA. Great question, Senator. I think the first problem is a question of prioritization. Clearly, the bill became law in 2018–2019 timeframe. We headed into the crisis, and so there was a lot on various agencies' plates. OMB needs to issue the implementation guidance. Firsthand the importance of OMB's leadership on an issue like this. I believe that the 21st Century IDEA Act is greatly aligned with their strategy in the President's Management Agenda (PMA) and in the Executive Order. I view it as a tool that will enhance their strategy rather than distract.

The second is the role of this Committee in oversight. I, to answer very briefly, think something like a CX scorecard, perhaps even as a standalone product, could help reinforce the implementation of that Act and other legislative accomplishments of this Committee in the way that the FITARA scorecard has done with that report card.

It is tangible. It is binary. It is quantitative. I will say, firsthand, being on the other side of Pennsylvania Avenue, it was an incredibly useful tool, the FITARA scorecard, in driving agency deliverables.

Senator PORTMAN. To all three of you and to my colleagues on the Committee, let us work on that. I think that is something that could be very meaningful both to move the IDEA Act implementation but also more generally with regard to customer service metrics, understanding what the needs are, understanding what the success or failure is in implementing the strategies.

Thank you.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you, Senator Portman.

Senator Lankford, you are recognized for your questions.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR LANKFORD

Senator LANKFORD. Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, thanks for holding this hearing to be able to have a dialog about customer service.

If I go on hold with just about any commercial entity nowadays, they tell me how long I am going to wait; they ask if I want to get a callback rather than wait that long; they say if you will hold at the very end of this you can push a button to be able to give us an evaluation. If I go to a fast food restaurant, on my receipt, it says, hey, punch in your survey here and we will actually give you a free meal next time if you will tell us how we are doing. So everybody seems to say, to me, please give me your feedback until I log in with a Federal agency, and then I do not get that same response.

As we worked through the process over the last several years, I have a bill called the Federal Agency Customer Experience (FACE) Act. FACE Act is not that revolutionary. It allows agencies to get customer service information back so that individuals that want to give feedback to agencies can. I have been fought and fought and fought on this for years now.

The simple statement is: Allow the American people to give feedback to agencies. In this case, with the FACE Act, if agencies want the feedback even, so it even gives them the latitude. It is not requiring agencies to do it.

It is finally in real conversation at this point, after years of pushing this simple idea, to say, allow the American people to be able to do that.

Mr. Lira, you had mentioned before there are some things that are moving. I was nodding my head when you said that earlier, to say, yes, there are finally some breakthroughs on this, where people are starting to say, OK, let us let the American people talk to their own government like everyone talks to other entities.

With that, let me ask a couple of questions on this. Some agencies, as you mentioned VA, have started to experiment already with finding ways around it to be able to get feedback on this, some of the most basic things, how long is this line, the details that go out to other Americans dealing with other entities. What is the low-hanging fruit for customer service experience that the technology already exists that Federal agencies could put in place?

I want kind of a rapid response of what your thoughts are of what are customer service improvements that could be done right now with technology that already exists. You can take that in any order.

Mr. LIRA. Do you want to start?

Ms. DORRIS. Sure. Thank you, Senator, for that question. I think your legislation around getting feedback is really where agencies should start because that way they can actually identify those pain points and adopting some of those best practices from the private sector, such as transparency, knowing where people are in the queue and how their applications or their transactions are going through that process. Same thing with the customer callback function, that is starting to get use. IRS just started using that, but that also saves time and efficiency.

There is, many other—even on the website, use of analytics, use of whether it is the digital analytics program that GSA has or even more detailed analytics through their websites and their contact centers, and having agencies really assess those metrics to see where those pain points are.

Senator LANKFORD. OK. Mr. Eggers, Mr. Lira, do you have anything you want to add on that?

Mr. EGGERS. Yes, very quickly. I would say what we are seeing in the private sector is a focus on hyperpersonalization. We are seeing the contact center not as a back-office function but instead as an experience hub. We are seeing omni-channel service delivery wherever you are at any one time, and you stop, you come back, and they know exactly where you are, a big focus on using solutions like AI and blockchain, and a strong focus on digital trust.

Senator LANKFORD. OK. Mr. Lira.

Mr. LIRA. First of all, on the FACE Act, I think getting that sort of data is absolutely essential. It is natural for any large organization to be hesitant, especially if they are concerned about what that data might show. But as I like to say, the person waiting in line knows how long they are waiting in line, and so if you do not collect that data the only person you are fooling is yourself.

Senator LANKFORD. Right.

Mr. LIRA. It is very critical that agencies do that.

To your question on technology, I am particularly bullish on robotic process automation as a bridge technology between legacy systems and modern customer experiences. One of the challenges that we faced at agencies was the sequential nature of having to improve a largescale agency enterprise system which might be decades old before you can make the necessary customer experience improvements, and technologies like robotic process automation (RPA) enable you to bridge that gap.

Again, you have seen that in places like the United Kingdom and in various State governments, where they have been able to use technologies like RPA to do them concurrently. Even as they are making the back-end improvements, they are making meaningful improvements to the front-end experience.

Senator LANKFORD. OK. That is helpful because we all hear the same phrase over and over again: We would do this except for our legacy hardware and legacy software.

I have heard that for 10 years as agencies request additional dollars, and then dollars are allocated to them, and then they come back next year with the exact same line: We have legacy hardware and software. We cannot do this anymore.

Let me bring up, Mr. Eggers, what you had mentioned before about duplication and trying to get some cooperation. If you are a pipeline company and you are trying to submit requests and information through Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) right now, you are going to fill out different forms, but you are going to put the same information in form after form after form after form that you are turning in. Multiple different entities are like this, where you are filling out the same information, and agencies are not cooperating and sharing, to be able to share that information, or it just does not save to be able to do it.

Another illustration I can give you that I brought up for years, the Census Bureau, every 10 years, contacts every single American and gets basic information back from them, and they act like this is something that no other entity in the Federal Government does, and they have this complicated system to do it. The IRS actually contacts almost every citizen in America every year. But the IRS and the Census Bureau refuse to cooperate with each other to where every 10 years Census Bureau information could be added to the IRS forms, and then when you turn in your IRS forms you are also completing your census that year. They continue to fight that idea and say, no, the two of us cannot share information on this.

What is holding us back in Federal agencies from sharing that information so that people are not refilling out forms or an area that is as simple as when you complete your IRS form every year, once every 10 years, that is also your census information?

Mr. EGGERS. I would just say this is one area where we are pretty far behind many other countries around the world. Almost every country in the European Union (EU) right now has a once-only process right now that they are implementing or have implemented, where basically you only have to give our information to government once and then it is shared, and this is even across dif-

ferent levels of government. But they made this a priority starting about five to seven years, first learning from Estonia.

On the business example, I think that is something we have not talked about yet, but actually looking at the business the government-to-business sort of thing and looking at businesses as customers, treating them that way. You can dramatically reduce the friction, reduce the cost of compliance with government while actually increasing compliance, by focusing on business as a user, and that is not done enough in a lot of the regulatory agencies today.

Senator LANKFORD. No, it is not.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you, Senator Lankford.

Senator Padilla, you are recognized for your questions.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR PADILLA

Senator PADILLA. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank the three of you for your participation today.

I concur with a theme that has already come out of the hearing, that we should consider every interaction between citizens and the government as an opportunity to either demonstrate whether we are being efficient and effective and trustworthy, or at least measure, because if we are not, how do we improve upon customer service.

I want to acknowledge that President Biden's Executive Order from this last spring noted that too often a disaster survivor, a small business owner, a veteran, an immigrant can wait months for the Federal Government to process the benefits to which they are entitled, and this lost time is referred to as a so-called time tax because of the delay. We clearly are committed to reducing this time tax that is imposed on citizens, and we should be striving to make it easier for citizens to interact with government, particularly for the most vulnerable.

For the most vulnerable, sometimes them accessing the aid that they are entitled to involves invasive and time consuming and confusing requirements. That is why, among other initiatives, I have pushed for a pilot program to address the documentation barriers facing people.

For example, people experiencing homelessness, as primary Exhibit A, I mean, somebody whose everyday concern leads with finding a place to sleep, finding a place to shower, finding somewhere to eat. That requires a considerable amount of cognitive bandwidth, and adding layers of paperwork with different requirements to receive benefits adds an unnecessary tax, that time tax that I talked about, which can be mentally or emotionally insurmountable for a lot of people.

Again, that is an Exhibit A of how the lenses of customer service, customer experience I should say, and behavioral science should be applied to a wide variety of policy reforms, whether they are related to accessing deserved public benefits, paying taxes, solving food insecurity, navigating disaster benefits or anything else.

The lead-up, and it is predictable for you, Mr. Eggers. You studied other countries who are using human-centered design and behavioral science to significantly improve outcomes. How have you

seen that work, improve societal equity as well, and what lessons might we take away that should apply here in the United States?

Mr. EGGERS. First of all, I could not agree with you more. We just released a study looking at digital access for all and looking at the role of digital experience in actually increasing equity. It is a really important subject that a lot of cities and States are now focused on.

Just look at, say, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application process. At one point in California, it was 50 pages long. Most people who are applying oftentimes they do not have laptops. They are doing it off their phone and so on. They really looked at how do we simplify that user experience, how do we make it much more simple to do, and really by focusing on what does the journey look like, what are the obstacles, what are the pain points, and really understanding that in a deep way, where can we automate it, and so on and so forth.

There are things going on in that respect, and I think it is one of the equity issues that people do not talk enough about because it does have this time tax. But to think about the homeless or a mental health crisis. That is a Byzantine system to go through, and what we can do is we can streamline that by really focusing on it.

But the problem that often you see here is the silos between government agencies, the silos between levels of government and even sometimes between the public and private sector. That is the major thing that needs to be really fixed because citizens do not care what government agency is providing the service. They just want to get something done and especially if they are facing a real sort of tough and difficult issue in their lives. As you said, you do not want to overload them from a cognitive standpoint.

