

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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Opening Statement **Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney** **Committee on Oversight and Reform** **“The 2021 GAO High-Risk List: Blueprint for a Safer, Stronger, More Effective America”** **March 2, 2021**

The United States government is one of the most complex and consequential organizations on earth.

Responsible for serving a population of more than 330 million people, and adding a new person at a rate of every 52 seconds, the federal government has a mission that is staggering in both breadth and depth.

Every two years, the Government Accountability Office releases a blueprint for how to better meet this mission.

The GAO High-Risk List identifies the areas of federal operations most in need of improvement or transformation, complete with hundreds of ratings and specific recommendations for how to achieve progress.

This year’s report is titled, “Dedicated Leadership Needed to Address Limited Progress in Most High-Risk Areas”—a message that cuts right to the heart of the challenge we face.

Over the past four years, the objective metrics of the High-Risk List show that the federal government improved less, and regressed more, than before the former President took office.

Of the 35 areas that were included on the last list, twenty were stagnant, five regressed, and two new areas were added.

The country now strives to recover from an unprecedented pandemic that has killed more than 500,000 Americans and reduced the average life expectancy by one full year—a toll that falls particularly hard on minority populations.

14 million Americans lost their jobs in the first three months of the pandemic—more than in two years of the Great Recession.

10 million are still unemployed, and that number doesn’t even include the millions of Americans who have given up looking for jobs.

As this silent war rages on in homes and hospitals, another silent battle is being fought in our IT networks by cyber attackers intent on stealing our intellectual property and undermining our national security.

The SolarWinds breach that came to light last December, as well as escalating and targeted cyberattacks that have drained millions of dollars from struggling hospitals, are just two examples of the threats we know about.

The economic toll of the pandemic also cuts across multiple high-risk areas, straining resources and inflicting damage on a financial regulatory system that remains dangerously fragmented even after the last financial crisis.

Our frontline healthcare and essential workers are traumatized and exhausted, suffering devastation that will redefine a generation.

They will not forget that the federal government told them they were on their own when the ICUs filled up and the personal protective equipment was nowhere to be found.

They will not forget that the federal government put more lives at risk by contradicting basic scientific facts.

They will not forget that the federal government used outdated IT systems that delayed their economic stimulus checks.

I know our federal government is better than that. As one of our colleagues reminded me a few weeks ago, our federal government put a man on the moon, so setting up a functioning system for distributing pandemic relief payments quickly and accurately should be entirely attainable.

It is attainable—as are the other recommendations in today’s High-Risk Report.

But it will take dedicated leadership to get there, and not just by one person.

No one person can rebuild the broken roads, prevent the next catastrophic flood, or stop the next deadly virus from ravaging our cities and towns.

No one person can remove the lead from the water, cover payroll costs for pandemic-starved small businesses, or save the 136 Americans who will die of opioid overdoses today.

No one person can do all these things, but when we all work together as effectively as possible, we have a shot.

That is the work of government, and the work of today’s report.

The Committee is honored to welcome Gene Dodaro, the Comptroller General of the United States and the head of the Government Accountability Office.

The diligent and thorough work undertaken by Mr. Dodaro and his staff of dedicated professionals complements the mission of this Committee, and we are grateful for it.

The need for an effective, efficient, functional, and responsive federal government has never been greater.

Congress and the executive branch must work together strategically on high-risk areas so federal agencies are in the best position possible to restore the health, security, and prosperity of the nation.

Comptroller General, thank you for being here today, and I look forward to a wide-ranging and constructive discussion today.

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