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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

Hearing on “GAO’s 2017 High Risk Report: 34 Programs in Peril”

February 15, 2017

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding today’s hearing. And Mr. Dodaro, thank you for the in-depth work that you and all of the dedicated professionals at GAO put into updating this High Risk report every Congress.

GAO reports and I quote “solutions to high risk problems potentially save billions of dollars, improve service to the public, and strengthen government performance and accountability.” The work at GAO complements this Committee’s mission, and we are grateful for it.

I was particularly pleased to see this year’s report highlight that progress over the past decade has resulted in financial benefits totaling approximately \$240 billion. Real progress has been made, and must continue. We cannot afford to go backwards.

Unfortunately, I fear we may be on the brink of doing just that. Less than a month into office, the President’s actions threaten to undermine many governmentwide recommendations the nonpartisan experts at GAO have issued.

The progress of three high-risk areas in particular are in jeopardy under President Trump’s Administration—managing strategic human capital, modernizing the financial regulatory system, and managing fiscal exposure to the risks of climate change.

First, on January 23, 2017, President Trump issued an executive order freezing federal employee hiring. GAO has stated in the past that hiring freezes quote, “disrupt agency operations, and in some cases increase costs to the Government.” In fact, this year’s GAO report states, and I quote, “of the 34 high risk areas listed, 15 areas had skills gaps playing a contributory role.”

A hiring freeze could hamstring the ability of agencies to address the needs of American citizens, businesses, and consumers. It could exacerbate skills gaps at federal agencies, making them less productive and less effective.

Second, we owe it to the American public to continue implementing GAO’s recommendations to modernize our financial regulatory system. That begins by protecting

provisions of the Dodd-Frank Act that shield American consumers, not by rolling those provisions back.

GAO recommends implementing the remaining Dodd-Frank regulatory rules to ensure the effective functioning of reforms to the U.S. financial regulatory system, and I wholeheartedly agree. We must continue to support this vital work, not undermine it.

Finally, in order to protect America from fiscal exposure to the risks of climate change, we must address this issue head on. How can we work together to solve a problem if President Trump and some congressional Republicans do not even acknowledge its existence?

Generations yet unborn deserve better than to be burdened by the potentially catastrophic costs of climate change risks my colleagues across the aisle seem content to ignore.

I implore my colleagues to fully consider the progress we have made on all these issues and the harm that may be done if we go down the path the current Administration is taking.

I look forward to GAO illuminating all that is at stake today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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