We have a lot of examples from all over the world that do that. Let me give a quick example. In Portugal right now, Ukrainian refugees, they can ask for temporary protection. Once they get that protection, immediately, they get a Social Security Number, they get a tax ID number, and they get a health insurance number. It happens automatically, so then they can access government benefits and the labor market. They do not have to do anything for that to happen. It all happens behind the scenes with government agencies.

Senator PADILLA. Yes. Just as an aside, having been in public service first at the municipal level and at the State level and now at the Federal level, by the time somebody picks up the phone to call a department, an agency, or an elected official's office to ask for help, they are usually near wit's end. Right?

They have tried to figure it out on their own. They have asked a spouse, a child, a friend or a neighbor. If they have access to reliable internet, they have searched online. By the time they get to the point of picking up the phone, if they have not given up, at wit's end, and our systems for taking the intake and processing rarely keeps that in mind.

Ms. Dorris, you spent many years focusing on creating a citizen-focused culture. What recommendations do you have for us to better include the voices of particularly the most vulnerable?

Ms. DORRIS. Thank you, Senator. I think, Bill gave some great examples of using different components of customer experience in

terms of getting feedback, bringing people who are in the situation into the design as much as possible, having a staff that reflects the people that you are trying to serve so that when you are designing services that you have input from users in those circumstances or people who can identify with that.

Creating a culture, again, starts at the top in terms of even setting priorities and setting customer values, including for serving underserved populations. It all kind of comes together in the way and the priorities within the agency.

Senator PADILLA. OK. Thank you very much.

I would love to explore this further, but I know my time is up. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you, Senator Padilla.

As we start to wrap up the hearing, we have heard a number of ideas from all three of you. I am going to ask you here in some final comments, what is your top thing that you think we should do in Congress, in this Committee, whether it is legislation, whatever action you think we should take? Of all the ideas that you have put out there and you have written about, I am going to ask each of you to give me your top idea, something that we should take charge of. I will start with you, Ms. Dorris.

Ms. DORRIS. Thank you for that question. I think having a Federal Chief Customer Officer to drive these changes and improvements would be my No. 1, which was really hard to come up with one.

Chairman PETERS. Mr. Eggers.

Mr. EGGERS. I would say three real quick ones. First is funding. The funding designated from the Technology Modernization Fund, it is a good start, but more is needed. For instance, in just the State government of New South Wales in Australia, they have allocated more than \$2 billion in their Digital Restart Fund to accelerate life events and whole of government digital transformation. I think more funding is needed.

More flexibility. You need flexibility in interagency mechanisms to pool funds, second employees from these projects.

Then, oversight. We cannot change what we cannot measure. The passage of the Customer Experience Bill would be of great help to drive change and other sort of mechanisms we have talked about today.

Chairman PETERS. Great. Thank you.

Mr. Lira.

Mr. LIRA. Mr. Chair, if I could recommend only one item, it would be the robust but purposeful oversight of this Committee on progress on these issues. The Committee has done an incredible bipartisan job over many years giving agencies the tools. There are some more than need to be added, but seeing that the progress is being followed through on at the agency level. This does not necessarily need to be adversarial or about just sort of "gotcha" and finding anecdotes. But in the spirit of the FITARA scorecard, providing consistent oversight and measurement of progress by Federal agencies is actually a tool, and I have seen it firsthand, for the people in the agencies who are driving that change.

Chairman PETERS. Great. Thank you.

One final question. As Congress continues to introduce and pass legislation that addresses various facets of consumer experience, we continue to hear that well-intentioned, about some outdated laws, such as the Privacy Act and the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA), can actually impede the ability of Federal agencies to enhance customer experience while still respecting privacy and reducing the burden.

So to each of you, in your opinion, what are particular aspects of these laws that should be reformed to enable greater service delivery and customer satisfaction? I will start with you, Mr. Eggers, and then, Mr. Lira and Ms. Dorris, you can wrap it up.

Mr. EGGERS. I would just say, as we have talked about this whole session, to actually do this well, you need to get a lot of feedback from users and you need to just basically be able to understand what the users are going through in a very deep way, and that is how every company and every other government does modern digital today. Anything that impedes that right now needs to be reformed and modernized.

Obviously, the Paperwork Reduction Act was passed for a very different time. I think that is the key thing to focus on. Various administrations have looked at this for years, but I do not think we have seen the sort of progress that we really need to do digital and customer experience well.

Mr. LIRA. The laws that you mentioned have not been reauthorized in the Digital Age.

Chairman PETERS. Right.

Mr. LIRA. There is a great deal of legacy laws there that are no longer relevant to today's world, as Mr. Eggers indicated. In some ways, the Paperwork Reduction Act has become, in practice, the Paperwork Protection Act because it has inhibited the ability of agencies to move quickly.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, there are critical and important equities around privacy and the protection of the citizens against overly abusive processes from agencies, and those equities should be protected and any reform in those areas. But clearly, if the political capital exists to update and reauthorize those bills for this age and for the age going forward, it would do a tremendous amount of good in agencies.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you.

Ms. Dorris.

Ms. DORRIS. Thank you, Chairman. I agree with both Bill and Matt, and I think that especially the Paperwork Reduction Act has provided agencies with convenient excuses for not collecting feedback over the years. That needs to be changed so that we can better understand how the public businesses, employees, et cetera, are interacting in their experience with the government.

Chairman PETERS. Right. Thank you.

We are in a vote series, so I am going to have to slip off.

Did you have any other additional questions?

Senator PADILLA. [Shaking head negatively.]

Chairman PETERS. I have one member who is on her way here. Senator Rosen is on her way. She should be here momentarily, so I will leave the gavel here. But when Senator Rosen comes back,

she will pick up the gavel, she will ask her questions, and then we will adjourn the meeting. That should happen in a few minutes.

We will be in recess until Senator Rosen gets here, which should be momentarily.

[Recess.]

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR ROSEN

Senator ROSEN [presiding.] The Committee will reconvene.

Thank you for waiting. We really appreciate it. Of course, we are in the middle of a vote, so I appreciate your indulgence.

I am not going to thank the Chair; that would be me. But I appreciate all of you being here and for testifying and for the work that you do.

I want to talk a little bit about the small business startup experience and their experience with the government. Mr. Eggers, in your written testimony, you discussed how founding a small business is really a significant life event, right, when Americans often have to interact with multiple Federal agencies and even multiple levels of government. Small business startups face a number of challenges in the United States, not the least of which is navigating the complex web of local, State, and Federal requirements.

In Nevada, we have seen a spike in new startups over the last two years, I am proud to say, including nearly 100 in the Reno-Sparks metro area alone. That is why I am working to improve the startup experience through legislation I hope to soon introduce to create a central portal, an Small Business Administration (SBA) portal, where small business startups can find information on Federal, State, and local permitting and licensing requirements. It becomes a one-stop shop so you or the other business owners do not have to find a million different phone calls or internet addresses, and it is just one way to enhance the customer experience for startups and help them navigate everything they need to do.

Mr. Eggers, what other kinds of coordination across levels of government do you think we can do to improve the business customer experience, and how can we here in Congress help facilitate that?

Mr. EGGERS. I am so glad that you are focused on that. I wrote a study a number of years ago that was called “Compliance without Tears,” which is basically by improving the government-to-business you can actually both increase compliance but actually reduce the costs to business dramatically, and we need a lot more focus on that.

A good example of the business one-stop that you are talking about is actually in the State of Connecticut right now. The State of Connecticut has a portal which has information and services by significant business group, and they look at starting a business, managing a business, and it has customized checklists to guide business owners through the process of setting up a business entity. More than 17,000 checklists have been created on the portal since it went live in the summer of 2020, and so that is a great example of actually being very proactive in this way.

I mentioned Portugal. They have also done things like this.

But actually, if you look at like teaming up with States like that—and Ohio has the Ohio Business Gateway, and others which are pretty advanced in this area—and getting to the point where

you can have an integrative approach from Small Business Administration, from these State portals that are doing it the same way and at the local government level, you can dramatically reduce those costs of starting a business and the friction that it involves.

Senator ROSEN. Would you like to build on that, about how can we help you do information sharing, data sharing between inter-government agencies the same way through this portal? Are there other things we can do like that that would help reduce the number of forms that you may have to fill out?

Mr. EGGERS. Absolutely. There is a lot of technology solutions to that right now, and we see that happening all the time. I do not want to get into the details of it, but it is around application programming interface (APIs) and microservices and other sorts of things where you actually do not even have to share a lot of sensitive information. It is just a way of sharing that data between entities.

Every company uses this sort of technologies right now to share data across different departments. We are seeing this happening more and more in government agencies around the world. We are seeing this in New Zealand and Australia as they try to integrate across levels of government. That is what I think is really important, and that is an area where I think the United States is a little bit behind some other countries right now, but we can learn lessons from them in doing so.

I do think just as you mentioned. I think starting a business and the business area is a really great place to start there.

Senator ROSEN. Yes, and I think that that is really true, and that really leads to my next question about investing in our technology infrastructure so that we can do these kinds of things that make it easier for someone to start a business, with common data being shared across agencies, not sensitive data but maybe name, address, phone number. Simple things make a huge difference. Right?

I want to build on Senator Lankford's comments on legacy technology because as many people here know I am a former computer programmer. I wrote code and Common Business-Oriented Language (COBOL) and Formula Translation (FORTRAN) and Assembler way back. We will not say how far back, but it is troubling that there is agencies at the State and the Federal level whose IT still run on those legacy systems that I used when I started my career, in the 1980s.

Improving customer service, again, with the government means not only modernizing these websites but being better able to digitize all of our experiences and bring that infrastructure really down to everyone and make it more flexible and better customer service.

Ms. Dorris, what are the biggest challenges in upgrading government IT that are needed for enhancing the public's experience with the government because this is where I think people's opinion of how government works for them really is? Who answers the phone? Who answers the e-mail? How easy are these systems to navigate? These are the frustration barriers that prevent people from doing what they need to do or having success.

