

“High Risk: Government Operations Susceptible to Waste, Fraud, and Mismanagement”

February 15, 2017

Senator Claire McCaskill

Opening Statement

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing focused on the U.S. Government Accountability Office’s 2017 High Risk Report.

GAO is an independent, nonpartisan agency that investigates how the federal government spends taxpayer dollars. GAO’s work supports us in meeting our legislative and oversight obligations under the constitution and helps to improve accountability in the federal government by providing Congress with timely information that is objective, fact-based, nonpartisan, fair, and balanced.

At the beginning of each Congress, GAO releases its report of government programs that are at high risk due to their vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. Shortly after the release of the report, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee invites GAO’s leader – the Comptroller of the United States – to testify before the Committee about the GAO High Risk report.

I appreciate that this hearing is one of our first full Committee hearings of the 115th Congress. GAO’s 2017 High Risk Report provides us with a list of priorities for how this Committee can target and root out waste, fraud, and abuse in our government. For example, GAO reports that the federal government oversees more than \$80 billion in taxpayer funds for information technology investments, but poor management leads many IT contracting projects to fail or experience significant cost over runs. Contract oversight is not a new problem in government, but it remains one of the most important.

While most government employees are dedicated public servants, GAO's High Risk Report highlights that more work is needed to ensure that the federal bureaucracy performs effectively and efficiently on behalf of the American people. The report identifies several "mission critical" skill gaps within the federal workforce that could pose risks to American tax dollars and to American lives. For example, it is alarming that even after the large-scale cyber breach at the Office of Personnel Management and the medical wait list scandal at the Department of Veterans Affairs, that some of the federal "skills gaps" identified by GAO still include cyber security and nursing.

This year, GAO added the 2020 Census program to its list of High Risk areas. Knowing that our next census is rapidly approaching, I am grateful Director Thompson is here to provide a status update on the 2020 Census program. The cost of the Census has risen over the last few decades, with the 2010 Census being the costliest U.S. Census in history. Billions of tax payer dollars were wasted on programs that had to be scrapped at the last minute in order to ensure the 2010 Census was on time. Given these challenges and the important role the Census plays in counting our citizens as well as allocating resources to vulnerable communities, I am eager to learn how the Bureau expects to effectively manage costs while simultaneously modernizing the Census program and ensuring a complete enumeration. It is important that we avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

I am also grateful to Inspectors General Roth and Missal for joining Comptroller General Dodaro and Director Thompson here today to discuss their work to improve government programs at the Departments of Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs respectively.

When there is ineffective oversight and accountability in government, money gets wasted and mismanagement goes unaddressed. As a former state Auditor, I consider government

accountability as an important part of my work here in the Senate. I have spent my career confronting waste, fraud, and abuse in government. Here in the Senate, I helped to establish the Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight, which investigated waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayer dollars at every federal agency, holding dozens of hearings to investigate waste and misconduct in federal spending. As Ranking Member of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Senator Portman and I were able launch several bipartisan investigations including one addressing anti-opioid abuse efforts in Medicare and private health insurance systems.

Last week, President Trump signed into law the *GAO Access and Oversight Act*, a bipartisan measure I that co-sponsored to ensure that GAO has full access to the National Database of New Hires, a key tool for cutting waste and fraud in many of the government's largest programs, as well as allowing states to aggressively pursue child support payments. The law also strengthens GAO's ability to take legal action if an agency refuses to provide GAO with information necessary to perform its oversight functions. This law is a great example of what our Committee can do when we work together to promote accountability in the federal government on behalf of our constituents.

The federal government is a complex system of agencies that spends more than \$3 trillion dollars annually on behalf of the American people. As elected representatives, we are members of a public trust to ensure that those tax payer dollars are used effectively and efficiently.

I have never shied away from confronting government waste and I don't intend to now as the Ranking Member of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. I will continue to examine the areas where the federal government can make improvements to better serve our constituents and appreciate the witnesses' testimony on this important issue today.

Thank you.