

OPENING STATEMENT FOR SEN. HEIDI HEITKAMP

Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management Subcommittee hearing, December 10, 2015: **“Implementing Solutions: The Importance of Following through on GAO and OIG Recommendations”**

Thank you, Chairman Lankford. Welcome Mr. Dodaro, Mr. Horowitz and Mr. Crumpacker.

The federal government spends hundreds of millions of dollars annually to have federal programs audited and investigated by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the offices of inspectors general (IGs). The GAO and IGs spend their days providing valuable recommendations on how federal agencies can be more effective and efficient with taxpayer dollars.

This type of oversight is critical and valuable. The American people can be sure that their tax dollars are being used wisely when agencies take GAO and IG recommendations seriously and use these recommendations to make the federal government work better.

Our hearing today is about learning more about how to improve agency follow-up and make sure that everyone is doing their part in assessing recommendation follow-up. The work that the GAO and inspectors general perform in providing recommendations to agencies is important and the recommendations shouldn't go unimplemented or unnecessarily delayed.

As you can see from the Audit Process charts in front of you and the chart on the easel to my left, a great deal of planning, and many hours of work, go into the auditing process by the GAO and IGs. We want to make sure that the hard work isn't going unnoticed, unappreciated or unimplemented.

If you take a look at the lower left hand side, you will see the GAO's work on monitoring and implementation of recommendations. Over the years, the GAO has taken a number of steps to increase oversight of recommendations. The GAO maintains an online database of open recommendations that still need to be addressed by agencies. According to GAO's website, the goal of the recommendations database is to “help congressional and agency leaders prepare for appropriations and oversight activities, as well as help improve government operations.” Because of this database of open recommendations, we know that there are almost 4,600 open recommendations with federal agencies. That is a significant number and I hope to discuss ideas today on how to move that number lower.

Next, I want you to take a look at the lower right hand side. Inspectors general operate differently from the GAO. It is a little more challenging to know how Federal agencies are responding to inspectors general recommendations. While IGs are required by law to provide semi-annual reports to Congress tracking audit recommendation implementation, each IG has their own system for tracking the recommendation implementation.

IGs do not maintain a centralized database in which all outstanding recommendations government-wide are input, stored, and made accessible to Members of Congress and the public. While we know that there are IGs doing a great job of following up with recommendations, the current set-up right now doesn't allow Congress or the public to track outstanding recommendations or recommendations over time. And it's not just Congress that would win with having a more open process regarding IG recommendations, but other IGs would be able to see what is working at other IG departments so that they can incorporate into their own recommendation follow-up process.

Today's hearing is about learning the recommendation follow-up practices that work for agencies and figuring out how to do more of what works. We're not here to place blame on any

particular entity. We're here to stand with the GAO, offices of inspectors general and agencies as a partner in making the federal government more effective and efficient.

We are all in this together. This hearing is just as much about agencies, the GAO, IGs as it is about Congress.

My hope with this hearing is to start a dialogue on how Congress can work with agencies, the GAO and IGs to improve Congressional oversight of recommendations.

I look forward to the hearing the testimony from the witnesses.