Ms. DORRIS. Thank you, Senator. I really do not think that the issue is technology as much as it is making service delivery and the

experience a priority. I think it is around the culture in an organization and working together and breaking down stovepipes by putting the customer at the center and working through the solutions to get to the experience that you want to provide. I think it is driving those measures and changing the culture to a place where people can work together to deliver better experiences to citizens and to businesses.

Senator ROSEN. You talked in your written testimony about mobile devices really a dominant technology for most people. What investments do you think we need to make to better make that mobile, digital experience improve that for interacting with customers?

Ms. DORRIS. Great question. I think all websites should be available—should be mobile-enabled, and this impacts people using websites, but it also enables the underserved communities to be able to access information and services. That has been part of the 21st Century IDEA Act that was passed in 2018, and mobile is definitely an important component to it.

Senator ROSEN. Yes, I could not agree more. In order to do all these things, there is something really important we have to do, and that is investing in our technology workforce because we cannot do any of these creative measures, we cannot do any of this programming, IT support, all of that without having the professionals. Building that tech workforce of tomorrow is not only important for our government but for securing our data, cybersecurity, for every individual that interacts with our Federal agencies and, I would argue, State, local, and the like.

That is why my bipartisan Cyber Ready Workforce Act, which we introduced, would provide grants for registered apprenticeships in cybersecurity so that we can fill the nation's over 700,000 job openings just in cybersecurity alone, including in the Federal Government. These jobs are critical to protecting the data of Americans seeking assistance, so we do not want to create these portals and not have them be safe.

Ms. Dorris, how can cybersecurity and IT workforce development programs, reskilling, upskilling, how can they help us build the talent pipeline and protect people's personal information? What more do you think we can do?

Ms. DORRIS. I think cybersecurity is obviously a high priority in terms of securing the systems that we use, but it is also important to delivering on the better experience for users of government systems. I actually am involved in the U.S. Cyber Challenge Program, which really was to identify the next cybersecurity workforce, and we hold cybersecurity camps, that then we can drive some new talent into both government and industry.

I think whatever the Federal Government can do to one impediment to this has been on the Federal level, is training people in cybersecurity who are a certain level in the government and then being trained and wanting to go into a cyber position, but the Federal personnel regulations did not allow them to go into that work, the cyber workforce at a higher level. They had to go back at the same level they were. We have a lot of human resource (HR) issues to work through in terms of reskilling the workforce for new kinds of skills.

Senator ROSEN. I will have my team reach out to you. I would be interested in hearing about some of those roadblocks in HR that prevent us from upskilling or reskilling folks in the cyber space. Thank you.

I want to thank you all again for being here, for joining us today, for your thoughtful work on where we need to go moving forward because, as we have heard, improving customer experience in government is a tremendously important priority for this Administration and for Congress. Enhancing the ability of Federal agencies to deliver seamless, secure, and equitable services increases trust in government and reduces unnecessary burdens on our taxpayers. This Committee will continue to examine ways we can support these critical customer service priorities.

The record for this hearing will remain open for 15 days, until 5 p.m. on July 8, 2022, for the submission of statements and questions for the Record.

This hearing is now adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:34 a.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

**Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: Putting People First: Building Trust in Government through
Customer Experience
June 23, 2022**

I'd like to thank our witnesses for joining us. The purpose of today's hearing is to examine customer experience strategies in the federal government and discuss how government can more effectively deliver critical services and benefits to the American people.

Customer experience has always remained a top priority in the private sector, with many leading companies working to better understand their customers, provide more effective digital services, and increase profits.

Profit incentives do not drive federal agencies, instead, they are driven by their mission to effectively serve taxpayers and make government work efficiently, including by reducing waste and saving taxpayer dollars.

This important responsibility requires the federal government to continuously look for ways to modernize its information technology, better assess how agencies perform for their customers, and deliver programs and services in a way that increases satisfaction and trust for the people receiving services.

Rebuilding trust in our government is essential, and we can help restore the public's confidence in the federal government by continuing to strengthen its ability to deliver critical services, whether its assistance people count on like social security checks or unemployment benefits, or scheduling appointments for critical services like VA health care.

Restoring decades of lost faith is a monumental task, and I am pleased the Administration has made enhancing customer experience a top priority by encouraging federal agencies to modernize programs, reduce administrative burdens, and launch new online tools to provide a seamless and secure customer experience.

However, these efforts must also include examining past setbacks that resulted in service delays, which offer valuable knowledge to help agencies elevate customer experience to a level of primary importance, strengthen accountability, and deliver better results across the board.

For example, I have recently heard from small business owners in my home state of Michigan who have run into issues accessing the System for Award Management or SAM.gov, the government-wide registration system for federal funding awards.

Recent changes created unexpected challenges for companies seeking to register for federal contracting opportunities. I had the chance to speak with General Services Administrator (GSA) Robin Carnahan about this recently, and I was pleased to hear that thanks to the swift work of GSA's Technology Transformation Service, many of these initial setbacks are now being addressed.

I will continue to conduct oversight of these challenges, and stay in contact with both GSA and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), to ensure that the problem is fully resolved and that small businesses are paid for their work and able to pursue new opportunities.

Along with these measures, GSA and OMB are also taking timely efforts to dramatically improve government-wide customer experience by designating \$100 million from the Technology Modernization Fund to help secure and modernize government technology and improve online access to government services.

Once implemented, these reforms have the potential to not only improve the ability of federal agencies to deliver modern, effective digital services to citizens, but to also improve taxpayer satisfaction with the government.

As Chairman, I have pressed for robust resources to improve the customer experience and promote government efficiency and accountability, most recently by passing my bipartisan *Federal Agency Performance Act* out of this Committee last month. This bill seeks to provide lawmakers and the Administration, with the necessary tools and data to measure and evaluate the performance of federal agencies and ensure they are meeting their long-term strategic goals.

This bill, along with other bipartisan efforts to address some of the key barriers to effective federal service delivery, are an important step, but there is more Congress can do to implement proven, effective solutions by government agencies.

Today I am pleased to be joined by our panel of non-governmental, expert witnesses who can discuss how we can better address this well-known problem, so the federal government can improve its ability to deliver valuable customer services to Americans more quickly, securely, and effectively.

Opening Statement [as prepared]

Ranking Member Rob Portman

Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing:

“Putting People First – Building Trust in Government Through
Customer Experience”

Thursday, June 23, 2022

Thank you, Chairman Peters.

I’m glad we’re having this hearing on the bipartisan issue of customer experience with government. In this committee we hear the phrase “good government” a lot, commonly in the context of accountability and transparency. However, I think “good government” also means efficiency. I believe that government should have a limited role in people’s lives; but in order for people to focus on their families, jobs, and growing our economy, their interactions with the government need to be efficient. People must be able to get what they need and move on with their lives. This involves everything from applying for grants to support their small businesses, to applying for veterans’ benefits, to waiting in line at the airport.

For example, I've heard that the Ohio Department of Transportation has found the federal Department of Transportation's "Common Application" feature convenient because it allows applicants to apply for multiple infrastructure funding opportunities through one application.

On the other hand, I am concerned that some Ohio businesses have recently had problems with a General Services Administration (GSA) website for government contracts that was developed in-house. These businesses have had trouble getting paid for work they did for the government, or had agencies stop working with them because the website's system for registration renewal was not working correctly.

In 2018, Congress passed my *21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act*, or the 21st Century IDEA Act. I'm glad to see Ms. Dorris and Mr. Lira here today, whom I know from my time working on that bill. Among other things, the *21st Century IDEA Act* requires an agency that maintains a website or digital service to ensure that it has a consistent appearance, is accessible to individuals with disabilities, has a search function, has an industry-standard secure connection, and

is generally designed around user needs. These are all common-sense elements.

It also requires that each agency make available an online, mobile-friendly, digital service option for any in-person government transaction or paper-based process in a manner that decreases cost and improves customer experience. Unfortunately, we know that many of the requirements in this law remain unimplemented. I look forward to a discussion with our witnesses of why that is and how Congress can increase oversight to ensure full implementation.

White House efforts in the Trump administration and continuing in the Biden administration have begun to move agencies in the right direction. In December, President Biden signed an Executive Order on customer experience with government. I may not agree with everything in there, but I think it's a good step forward on prioritizing the issue.

I'm always open to learning about new legislative ideas, but I think we should also focus on using the tools we already have, particularly through increased oversight of the recent mandates from Congress and initiatives within the executive branch. There is also a lot we can learn from our private sector, which is always developing

new innovations we can tap into. We must also ensure we are good stewards of taxpayer money, and respect the balance of state and federal jurisdictions on which our country was built.

I look forward to hearing our witnesses' ideas on how we can prioritize making our government work better for the people. Thank you.

Written Testimony of Martha A. Dorris

Founder of Dorris Consulting International

Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs

On "Putting People First: Building Trust in Government through
Customer Experience"

June 23, 2022

Good morning Chairman Peters, Ranking Member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify today; it is a privilege to discuss how the federal government can improve the experience the American public has when interacting, engaging and transacting with them.

My name is Martha Dorris, and I am the Founder of Dorris Consulting International, a small business consultancy that helps government and industry transform government services through sharing best practices across agencies, connecting people, and recognizing and celebrating successes at all levels of government through the Service to the Citizen Awards. I have been in my current role for almost seven years. I previously served for 34 years with the U.S. General Services Administration, including twelve years as the Deputy Associate Administrator for the Office of Citizen Services. These experiences have made me acutely aware of the challenges and opportunities confronting federal agencies as they pursue improving citizen services.

Every day, millions upon millions of people are interacting with the U.S. government, in many different ways - whether it's seniors receiving monthly payments from Social Security; travelers going through TSA screening; survivors of national emergencies receiving resources to recover from floods, wildfires, etc; veterans who are interacting with the healthcare system or applying for their benefits; or people going to national parks. People depend on government information in their daily lives and some of these services are provided during the most critical moments in people's lives. It has been found that many people who are eligible for these services don't receive them due to the overly complex and cumbersome eligibility processes.

