Citizen Satisfaction With Federal Government Services Plummet,
According to ACSI

Ann Arbor, Mich. (January 25, 2011)—Citizen satisfaction with the services provided by the U.S. federal government plunges this year, down 4.8% to 65.4 on a 0-100 scale, according to the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI). This drop represents the largest single-year decline in satisfaction with the federal government since ACSI measurement began in 1994.

The latest ACSI results indicate that the federal government will face the challenge of halting and reversing declining citizen satisfaction under particularly difficult circumstances.

“Not only must the government do a better job satisfying citizens, but it will likely have to do so with fewer resources in the years ahead,” said Professor Claes Fornell, head of the ACSI and author of The Satisfied Customer. “High unemployment, declining tax receipts, and growing deficits are stretching government budgets thin. Much like private sector companies during the recession of 2008 and 2009, government must find innovative ways to provide better service with less.”

Among federal departments measured by ACSI, citizen satisfaction varies widely. Several departments, such as Agriculture (69), Veterans Affairs (69), and Commerce (68), score significantly above the federal average of 65.4. Other departments score lower, however, with the Department of Treasury (home of the Internal Revenue Service) well below the federal average at 60. The mission and purpose of these departments varies considerably as well, and a predominantly regulatory mission is likely to be associated with greater dissatisfaction than a department responsible for delivering benefits. “This is not to say, however, that an agency’s mission explains all differences in citizen satisfaction,” said Fornell. “Some regulatory agencies provide stronger citizen satisfaction than others, suggesting that even agencies with tough assignments can do a better job.”

As is the case in the private sector, federal government has moved aggressively to integrate advances in information technology into its processes, both as a means for providing better services and cutting costs. ACSI data indicate that citizens are generally more satisfied with federal government websites than with government services overall. The overall ACSI score of more than 100 federal government websites is 75.0—a score well above the federal government average of 65.4.

“Satisfaction with federal websites far outshines satisfaction with the overall government, showing that e-gov investments over the last couple of years have paid off,” said Larry
Freed, president and CEO of ForeSee Results, the ACSI’s e-government partner. “However, in this new age of government austerity, it would be a mistake to scale back investment in e-government initiatives because over the long run, it is an investment that pays for itself in terms of increased government efficiency, citizen satisfaction, and even trust in government.”

About ACSI
The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) is the only uniform, national, cross-industry measure of satisfaction with the quality of goods and services available in the United States. In 1999, the federal government selected ACSI to be a standard metric for measuring citizen satisfaction. Over 100 federal government agencies have used ACSI to measure citizen satisfaction with more than 200 services and programs. The Index was founded at the University of Michigan’s Ross School of Business and is produced by ACSI LLC. ForeSee Results sponsors the e-government index.

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