

Opening Statement of Chairman Johnson
“High Risk: Government Operations Susceptible to Waste, Fraud, and Mismanagement”
February 15, 2017

As submitted for the record:

At the start of each new Congress, the Government Accountability Office issues a report highlighting the agencies and programs of the federal government that present the greatest economic and national security risks to the American people. The goal of this “high risk” report closely mirrors the mission we have set for our committee: to enhance the economic and national security of America and promote more efficient, effective and accountable government. I view the GAO’s report as a roadmap of sorts for this committee, helping us focus on the highest priority items.

The GAO has identified 34 government programs and agencies that are the most vulnerable to fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement, or that need complete transformation. While each of these areas are important, today we are focusing on three critical high risk areas: problems at the Department of Homeland Security, which has been on the high risk list since the department was created, veteran’s health care, and the 2020 Decennial Census.

Inspector General Roth is here today to discuss the more than 500 open recommendations his office has made to the Department of Homeland Security that further underscore the agency’s designation as high risk. These include recommendations to fix vulnerabilities in homeland security programs, such as Citizenship and Immigration Services’ inability to adequately screen and process all immigration benefit applications, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s failure to effectively manage billions of dollars in grant funding. Our committee will work with Secretary Kelly to fix these longstanding problems.

Inspector General Missal is also joining us this morning. The GAO added veterans’ health care to the high risk list two years ago and is sounding the alarm that almost no progress has been made. Effective oversight is critical, especially for an agency like the VA, with so many systemic problems. That is why an independent inspector general is so important for veterans. Too often at the VA, the culture is to cover up mistakes and punish those who raise concerns, and unfortunately the former acting inspector general was complicit in covering up these problems. I remain hopeful that under IG Missal’s leadership, the VA can get the oversight it needs and make progress on its high risk areas.

Finally, we welcome Census Bureau Director John Thompson, who is here to discuss efforts underway to try to stem the skyrocketing cost of conducting the 2020 Decennial Census. The GAO has warned that if the Census Bureau does not succeed in implementing new technologies, the 2020 Census could cost taxpayers as much as \$17.8 billion. At that price, the Census would cost \$124 per household to administer, compared to just \$16 per household in 1970 in inflation-adjusted terms. This is inexplicable; it should be getting cheaper to count our population in the digital age, not more expensive. Given these risks, I am concerned that the Census Bureau has implemented only six of the 30 recommendations the GAO has made over the last few years.

As always, I want to thank Gene Dodaro and all the hardworking men and women at the GAO who he represents. Your work is invaluable to the American people. I thank all of our witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to your testimony.