Democracy is built on a system of trust. The experience people have with their government when they need it the most is critical to building trust. Services that are difficult to use or having to navigate the organizational structures of the government impact the public's trust and vulnerability to emerging threats.

The public's experience over the past two plus years has increased their expectations in being able to access government information anytime, anywhere on any device. The public should be able to obtain consistent information and services online through a website via a computer or mobile device, via the phone, email, chat, or social media without having to start over each time. When someone needs information or a government service/benefit, it's normally at a vulnerable time in their life. That experience should be easy, transparent, secure, and timely.

Customer experience is a business discipline that can improve the delivery of services to the customer from the time someone has a need through the completion of a transaction. CX includes knowing who your customers are, understanding their expectations, listening to real-time feedback, designing services using human centered design techniques and making continual improvements through measures that matter. Creating a customer-focused culture is core to ensuring that customers' needs are met. Customers means the public, employees, businesses, and other agencies.

The public expects to access government information anytime, anywhere on any device. They should be able to obtain consistent information and services whether they are online through a website or mobile app, a call, email, chat, or social media. That experience should be easy, transparent, secure, and timely.

The Biden-Harris' Administration has focused on delivering excellent, equitable and secure federal services through their management agenda and Executive Order. A management agenda that specifically highlights CX signals to the political and career officials that improving government services is a priority. Together, they set the vision and roadmap for designing services during key life events by putting people first, identifying short-term commitments for agencies, and strategies for incorporating CX into the business of government.

Applying the principles and practices of customer experience is difficult in the private sector but has unique challenges in the government. The government serves a diverse population while most private sector companies can select the population they want to serve. In addition, CX in the private sector is driven by loyalty and revenue. The benefits of better service delivery in the government include increased efficiency, employee engagement, voluntary compliance of government mandates, simplifying lives of Americans and building trust in government. Meeting the needs of customers requires starting with the customer and working your way backwards.

Customer experience isn't about technology alone. The time is now to modernize government services. To transform digital experiences, we need to:

1. Modernize secure technology infrastructures including broadband, cloud, AI and collaborative technologies
2. Modernize government websites and contact centers to create a full end-to-end digital experiences
3. Ensure identity management is easy to use and secure

4. Understand their customers by listening to feedback, using data analytics and human centered design techniques
5. Hiring and reskilling to build the talent needed to transform these important services.

Websites and apps have become a critical way for the American public to interact with the government. According to analytics.usa.gov, there were over 4.98 billion visits to government websites in the last 90 days. People depend on government information and services to make important decisions every day and during the most critical times of their lives.

According to GSA's Digital.gov, when comparing the website traffic to federal websites from March 11, 2020, to March 10, 2021, against the year before it (from March 12, 2019 to March 10, 2020, because 2020 was a leap year), the overall visits to federal websites that participate in the U.S. General Services Administration's Digital Analytics Program (DAP) increased by 57%, from about 14.82 billion to about 23.33 billion.

GSA attributes this 8.51 billion visit increase to an incredible amount of new content created by government agencies as a result of COVID-19. DAP data shows that there were over 28,000 individual webpages that received 100 pageviews or more containing the words "COVID" or "Coronavirus" in the page title.

As of April 2021, from March 2020 to April 2021, mobile devices became the dominant technology used to access federal websites, by about a 55% to 43% ratio, and tablets dropped to nearly 3%. The mobile versions of the high impact services scored much higher than desktop in satisfaction (4.22 to 4.07), effectiveness (4.14 to 3.99), ease (4.11 to 3.94), efficiency (4.06 to 3.86) and transparency (4.38 to 4.14). The scores suggest that a well-designed mobile experience can raise experience scores.

While improving services has its challenges, the government has demonstrated many successes. A couple of notable accomplishments include:

1. The VA went from 2500 telehealth appointments per day in March 2020 to 45,000 per day in March 2021 and improved trust by 24% over the past five years.
2. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) created a contact center concierge service called ASKUSDA to reduce the burden on the public to navigate USDA's organizational structure.

3. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has released a Taxpayer Experience Strategy and established a Chief Taxpayer Experience Officer reporting to the Commissioner of IRS. The IRS has expanded the customer callback service. They are also reaching more people in other languages.

What can Congress do?

Congress has the opportunity to ensure that improving government services is a priority that's sustainable over time. A Federal Chief Customer Officer needs to be established that is responsible for establishing the vision and strategy for improving the end-to-end customer experience, coordinating and collaborating with Chief Customer Officers and HISP leads across the government to share best practices and oversee the continual improvement to the government's delivery of services to their customers.

Each Agency with high impact services needs an organization or executive in charge of customer-focused initiatives reporting to the head or deputy of the Agency/Department. Congress should closely monitor service level improvements and internal CX capabilities for all agencies through a CX Report Card based on a CX Maturity Model. The CX Maturity Model and Report Card should assess the Agency/Department's leadership and governance of customer-facing systems and services, customer-focused strategic priorities, implementation of digital services, performance management, understanding of their customers, use of human centered design techniques, multi and omni-channel service delivery, and culture. From a performance perspective, Agencies/Departments should be assessed on service level improvements, improvements in trust, overall experience and satisfaction and the delivery of equitable, inclusive products and services.

The government's role is to serve the people. Reimagining how the public interacts with the government will improve the lives of the American people, make the government more efficient, and increase the public's trust in government.



Written Testimony of William D. Eggers

Executive Director, Deloitte Center for Government Insights, Deloitte Services LP

United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Hearing on "Putting People First: Building Trust in Government through Customer Experience"

June 23, 2022

Deloitte Center *for*
Government Insights

Introduction

Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman and members of the Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I've been researching and writing about government reform for 35 years, and there have been few opportunities like today to radically improve how government delivers services to its citizens. I want to thank the committee for its attention to citizen experience at this crucial time.

My name is William Eggers. I'm the executive director of the [Deloitte Center for Government Insights](#), a research institute that publishes a large number of studies each year on a range of government topics including customer experience, trust in government, digital government, climate change and the future of work. I also serve as a fellow at the National Academy of Public Administration, a council member at the World Economic Forum, and advisory board member for What Works Cities. I've published numerous books on a range of topics from digital transformation to public-private partnerships.

Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu is the world's largest professional services firm, with more than 360,000 employees in more than 150 countries. In the United States, we have more than 120,000 employees.

Serving the U.S. federal government is one of Deloitte's most significant initiatives. We have more than 25,000 individuals working alongside leaders from civilian and defense agencies to support their strategic initiatives through our expertise in human capital, customer experience, technology integration and program management.

From our research, we have gleaned four key lessons to improve customer experience (CX) in government:

- **Put citizens at the heart of service delivery:** Government efforts to improve CX often fall short of citizen expectations because they focus on improving operations from the viewpoint of *government*, not citizens. A CX focus places the citizen or business at the center of government services and asks how best to meet their needs.
- **Find new models for delivering services:** User-centricity can uncover new and transformational ways to deliver services, such as *life event-based service delivery*, which can cut costs, build trust and slash the "invisible tax" on citizens and businesses — the time and resources needed to deal with siloed government systems.
- **Make necessary changes to agency operations:** Such new models of government service, however, may require significant changes to current operations, changes that are possible only with sustained commitments of time, attention, resources and leadership.
- **Close budget and technology gaps for cross-agency CX initiatives.** To accelerate CX, consider creating a statutory foundation for existing efforts; provide additional funding authority for CX initiatives, both at high-impact service providers (HISPs) and on a cross-agency basis, and resolve structural barriers through actions such as broadening interagency transfer authority.

The current state of CX in government

Leading companies have found that putting customers at the heart of all activities can improve overall performance, and that realization is beginning to take root in government. The potential for a *triple value impact* — improved customer satisfaction, increased efficiency and enhanced mission effectiveness — is encouraging more and more government leaders to make the customer experience a core function. Advances in digital technologies, a new understanding of behavioral insights and new tools are helping governments worldwide pursue CX more rigorously.

Technology and executive orders have helped drive progress

CX isn't a new concept in government. As far back as 1993, the White House has issued executive orders and memos aimed at improving the customer experience at federal agencies. Since then, new technologies such as the internet, smartphones and social media have offered both new opportunities and new challenges. New sources of talent have been brought to bear on these issues through the U.S. Digital Service, 18F and other programs.

Most recently, the December 2021 Executive Order 14058, [Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government](#), emphasizes improving the customer experience for Americans by focusing on their life experiences. The EO calls for dedicated multi-disciplinary design and development teams to support priority services at 35 high-impact service providers (HISPs).¹ These services include food benefits for women and children, trademark applications, retirement and health benefits and federal student aid.²

As a follow-up to the EO, the President's Management Council identified five life experiences with which to begin:

- approaching retirement
- recovering from a disaster
- making the transition from military service to civilian life
- birth and early childhood for low-income women and their children
- facing a financial shock

Today, these five life events *all* require the public to interact with multiple agencies. For each life experience, cross-agency teams are researching users, understanding their pain points and devising action plans to improve their experiences.

Executive Order 14058 follows a series of executive orders, OMB circulars, toolkits and other initiatives developed in the past three decades across multiple administrations. These initiatives aimed not only to increase the focus on CX, but also to institutionalize it in government operations. Agencies have been directed to gather feedback, measure customer experiences, establish services standards and measure their performance against them. The orders also have directed agencies to develop plans to streamline services and improve the customer experience.

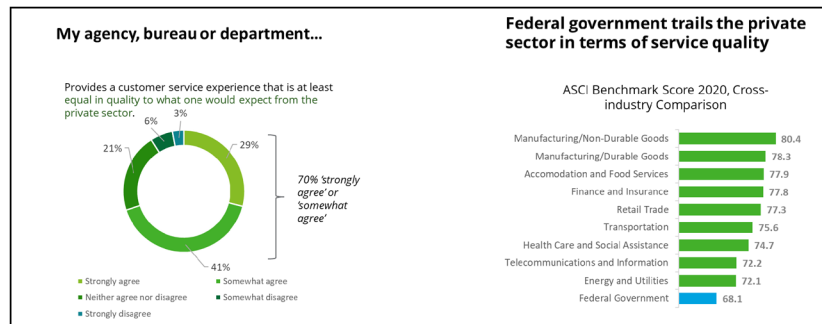
Later in this testimony, I focus on the "life event model" of CX to illustrate the concept, demonstrating the approaches different nations are using to radically improve the customer experience.

