Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: GAO's 2023 High Risk List: Recommendations for Reducing Waste, Fraud, and Abuse
April 20, 2023

Today I'd like to welcome Comptroller General Gene Dodaro to the Committee, and thank you for your service to the American people.

The Government Accountability Office, is an independent, non-partisan "congressional watchdog," charged with examining how taxpayer dollars are spent and evaluating whether government is working efficiently and effectively for the American people.

For over 30 years, GAO has reported on "high risk" government programs and operations at the start of each Congress. The High Risk List identifies government programs that are vulnerable to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement or need reforms to improve them.

The High-Risk List and GAO's important oversight work have been vital resources for this Committee to identify problems and work on bipartisan legislation to improve the way the federal government works, and I hope we will continue those efforts this Congress.

Over the past 17 years, by addressing many of the concerns highlighted on the High Risk List, Congress and federal agencies have saved hardworking Americans more than $675 billion in taxpayer dollars. I am grateful to GAO for their efforts to identify these areas for improvement and for their continued commitment to ensuring government functions in the best interest of taxpayers.

Just within the last two years, the federal government has seen an estimated $100 billion in financial benefits due to improvements in high risk areas noted in GAO's 2021 High Risk Report. And 16 out of 34 high risk areas have made improvements, the most since GAO began assessing high risk areas.

For example, a 2016 law that I authored, the *MEGABYTE Act,* which was based on a GAO recommendation to improve software license management, has saved taxpayers more than $450 million by reducing duplicative software purchases.

I've reintroduced bipartisan legislation this Congress to continue building on that success by further improving how the federal government manages software purchases, and will continue working to address other high risk areas highlighted in GAO's report.

This year, GAO has placed our nation's cybersecurity as one of the top five high-risk areas that need significant attention, and has issued more than 4,000 recommendations in the cybersecurity domain since 2010.

Strengthening our nation's cybersecurity has been a top priority for this Committee, and we moved several bills last Congress that I authored to shore up our nation's cybersecurity defenses, including legislation to require critical infrastructure owners and operators to report when they have been attacked or paid a ransom.

This is an important step toward safeguarding some of the most frequent targets of cyber-attacks, but it's clear we must continue working to address this issue as the threats from cyber-attacks continue to grow.

GAO has also highlighted challenges with hiring skilled cybersecurity and artificial intelligence experts to fill roles in the federal government. If we are going to be truly effective at strengthening our networks, leading the world in these fast-growing areas, and protecting our national security, then we must have qualified and dedicated cybersecurity, IT, and AI experts working across the federal government.

I have also authored legislation to address these skill gaps to ensure we can fill these in-demand roles in the cybersecurity and artificial intelligence fields, and will continue working with my colleagues to build a strong talent pipeline for the federal government.

The latest High Risk List also includes the need to address toxic substances, including PFAS, also known as "forever chemicals," that have contaminated communities in Michigan and all across the country.

These chemicals can be found in our food, air, water, and consumer products, adversely affecting the health of millions of Americans.

PFAS exposure remains a serious issue, and the EPA must be able to accurately assess and monitor existing and emerging PFAS substances to determine whether they pose a harm to human health.

I have pressed for the EPA and other agencies to increase cleanup efforts, and will continue conducting oversight to ensure agencies are detecting and responding to this threat in a timely manner.

Finally, this year's list includes pandemic preparedness and response efforts.

Last Congress, I released a report detailing the findings from a two-year investigation into the federal government's preparedness and initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The investigation revealed serious systemic failures in our nation's ability to grapple with a pandemic of that scale, and my report made key recommendations to ensure we are better prepared for the next public health crisis. I will continue working on legislation to address these shortcomings and strengthen our ability to respond to future pandemics.

Mr. Dodaro, we appreciate all of the independent, non-partisan work you and the dedicated employees at GAO have conducted. I know last month, the Partnership for Public Service named GAO the Best Place to Work in the federal government for mid-sized agencies, for the third year in a row. Congratulations on that recognition, and I look forward to our discussion today.