

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper
“Risky Business: Examining GAO’s 2015 List of High Risk Government Programs”
February 11, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

Last November, the voters went to the polls and sent us a clear message. They want the Members of Congress to stop bickering, come together to solve problems, and help continue our economic recovery. That’s exactly what we’re doing here today. We’re coming together to talk about how we can solve the problems that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) is naming today as the ‘highest-risk’ for our government, which I have long considered Congress’ ‘to-do’ list.

What GAO means is that if we don’t solve these problems, the taxpayers are exposed to a high level of waste, fraud or abuse, which can cost our government billions of dollars every year. GAO’s report also points to needed reforms in many critical government operations that provide for the security, health and safety of the American people.

We can solve all the problems on the High Risk list. But it is a shared responsibility. Congress must leverage the good work of GAO and the Inspectors General across the government, and work closely with the Office of Management and Budget and the agencies responsible for these programs.

GAO’s report being released today shows that kind of strategy is working in several High Risk areas. In fact, GAO reports that 18 of the 30 areas on the 2013 list have shown improvement. This includes progress in areas that we’ve worked on in this Committee, specifically cybersecurity, the sharing of information on terrorist threats, and the management of the Department of Homeland Security. Progress noted by GAO also includes the Department of Defense’s management of its contracts and major weapons systems acquisitions. I am pleased that GAO has found solid progress in all these areas.

However, we still have much work to do on these and other High Risk areas. There are a lot of what I call ‘repeat offenders’ on the list – for example, waste and fraud in Medicare and Medicaid, chronic financial management problems at the Department of Defense, longstanding challenges in recruiting needed skills into the federal workforce, and the government’s incredibly wasteful management of federal property.

These items’ continued presence on the list is obviously disappointing and troubling, but it also underscores the urgent need to provide strong oversight, and work with the Administration to develop and implement solutions to address these risks.

I also want to point out that there are two new items on the High Risk list. One is an issue that has long been at the forefront of oversight and legislative attention from this Committee. That is the acquisition and management of information technology by the government. Last year I worked closely with Dr. Coburn, then-Chairman Issa and Congressman Connelly to enact the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform

Act, FITARA. FITARA will strengthen the roles of Chief Information Officers across the government and will give them better tools to manage IT investments. I now will work closely with Chairman Johnson and our House colleagues to make sure that FITARA is implemented properly.

And as all Americans know, there are many serious problems with the health care that the federal government delivers to our nation's veterans. It is no surprise that GAO is adding this to the High Risk list. Last year, Congress came together and passed legislation to address the immediate problem of veterans having to wait too long to access care through the Veterans Administration. However, much more remains to be done to ensure that veterans get timely, high-quality, and cost-effective health care. Our veterans deserve no less.

I want to close by emphasizing the clear role that Congress must play in these High Risk areas. Federal agencies need adequate resources and, in many cases, new authorities from Congress to be able to tackle these problems. I can't think of two better examples than two that are at the top of my agenda for this Congress – restructuring the U.S. Postal Service and funding the nation's surface transportation system. It is up to Congress to act.

I thank Gene Dodaro, our Comptroller General of GAO, for the hard work that he and his team have done to put together this year's 'High Risk' list. The release of this list every two years is always sobering, because it's a reminder of the many serious challenges that face our government. But I also find that the release of the report serves as important encouragement to the executive branch and Congress because the report highlights the progress that is being made, and shows the path for further progress. So, Mr. Dodaro, I'm ready for you to give us our 'to-do' list, and Mr. Chairman, I know we are going to have a productive Congress and make great progress in making the High Risk list a shorter list.

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