Fundamental challenges remain

For all of the improvements made by these efforts, government CX continues to lag behind that of the private sector. Citizens have grown used to relatively seamless and frictionless experiences from private companies, and expect — or hope for — similar experiences with government. Unfortunately, a significant gap remains between the services offered by governments and those of the private sector. According to Forrester’s Customer Experience Index, the federal average is nearly 11 percentage points behind the private-sector average and lower than that of any other industry or sector surveyed.³

Furthermore, there’s a mismatch between *government’s* view of CX and those of its constituents. According to a [Deloitte survey](#), 70% of federal managers indicated that their agencies deliver a customer experience that is “equal in quality” to private sector expectations.⁴ But citizen surveys paint a very different picture. In the American Customer Satisfaction Index, a national cross-industry measure, the federal government ranks far below other industries in customer satisfaction (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. Government leaders overestimate how well customers perceive their CX



It appears that federal managers are following the letter of executive and congressional directives on CX but may be missing their spirit. They often view CX as a compliance task rather than as a fundamental shift in service delivery. This can lead managers to overestimate the quality of their CX: “We’re in compliance, so we must be good.” We need to acknowledge this optimism bias within government to make truly meaningful strides toward CX.

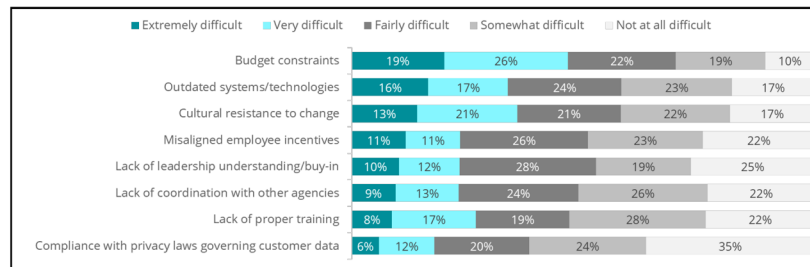
This gap in perceptions of the quality of customer experience can be connected to the much broader trend of declining trust in government. This isn’t a recent phenomenon. With few exceptions, public trust in government has been declining for decades.⁵

This is reflected in the way citizens *perceive* government services and programs. Many Americans today are so convinced that government programs are substandard and inefficient that they misidentify high-quality government services as private or just rate them as lower in quality more or less automatically.⁶ This crisis of trust affects almost all aspects of government work today.

Our research also suggests that budget constraints and outdated technology are some of the largest barriers to improving CX within government (**Figure 2**). But cultural factors are another, often

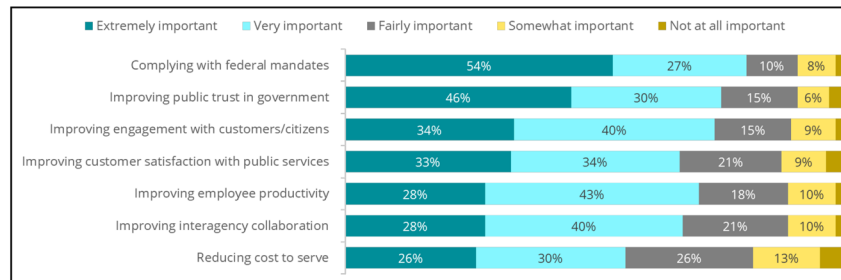
overlooked, factor. Changing culture and mindsets plays an important role in moving organizations incremental improvements to transformation.

Figure 2. Budget and outdated technology are perceived as significant barriers to better CX



All too often, government CX efforts are *driven by government, for government*. Fully 81% of leaders cited “complying with federal mandates” as an extremely/very important motivation for CX, but less than 53% said their agency consistently collects feedback on CX from constituents (**Figure 3**). This creates a troubling picture: federal managers view CX efforts as successful if they comply with federal orders and guidelines, and don’t have enough input from their customers to be persuaded otherwise.

Figure 3. Compliance with mandates is the leading motive for government to improve CX



The relationship between CX and trust in government

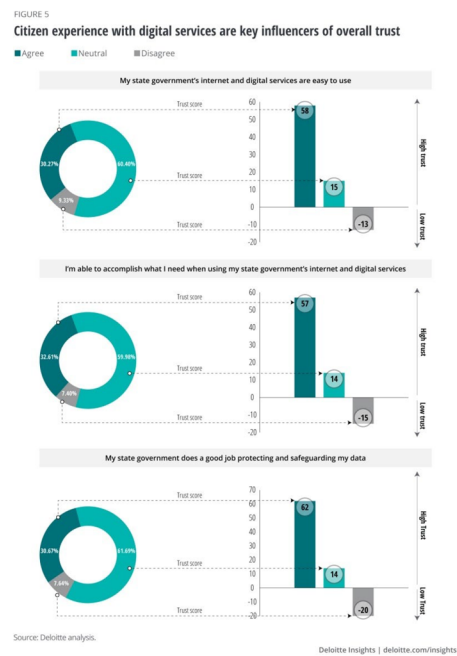
The mismatch between government and customer perceptions of CX points to an important issue: getting CX right *matters*. CX is ultimately a *perception* of how government agencies serve their customers. Without accurate and timely feedback about those perceptions, government can find itself spending more money for little in the way of effective results. Conversely, improving CX can improve customer satisfaction while increasing efficiency and enhancing mission effectiveness.

Citizens' digital experience with government is a strong predictor of their trust in government. This trust is *essential* — it affects public participation and engagement, compliance, customer satisfaction and recruitment, among other impacts. Many factors affect trust in government; it's easy to focus on higher-profile phenomena such as media coverage and political divides. But our research shows that trust is fundamentally related to citizen beliefs regarding government's competence and intent.

Those factors are strongly shaped by our individual interactions with government and what our peers tell us about their interactions. Each competent, human-centered, integrity-driven interaction contributes to increased general trust. CX thus either reinforces or undermines our belief in the competence and intentions of government.

A Deloitte survey on rebuilding trust in government found a strong link between satisfaction with online services and trust in government. Americans who said they were pleased with their state government's digital services also tended to rate the state highly on measures of overall trust (**Figure 4**). Those unhappy with digital services scored government *much* lower on trust; dissatisfaction essentially wiped out any inherent loyalty to government institutions.

Figure 4. Citizen experience with digital services are key influencers of overall trust



Citizens tend to trust *proximate* government more than distant government. By design, digital services make distant services more proximate, creating a direct interaction. Because digital is now a common first point of interaction with government, a positive online experience and secure and user-friendly services are critical to enhancing overall trust.⁷

The primacy of digital also helps illuminate the infrastructure government needs to improve CX. Government services are concerned with real, physical human beings, but if its interaction with them take place online, traditional paper documents such as passports and Social Security cards won't work. Instead, government needs a form of identity that can work seamlessly across both physical and digital worlds. A form of physical-digital identity can improve the public's experience while improving government efficiency and reducing the chance for fraud.

Improve trust *and* CX by building networks of trust

But government digital services don't exist in a vacuum; agencies rarely provide every part of digital service. Generally, government agencies work with vendors, partners and private industry to provide digital services.

But if a government service is to be trusted, *every link in that chain* must live up to the same trustworthy standards. A failure, data breach or error by one player will reduce users' trust in government more broadly. This means that [government must coordinate "networks of trust,"](#) working to ensure that entire ecosystems adhere to common standards of behavior.

Improve trust and CX by demonstrating empathy

Trust in government is a function of repeated successful interactions between constituents and a government agency. Again, CX plays a vital role in driving this trust, and can have a cascading effect on other government areas, both positive and negative.⁸ We've seen this play out in the way individuals' experiences at departments of motor vehicles and passport services affect their broader perceptions of government services.

While capability and reliability are primary drivers of CX, our research suggests that governments also have to deliver CX with *empathy*.

Demonstrating empathy can go a long way toward improving trust. Our work with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) shows how this works. Through its VSignals program that collects feedback from veterans and dependents, the VA has evolved into an "empathetic" organization laser-focused on the veteran experience and well-being. Feedback data collected through the program allowed the VA to measure service attributes linked to trust signals, including transparency, empathy, effectiveness and ease of use. The resulting insights then were used to improve its customer experience.⁹ The program proved especially useful for identifying veterans in crisis. The VA intervened in a total of 691 suicide crises, using AI-based tools that analyze comments in real time and route concerns to local VA offices and crisis hotlines.¹⁰

Each citizen interaction is a micro "moment of truth" for governments, and each has a wider impact on trust.

Improve CX and trust by increasing employee engagement

Our research also suggests a link between the customer experience and federal employee engagement. Employees often are the face of government for citizens. Focusing on *employee* life-cycle events such as recruitment, performance management, retention and employee experience can help governments create a highly engaged workforce. More engaged workers tend to work better and provide better services to citizens, improving CX and thereby increasing public trust.¹¹

Our analysis, based on proprietary surveys and federal employee engagement survey data, found that an increase in employee engagement scores leads to improvements in customer experience and thereby in trust. We also found that aligning employee skills with the agency's mission has a major impact; for agencies that interact intensively with citizens, this would mean better aligning employee skills with the mission of providing better customer service.

Access to training and development opportunities is positively correlated with federal employee engagement. Agencies should provide employees the right CX training and tools, including customer segmentation, journey mapping, human-centered service design, personalization and "co-creation," which incorporates customer feedback in every part of service design.¹² These tools can improve the employee experience, while human-centered design in particular can show agencies what actually matters to their customers.¹³

The benefits to government from improving CX

Improving CX offers many agencies an opportunity to reduce costs. Co-creation and customer testing, often through prototypes or storyboards, help teams more clearly define their customers' needs and wants. Organizations then can avoid investing in features and tools their customers will never use, or messaging that misses the mark. Early testing of new features helps give organizations a better understanding of customer adoption and leads to more relevant programs and services.

