FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
Thursday, September 17, 2015

Contact: Lauren Cozzi, 202-464-2692  
lcozzi@ourpublicservice.org

NEW REPORT OFFERS IDEAS TO ADDRESS GOVERNMENT DYSFUNCTION

Provides Guidelines, Examples and Recommendations to  
Improve Stewardship of Executive Branch

WASHINGTON – The nonprofit, nonpartisan Partnership for Public Service today released a new report that examines how congressional polarization and gridlock have diminished the ability of the executive branch to function effectively. “Government Disservice: Overcoming Washington Dysfunction to Improve Congressional Stewardship of the Executive Branch” highlights four critical areas where Congress—whether majority Republican or majority Democrat—has struggled to fulfill even its most basic responsibilities and hindered the ability of federal agencies to serve the needs of the American people.

“Much more is required of Congress and heads of agencies to find common ground in solving our nation’s problems and delivering for citizens,” said Max Stier, the organization’s president and CEO. “The good news is that there are Members of Congress fulfilling their role as stewards of effective government.”

The areas of concern include a repeated failure to meet funding deadlines, creating havoc for agency operations, and long delays in confirming political appointees, resulting in a significant leadership vacuum. Findings also reveal a lack of constructive oversight of federal agencies, with the emphasis on “political theater” rather than ensuring quality government, and a failure to renew or revise programs and policies, leaving agencies in limbo and unable to create new initiatives or halt those that are ineffective.

Research comes from extensive interviews with former high-level political appointees and career executives representing every Cabinet agency, who served in the Clinton, Bush or Obama administrations, and former representatives, senators and seasoned Capitol Hill aides.

Findings were released during an event including a panel discussion with Tom Davis, former chairman of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives; David J. Kappos, former Undersecretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property, U.S. Department of Commerce; and Clarine Nardi Riddle, chief of staff, former Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman, and co-founder of No Labels.
Findings:
1. There is a lack of understanding and appreciation between the legislative and executive branches.
2. Congressional oversight is more focused on headlines than improving agencies and programs.
3. Budget battles disrupt agency operations and result in lost productivity and an inability to plan, innovate and hire.
4. The lengthy confirmation process leaves key leadership posts vacant and discourages top talent from serving.
5. Executive branch agencies are buffeted by legislative headwinds and unintended consequences.

Recommendations:
1. Members of Congress and agency leaders should take responsibility for developing personal working relationships across the aisle and across branches of government to improve understanding, build trust and solve problems.
2. To improve oversight, Congress should seek more and better information to understand agency programmatic and operational challenges, and agencies should communicate regularly and candidly with Congress about what is working well and where they need help.
3. To reduce the disruption that stems from dysfunctional budget and appropriations processes, Congress should adopt a biennial budget and appropriations cycle, increase collaboration between and within the branches, and address overlap, duplication and cross-agency challenges.
4. To streamline the confirmation process, the Senate should reduce the number of presidential appointments subject to confirmation, streamline the paperwork requirements and improve coordination with the executive branch.
5. To improve legislative outcomes, congressional leaders should work with all members to help them develop better knowledge of the legislative process and also work effectively with federal agency executives to understand the effect of legislation on agency operations and programs.

The full report, “Government Disservice: Overcoming Washington Dysfunction to Improve Congressional Stewardship of the Executive Branch” is available for download from the Partnership’s website at ourpublicservice.org.

The Partnership’s signature programs reflect its vision for a dynamic, innovative federal government that effectively serves the American people. The Excellence in Government Fellows program prepares federal leaders to be successful managers and innovators who creatively problem-solve, and the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government® rankings provide critical information to help agencies, the administration and Congress assess workplace health and performance. The Ready to Govern initiative will assist presidential candidates in navigating the transition process, engage Congress and promote presidential transition reforms, develop management recommendations addressing operational challenges for the next administration, and train new and seasoned political appointees to lead effectively.
The Partnership for Public Service is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that believes good government starts with good people. The organization works to revitalize the federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and by transforming the way government works by strengthening the civil service and the systems that support it. Visit ourpublicservice.org for more information.

###