Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: Governing AI Through Acquisition and Procurement.
September 14, 2023

Today's hearing is the third in a series I have convened on artificial intelligence. At our first hearing in March, we discussed the transformative potential of AI, as well as the possible risks these technologies can pose. At our second hearing in May, we considered the role of AI in government – how AI tools can improve the delivery of services to the American people, and how to ensure they are being used responsibly and effectively.

Today, we are doing a deeper dive into how government will purchase AI technologies, and how the standards and guardrails government sets for these tools will shape their development and use across all industries.

The federal government is already using AI, and its use across agencies is only expected to grow in the coming years. These systems can help provide more efficient services, assess potential security threats, and automate routine tasks to enhance the federal workforce. For example, the Department of Homeland Security is using natural language processing to evaluate employee surveys and improve workplace experience. And the Federal Aviation Administration deploys machine learning to update the weather models that help land planes successfully.

Other technologies that are continuing to develop, such as generative AI, offer the potential to improve government services even more. For example, many agencies – from the Office of Personnel Management, to the Department of Health and Human Services, to the Department of

Education – have rolled out chatbots to provide better service to federal employees and the larger American public. AI is here, and it's already being put to good use.

Many of these systems are not developed by the government, but rather in the private sector. Over half of the AI tools used by federal agencies have been purchased from commercial vendors. This collaboration between the public and private sector is crucial – it ensures that the government is using the most effective AI systems. American companies are breaking new ground with these technologies, and we have the chance to share in the benefits of that innovation.

But these tools also bring potential risks and policy implications. They require new knowledge from procurement officials, as well as increased coordination across agencies.

In order to successfully and effectively purchase and use AI tools, federal agencies have to be prepared to address issues like privacy concerns about the use of federal data to train commercial models and bias in government decision-making. We must be nimble *whenever* the government collaborates with the private sector – but this is especially true with AI, where new developments emerge almost every single day, and tools that are purchased are often actively learning and changing as they are used.

Last Congress, I authored and enacted a law that requires officials that procure AI tools to be trained in their capabilities and potential risks. This year, I introduced legislation that would extend this training to all federal managers and supervisors. I have also introduced legislation

that would designate a Chief AI Officer at every federal agency, so that we have the leadership and expertise in place to maximize the potential of these technologies and effectively address the risks.

These guardrails are more important than ever. Federal agencies are inundated with sales pitches and technology demos promising the next big thing. While the federal government must be forward thinking, we also have to be cautious in procuring these new tools. And we must continue that work past the initial purchase – testing and fine-tuning our models to ensure that they are effectively serving the American public.

And as AI development accelerates, private industry has yet to standardize practices for evaluating AI systems for risk, trustworthiness, and responsibility. Through federal procurement policy, the government has a unique opportunity to shape standards and frameworks for development and deployment of these technologies across the private sector more broadly.

I look forward to hearing from our expert witnesses today, and to continuing our bipartisan work to help encourage American development of AI and ensure it is being used appropriately.