- **The real value of CX can be realized when the federal government uses it to drive meaningful change.** While 58% of federal managers indicate that their agency incorporates CX in decision-making, only 51% say their agency's overall strategy has a CX component. To elevate CX to the mission level, agencies need a leader who owns all the touchpoints across the customer journey. Based on our research, only 48% of agencies have a dedicated CX office or leader. This said, the growing emergence of a CX leadership role in the public sector is an encouraging sign.
- **Better data analytics can guide federal agencies on their CX journey, but many agencies don't even collect or analyze customer data.** Only 54% of federal managers surveyed said their agency consistently collects customer feedback data, and about the same share said they conduct ongoing research about their customers. Only 57% of respondents analyze customer feedback and only 46% publicly share customer feedback analysis.¹⁴

If you get CX right, the benefits follow

An agency's ability to achieve its mission is linked to its ability to deliver an effective customer experience. Several benefits flow from improving CX:

1. **Increased compliance.** As their trust in government increases, citizens and businesses are more likely to comply with rules and procedures.
2. **Improved effectiveness.** An enhanced experience often requires agencies to change their workflows, reimagine back-end processes, modernize systems and reimagine how they deliver services. This can lead to increased efficiency, the elimination of duplicative processes and systems and a more effective use of existing technologies and resources.
3. **Better employee engagement.** Positive citizen experiences and streamlined operations can lead to more engaged employees who take pride in working for the government.
4. **A reduced “invisible tax” on citizens and businesses** — that is, the time and resources needed to navigate government services and comply with regulations. Improving the experience for businesses also reduces compliance burdens, encourages innovation and spurs job creation.

A life-events focus

Whether they’re registering a birth, founding a business or seeking aid after a natural disaster, people don’t *care* how many agencies are involved or what forms are needed, they just want results. A life-event approach does two critical things: it can begin delivering services without the citizen’s involvement, and provide multiple types of services in response to a single life event.

Life event-based services

Life event-based service delivery is one of the most important trends in government CX. Citizens regularly encounter life events that trigger interactions with multiple agencies. A marriage, for instance, can involve not just a marriage license but a change of address, a new legal name and changing eligibility for government benefits such as health insurance subsidies. The number of required transactions can be daunting — and providing the same information again and again is irritating at best.

Such an experience is twice as cruel if the life event is painful, such as a disabling injury, a job loss, a natural disaster or a death. Not long ago, United Kingdom citizens coping with the death of a loved one had to contact multiple national and local government departments up to 44 times to notify about the death.¹⁵ To rectify this, the UK created a “*Tell Us Once*” program for interactions involving death and bereavement. With a single interaction, UK residents can trigger notifications to tax authorities, the passport office, local governments and benefits programs. Tell Us Once has been nominated for two technology leadership awards.¹⁶ Between tech infrastructure improvements and other efficiencies, recent upgrades to the program are saving the UK government £20 million annually.¹⁷

In the U.S., the state of Connecticut’s *one-stop business portal* organizes information and services around significant business events such as starting a new business, managing a business, paying taxes and relocating or expanding a business. The portal generates a customized checklist to guide prospective entrepreneurs through the process of setting up a business entity. More than 17,000 checklists have been created on the portal since it went live in summer 2020.¹⁸ In neighboring New York, a central pillar of the state’s digital strategy is delivering services around key life events.

Life event-based services require a realignment and integration of information and resources to understand and anticipate the cluster of needs a citizen may have — even when the person navigating a new life event isn’t aware of all the services that may be available.

Challenges in implementing life-event services

The life-event model disrupts how government agencies traditionally have been organized. Again, many related tasks prompted by a life event are handled by totally separate entities. Consider how creating a new business can trigger the need for incorporation, sales tax permits, a Small Business Administration loan and more — all traditionally delivered by separate entities. Integrating such services, with the required technology, governance and funding, presents significant challenges:

1. **Siloed technology and data systems:** Life-event service delivery requires seamless data sharing. Unfortunately, siloed computer systems often hinder data sharing even *within* an agency, let alone among different parts of government. Moreover, seamless systems require common data standards, and many governments haven't defined such standards.
2. **Governance and misaligned incentives:** Effective cross-departmental governance requires well-defined roles and an alignment of goals among separate agencies. Existing policy frameworks and legislation often hinder data sharing and restrict the scope of shared governance and accountability mechanisms.
3. **Siloed funding:** Government funding generally is tied to specific agency programs. It may be difficult to assign funding according to outcomes or to divide it among partnering agencies. Furthermore, government funding often requires estimates for the full funding requirement at the initial stage of a project, which can constrain agencies' ability to adapt to changing customer needs. As has been seen in software acquisition, more flexible funding and acquisition authorities can help break down silos and improve efficiency.¹⁹
4. **Privacy and data security concerns:** Consolidated information systems create data security challenges. If an update in one part of the system triggers automatic changes to other government records, it may open opportunities for identity theft. Vigilance is essential.
5. **Lack of trust:** Life-event service delivery requires two levels of trust. One is trust among agencies; if they don't trust one another to share data, resources and technology, they can't deliver a collaborative service. Second is trust from citizens. If they don't trust government agencies with their data, they'll be reluctant to consent to its use. Thus, relationships and tight protocols are needed to build strong partnerships.
6. **Inadequate coordination across levels of government:** The number of levels of government — federal, state, county, municipal and more — affected by some life events can make coordination difficult. Statutory, financial and even cultural differences between levels of government can make it difficult to create a streamlined, end-to-end experience for customers.

Examples in other nations

Life-event service delivery requires linking services and costs across multiple agencies and levels of government. It calls for reimagined governance models, shared funding and secure data-sharing technologies citizens can trust. Much can be learned from successful examples in other nations.

New Zealand's life-events program: Focusing on user centrality

SmartStart, one of New Zealand's life-event efforts, is an interagency program for birth and infant care that was born from extensive surveys and interviews. A multi-agency team conducted workshops,

interviewed parents and used journey mapping to understand the pain points parents faced in registering a baby and accessing early childhood services, and continued engaging with stakeholders throughout the project's lifecycle.²⁰

Several lessons emerged through this process. First, start with user testing and continue it throughout the project to uncover users' biggest pain points. Second, prioritize the features most customers want. Based on customer feedback, the SmartStart team identified eight key features for a minimum viable product (MVP). Third, test and *use* the MVP; don't wait until the product roadmap is final to start development. And finally, be agile — respond to feedback and iterate quickly.²¹

Singapore's life-event app: Lessons in governance

Singapore's Life SG app assembles a wide variety of government programs through a single interface organized by life events. Citizens can search for programs they need and apply for them through the app. The bulk of work on LifeSG was driven by the Public Service Division (PSD) and the Ministry of Social and Family Development. Both organizations co-chaired an operations committee comprising senior leaders from 15 different agencies.²² PSD's Innovation Lab established a program office made up of officers seconded from participating agencies to manage the project.²³ Singapore now offers more than 70 services through the app.²⁴

New South Wales: Shared funding

To overworked federal staff, a cross-agency approach can feel like an added responsibility. As one government executive put it, "We're going to be measured on our own performance, and not on cross-agency performance."²⁵ Funding mechanisms for shared responsibilities, then, should provide appropriate incentives yet maintain flexibility. That's why in June 2020, Australia's New South Wales (NSW) state government announced a record investment of \$1.6 billion in its Digital Restart Fund.²⁶ In June 2021, the fund was topped up with an additional \$500 million, extending it to 2024.²⁷

The Digital Restart Fund is designed to accelerate whole-of-government digital transformation and funds projects at multiple agencies including life-event projects, digital assets used by multiple agencies, modernization of legacy systems and by upskilling NSW government employees.²⁸

Portugal: Frictionless, automated interactions

During the height of the pandemic, every time someone was reported as having COVID-19, Portugal's health ministry would contact the social security ministry to issue a "temporary leave permit" authorizing the individual's absence from work.²⁹ Companies then could submit these names for a refund on payroll taxes.

Portugal also has made registering a new company relatively quick and painless. For a fee of \$500, the company is registered as a business and even issued a domain name.³⁰ Preapproved names and contracts supplied by the government further speed the process.

How to succeed in improving government CX

Many government agencies are stuck in traditional program-centric service delivery models that prioritize agency processes over citizen needs. Here's how federal agencies can accelerate their CX journey:

Understand your customers

- **Shift from a government-centric to a citizen-centric lens.** Tailor government standards and processes around citizen needs, not government silos. This requires ethnographic research, citizen interviews, focus group discussions and behavioral insight tools. But even more so, it requires congressional action to help reduce the budget and process restrictions that create silos. Cross-agency governance structures should give agencies the flexibility they need to move quickly to meet changing customer demand without compromising Congress' critical oversight role.
- **Use data to identify citizen needs** and tailor government processes to deliver a consistent experience. Coordinate within and among agencies to share citizen data and enable seamless services.³¹
- **Ensure changes are designed from the user's perspective.** Human-centered design examines problems from the user's point of view. While it promises better CX, it also can increase program buy-in, improve processes and efficiencies and lower errors and costs.
- **Invest in CX measurement platforms** that track individual experiences to prioritize improvements to the customer journey. Better data drives better design and better design drives citizen satisfaction.³²

Tie the customer experience to a particular mission outcome.

- **Directly link mission outcomes with CX.** A common misconception about CX is that it's only about delivering a great customer experience; but it *also* can be used to advance mission outcomes. The Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) PreCheck program allows passengers who pass a background check to speed through airport security lines. Travelers voluntarily provide data that, when combined with other layers of security, allow TSA to direct more screening resources to higher-risk passengers and protect the nation's transportation systems more efficiently.³³
- **Improve decision-making** by focusing on customer analytics to unlock a treasure trove of insights into customer behaviors, issues, needs, and pain points.

Create a roadmap for change

A unified vision for change starts with an assessment of the organization's current state and maturity with respect to customer experience.

- After defining the "as is" state, the organization can define the **future state**. The future state vision or blueprint begins with basic design principles — core statements of what the system and culture will do.
- **Designate a leader to own CX initiatives.** Since many government agencies operate in silos, it's often difficult for agencies to make changes to CX because no single person or business unit owns all the touchpoints in the customer journey. To rectify this, leading agencies are establishing a CX office that coordinates projects across an agency, prioritizes initiatives and influences budget decisions that affect citizens directly.
- **Adopt new governance and budget structures** to allow for better cross-agency collaboration. Designate dedicated funds for cross-agency CX initiatives. The Technology Modernization Fund's \$100 million allocated to projects supporting the executive order on CX is an important start.³⁴

Build infrastructure to deliver CX

Personalized and frictionless services require strong data-sharing mechanisms. Truly seamless services often are built on a digital platform and unique digital identities that enable a 360-degree view of citizen-consumers.

- **Build the customer-facing infrastructure.** Drive the adoption of digital identity for personalized service delivery. India's Aadhaar, a unique digital ID, has been used to disburse COVID-19 cash relief. The Aadhaar-enabled payment system disbursed 280 billion rupees (US \$3.8 billion) to more than 300 million beneficiaries during the lockdown.³⁵
- **Build the technical infrastructure.** Embracing new technologies can help lay the foundation for new customer experiences. For example, integrated data management systems can promote the "once-only" principle, so that citizens and businesses need to provide information just once to use multiple government services. With common data shared across agencies, organizations can then redesign service delivery processed to integrate emerging technologies such as AI. Estonia relies on AI and machine learning technology to profile job candidates and recommend jobs for which they may be best suited.³⁶
- **Build the organizational infrastructure.** New technology won't improve CX unless it's accompanied by sustained leadership and governance. Cross-agency governance structures, whether at OMB or elsewhere, can help ensure that the focus on CX isn't lost, and that agencies continue to put the public at the center of their services.

Conclusion

Building trust in government is a continuous process. It will require challenging existing orthodoxies in government. Providing seamless and personalized service delivery through proactive models such as life events is an essential step in this direction. While shifting from a government-centric to a citizen-centric lens isn't always easy, the federal government's ability to rebuild trust in citizens depends on it.

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**STATEMENT OF
MATHEW L. LIRA**

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**AT A HEARING ENTITLED
“PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST:
BUILDING TRUST IN GOVERNMENT
THROUGH CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE”**

**PRESENTED
JUNE 23, 2022**

Introduction

Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and Members of the Committee -

Thank you for holding today's hearing and for inviting me here today to discuss this important issue.

Let us begin with the good news. Momentum is building and progress is being made. The Federal government's institutional capacity for change management has been strengthened by the bipartisan work of this committee. The TALENT Act, the Modernizing Government Technology Act, the Centers of Excellence Act and the 21st Century IDEA Act are reforms which continue to provide direct benefits to the American people. A fact demonstrated as recently as last week's announcement of dedicated CX funding in the Technology Modernization Fund.

Yet, despite this progress, why does the challenge of improving customer experiences remain pervasive across the Federal government?

Quite simply, we live in a world of exponential change and far too often agencies are making linear progress. Over time, this means that even as progress is made the gap between the public's expectations and their experiences is getting worse. The only way to close this gap is for the pace of improvements to match or exceed the pace of change – agencies must implement solutions capable of scaling to the size of the problem.

Recommendations

Towards that end, I recommend the following initial steps be taken:

- 1) **Efforts should initially focus on High Impact Service Providers**, the 35 Federal programs designated by OMB as having public-facing services with the greatest scale and impact. The prioritization of improvements to High Impact Service Providers in the President's Management Agenda and recent Executive Order are welcome developments that should be supported by this committee.
- 2) **Agencies should leverage commercial technology at scale.** The technology to solve this problem exists, in fact it is largely commoditized across our economy. We do not need to hire Thomas Edison to invent the lightbulb; we simply need to buy them in the marketplace. From robotic process automation, the digitization of citizen-facing forms, the use of electronic signatures, and other standards-compliant SaaS products - proven commercial technologies that provide truly exceptional customer experiences are readily available.
- 3) **CX needs a guaranteed seat at the table. There must be increased accountability within agencies for customer experiences.** Too often, the prioritization of CX improvements within agencies are driven by the ad hoc actions of a single advocate rather than as a core equity empowered by organizational design. I believe this committee should direct agency heads to designate and empower a senior official with CXO responsibilities for every High Impact Service Provider within their agency, with the budget and operational authority to match those responsibilities.
- 4) **Agencies should leverage the authorities they've been given.** Far too many authorities given to agencies by Congress remain underutilized. Specifically, this committee should encourage OMB to issue implementation guidance for the provisions outlined in the 21st Century IDEA Act and to leverage the requirement that agencies comply with the U.S. Web Design System. In all candor, as we have seen with the success of similar efforts in the United Kingdom and various state governments, I believe the proper implementation of this single provision has enormous potential to improve the quality of customer experiences across the government.
- 5) **Quantitative measurement of results.** This committee should explore requirements to collect and publish quantitative metrics of Federal service delivery. While qualitative metrics can provide valuable insights, the direct measurement of customer experiences -

wait times, program backlogs, time to resolution, and other key performance indicators - are essential to meaningfully measuring the net effectiveness of agency efforts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while the issue of agency customer experiences may not grab headlines every day, it does impact millions of Americans. Every. Single. Day.

People for whom broken links and poorly implemented webforms equate to sleepless nights and stolen time away from their families. Millions of people who, often in their most vulnerable moments, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

By leveraging modern technology, our government has the potential to deliver exceptional customer experiences and, in the process, restore the public's faith in our national institutions once again.

Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

Additional Statements

Reinforce CX Improvements at High Impact Service Providers. Building on the bipartisan work of the previous two Administrations, last December President Biden signed the Executive Order Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery, which provided 36 specific customer experience improvement commitments across 17 Federal agencies. Each commitment is oriented around significant life events - i.e., turning 65 and retiring, having a child, applying for a loan, etc. - focused on the High Impact Service Providers (HISP) as determined by OMB Circular A-11 in 2018. Notably, the Administration has set a specific success metric of delivering a post-transaction trust rating of 75% or higher at all HISPs. To the degree that they are aligned with the committee's overall policy objectives, the committee should reinforce these commitments in its discussions with the relevant Federal agencies.

The Need for a Chief Technology Officer. It should be noted that the lack of a Chief Technology Officer within the Office of Science and Technology Policy remains an opportunity to ensure that technical expertise is fully represented in senior-level discussions within the Executive Office of the President. In the previous two Administrations, the CTO was a valuable ally to the Federal CIO and other innovation stakeholders in ensuring these issues had organizational capital. Given that any nomination would likely take time to reach confirmation and we are rapidly approaching the midpoint of the Presidential term of office, I would recommend that the committee inquire as to the Administration's intentions regarding filling this important position.

CX Scorecard and Constructive Oversight. The impact of Congressional oversight should not be underestimated, particularly when aligned with a broader strategy and legislative requirements. For example, while imperfect and occasionally frustrating for agency officials, the FITARA scorecard served as an effective catalyst for change. I would encourage the committee to explore creating a similar, data-driven report structure for the customer experiences provided by High Impact Service Providers.

Restoring the Public's Trust. We all know the feeling, what it's like to be delighted by a customer interaction. Review any list of the most popular, most trusted - and often the most successful - brands in the United States and you will see a list of companies that treat their customers well. Throughout every touchpoint, in ways both large and small, the customer experience is prioritized. It's more than a mere luxury. It's a feeling of respect, it's a feeling of being valued, and it creates trust.

Over the past 90 days, according to Analytics.gov, there have been more than 5 billion visits to the Federal government's various digital properties. How many of those visits have delighted end users? How many of those visits have created trust?

And yet, unlike many of the country's private sector experiences, these visits are often by people for whom the underlying services are not optional. Well-designed, modern, equitable government services strengthen our Nation. It means millions of Veterans receive the benefits they have earned. Entrepreneurs and farmers who secure financing to take risks and create jobs. Mothers and infants who can access critical, life-changing nutrition support. Disaster survivors who can rebuild their homes and their lives without mountains of paperwork.

Restoring the public's trust in our Nation's institutions begins by earning it, one customer experience at a time.

I commend the committee for hosting this important discussion and encourage the committee to continue to focus on this issue.



Statement for the Record

Submitted to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Full Committee Hearing “Putting People First: Building Trust in Government through Customer Experience”

June 23, 2022

Submitted by The Center for Accountability, Modernization, and Innovation (CAMI)
1401 H St NW, Suite 550
Washington, D.C. 20005

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement to the Committee regarding its work to put people first and improve the customer experience in government. The Center for Accountability, Modernization, and Innovation (CAMI) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that provides thought leadership designed to help government work better for the American people. We advocate for policies that catalyze innovation, prominently including public/private and other multi-sector partnerships that will enhance the performance of federally funded public assistance programs, while also improving the quality of service to beneficiaries.

We applaud the Committee for holding a hearing on the important issue of improving the customer experience with government agencies. It is a key focus of CAMI; indeed, the organization has a podcast entitled “People First.”

As you know, on December 13, 2021, the Biden administration issued a sweeping executive order designed to drive new and better ways to improve the “customer,” or citizen, experience with government agencies. According to the order, the focus of these efforts will be on “modernizing programs, reducing administrative burdens, and piloting new online tools and technologies that can provide a simple, seamless and secure customer experience.” It is an ambitious and important initiative that sets bold objectives across a wide spectrum of federal programs from health to retirement, and from poverty to passports. It seeks to attack some of the most pernicious challenges in government management, many of which were defined in a compelling article by Annie Lowrey in *The Atlantic* (“The Time Tax”) and echoed by President Biden when he signed the order.

CAMI believes that this executive order presents an incredible opportunity to make important steps towards this goal, and we ask for your support in overseeing, and bolstering, the success of this Order.

The order will focus efforts on “modernizing programs, reducing administrative burdens, and piloting new online tools and technologies that can provide a simple, seamless, and secure customer experience.” It is an ambitious and important initiative that sets bold objectives across a wide spectrum of federal programs from health to retirement, and from poverty to passports. It seeks to attack some of the most pernicious challenges in government management. But, it is essential that the Order, and corresponding policy changes, are implemented in a way that makes good sense and actually addresses the problem.

For instance, let’s not jump into the business of fixing front end apps and websites until we’ve fully defined all of what really makes up the citizen experience—and what drives it. Any efforts to improve the technology and tools available to citizens must not only be underpinned by a comprehensive assessment of the disaggregated array of critical citizen services programs, but

also by an equally comprehensive assessment of the underlying business processes and policies that govern the programs themselves.

General Services Administration Administrator Robin Carnahan's declaration that "we're going to fix the damn websites" is spot on. But real fixes, real improvements in the full customer experience, are more about the underlying processes and policies that govern the citizen or customer journey. It's both the toughest part of the puzzle and the one with the biggest payoff.

Further, important, near-term "wins" are essential and very possible, particularly if we look to learn first from authorities and flexibilities that have already been put in place by Congress and/or the Executive Branch. The pandemic has helped to highlight some of the most glaring gaps in the delivery of citizen services, particularly those that are federally funded and state administered. The lessons learned as a result can form the basis for immediate, longer-term action. For example:

1. The pandemic-driven flexibilities that allowed state and local governments to hire part-time employees, rehire retirees and contract for private sector support for the extraordinary surge in back-logged claims expired four months ago. Since then, states and cities have not only continued to face daunting backlogs of millions of claims (which are expected to persist for many months, if not years), but also had to contend with massive staffing shortages that greatly exacerbate their ability to handle the surge and, in turn, substantially impair the citizen experience. By extending this expired flexibility, Congress can make an immediate difference.
2. Additionally, in the face of many reports of problems with the implementation of unemployment insurance programs (most of which involve organized technology incursions as opposed to individual fraud), last year Congress appropriated \$2 billion to modernize unemployment insurance and reduce fraud while improving access to benefits for unemployed claimants. To date, only \$140 million has been committed to the states. We ask that Congress push for these funds to be fully committed to states, which will go a long way to improve claimants' experiences during what are, by definition, very difficult times.

President Biden's order covers three dozen programs across seventeen agencies. It could catalyze the most significant reforms in decades to government management and, more importantly, to the plethora of ways in which citizens interact with government at all levels. Its sheer scope is exciting and full of potential. Some enhancements can be implemented quickly and help meet the Executive Order's directive that substantial results be recognized in a year. But the truth is that it will take much longer to really take hold across the complex, disaggregated array of programs and services.

We ask that Congress, and the Committee, continue to provide strong leadership and support for this crucial initiative, and take extra care to ensure that the framework President Biden has provided is executed in the most thoughtful and impactful way possible.



The Honorable Gary Peters, Chairman
 The Honorable Rob Portman, Ranking Member
 U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
 340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
 Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Chairman Peters and Ranking Member Portman,

I am writing to express my support for the [Federal Agency Customer Experience \(FACE\) Act](#) (S. 671) and urge Congress to pass this bipartisan measure that will improve federal customer experience and build public trust.

The Partnership for Public Service has been working with the government to improve the public's experience and trust with federal services. For years [our research](#) has consistently shown that agencies can greatly enhance how they deliver services by collecting customer feedback and data and using insights from the data to drive improvements.

One of the biggest obstacles to gathering voluntary customer feedback is the [Paperwork Reduction Act](#). In its current form, the law contains restrictions that require agencies to go through a convoluted approval process before being allowed to collect valuable voluntary public feedback. This process can often take more than six months to complete, increasing the time it takes for agencies to gather customer insights and improve their services accordingly.

Passing the FACE Act would enable agencies to quickly gather and act on feedback from the people they serve, and it would also provide important data for Congress to improve customer experience through oversight of federal agencies. The measure would also increase transparency with how agencies use voluntary public feedback and help agencies build public trust in their services. By using the insights learned from feedback effectively and efficiently, agencies can ensure their services are modern and meet the needs of all people.

I applaud the Senate for passing the FACE Act and encourage Congress to take immediate action to improve federal agency customer experience and build public trust by passing the FACE Act in the House and sending it to the President's desk. By enacting this legislation, Members of Congress can help create a sustainable government-wide approach to modernizing federal services right now and improve public trust in our federal government.

cc: Senator Maggie Hassan
 Senator James Lankford

Sincerely,

Max Stier
 President and CEO
 Partnership for Public Service

June 23, 2022

Questions for the Record
From Senator Ron Johnson
Submitted to Martha Dorris
“Putting People First: Building Trust in Government Through Customer Service”
June 23, 2022
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

Per your request, below is the answer to your question for the record.

Question: On June 22, 2022, the National Taxpayer Advocate’s annual report found that the IRS has a paper backlog of 10.5 million individual returns and 7.4 million business returns¹. Additionally, the IRS still needs to classify 3.4 million returns as individual or business returns.² When the IRS issues a notice to a taxpayer requesting a response, the taxpayer must do so by mail; the National Taxpayer Advocate’s report found it took the IRS an average of 251 days to process these responses, triple the average processing time of 74 days in fiscal year 2019.³ What are your recommendations to the IRS to timely and efficiently process its backlog of returns?

Answer:

It is clear from these examples that the IRS needs to focus and prioritize the amended returns backlog, digitize the process as it has in other tax processes, and allow taxpayers to understand where their returns are in the process. Using human centered design practices and feedback from taxpayers, the IRS can continue to improve the process. The IRS needs a full understanding of the taxpayer’s journey when filing an amended return if they haven’t done so. This will allow them to continue to make improvements as we have seen recently.

With the passage of the Taxpayer First Act and the Administration’s focus on improving customer experience, the IRS has increased its focus on improving the taxpayer’s experience. Like all federal agencies, the IRS is best able to accomplish its mission when they receive the resources necessary to do so. The IRS’ mission is vital to the functioning of our government. The IRS collects approximately \$4.1 trillion in gross revenue per year, representing about 96 percent of the gross revenue of the U.S., which shows that the success of our nation is closely tied to the success of the IRS. The President’s FY 2023 Budget proposal, which provides \$14.1 billion for the IRS, will allow the agency to take important steps forward in improving taxpayer service, modernizing their systems and ensuring fairness in the tax system. In February of 2022, to address the amended return inventory, the IRS temporarily moved approximately 900 employees (surge teams) with previous relevant experience back into key areas from other organizations enhancing the taxpayer experience the IRS needs to:

- Invest in automating the processing of amended returns received both on paper and electronically with multi-year funding to build out new phases of back-end processing
- Continue to focus on surge teams through the remainder of year to process existing amended return inventory, but IRS needs adequate and timely funding to hire staff to maintain the inventories in amended returns.

The IRS has made some progress, including:

¹ Taxpayer Advocate Service, *Annual Report to Congress* (2022)

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

Status of Processing Form 1040-X, Amended Individual Tax Return: As of July 2, 2022, the IRS had 2 million unprocessed Forms 1040-X. They are processing these returns in the order received and are working to get through the inventory. The current timeframe can be more than 20 weeks instead of up to 16. Taxpayers can check the status of their return at [Where's My Amended Return?](#) for the most up to date processing status available.

On the link below under the "Filed a Tax Return" tab, the IRS updates the status of processing of amended individual tax returns.

[IRS Operations During COVID-19: Mission-critical functions continue | Internal Revenue Service](#)

Thank you for the opportunity to share my recommendations on how the IRS can better serve the taxpayers when filing amended returns. I happen to be one of those people in the backlog so I'm certainly aware of this issue.

Questions for the Record
From Senator Ron Johnson
Submitted to William Eggers
“Putting People First: Building Trust in Government Through Customer Service”
June 23, 2022
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

Question from Senator Johnson:

- On June 22, 2022, the National Taxpayer Advocate’s annual report found that the IRS has a paper backlog of 10.5 million individual returns and 7.4 million business returns¹. Additionally, the IRS still needs to classify 3.4 million returns as individual or business returns.² When the IRS issues a notice to a taxpayer requesting a response, the taxpayer must do so by mail; the National Taxpayer Advocate’s report found it took the IRS an average of 251 days to process these responses, triple the average processing time of 74 days in fiscal year 2019.³ What are your recommendations to the IRS to timely and efficiently process its backlog of returns?

The IRS is working to process the return inventory through its workforce planning⁴ (including reassigning existing employees where feasible and hiring new employees. It is also investigating use of other solutions such as “scanning as a service”⁵ to expand existing scanning capabilities. I recommend IRS continue to find ways to scale these efforts to digitize data in order to address the inventory and enhance customer service.

¹ Taxpayer Advocate Service, *Annual Report to Congress* (2022)

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ Brian Naylor, ‘The IRS is assigning more workers to deal with a huge backlog of tax returns’, NPR, 21 February 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/21/1081747096/tax-filing-season-tax-return-2022>.

⁵ Dave Nyczepir, ‘As Pilot IRS program expands, agency looks for more ways to ‘buy like a venture capitalist’’, FedScoop, 24 January 2022, <https://www.fedscoop.com/pilot-irs-digitalization-issues/>.

Questions for the Record
From Senator Ron Johnson
Submitted to Matthew Lira
“Putting People First: Building Trust in Government Through Customer Service”
June 23, 2022
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

On June 22, 2022, the National Taxpayer Advocate’s annual report found that the IRS has a paper backlog of 10.5 million individual returns and 7.4 million business returns¹. Additionally, the IRS still needs to classify 3.4 million returns as individual or business returns.² When the IRS issues a notice to a taxpayer requesting a response, the taxpayer must do so by mail; the National Taxpayer Advocate’s report found it took the IRS an average of 251 days to process these responses, triple the average processing time of 74 days in fiscal year 2019.³ What are your recommendations to the IRS to timely and efficiently process its backlog of returns?

The witness failed to respond to these questions at time of printing. If responses are received, they will be on file in the committee offices for public inspection.

¹ Taxpayer Advocate Service, *Annual Report to Congress* (2022)

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*