

**Opening Statement
Chairman Elijah E. Cummings**

**Hearing on GAO's 2019 High Risk Report
March 6, 2019**

Good afternoon. Today, the Committee is pleased to welcome Gene Dodaro, the Comptroller General of the United States and head of the Government Accountability Office.

Mr. Dodaro is here to discuss GAO's High Risk Report. GAO issues this report at the beginning of each Congress to highlight programs that are most vulnerable to waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement. The High Risk Report also recommends solutions to save taxpayer funds, improve public services, and hold our government accountable. Over the past 13 years, improvements to high-risk programs have saved nearly \$350 billion, or about \$27 billion a year.

Improving high-risk programs can have a very real impact on Americans' lives. If implemented correctly, this year's recommendations would improve healthcare for veterans, protect Americans from toxic chemicals, make our food safer, and help stem the deadly tide of opioid addiction.

Mr. Dodaro, thank you for all the work that you and the dedicated professionals at GAO have put into this year's High Risk Report. We will discuss many issues today, but I would like to highlight a few.

Inaction on Climate Change: Perhaps the most concerning issue in this year's report relates to climate change. According to this report, the Trump Administration "has not made measurable progress since 2017 to reduce its fiscal exposure to climate change, and in some cases, has revoked prior policies designed to do so." Instead of confronting this existential threat with science and ingenuity, the President is denying that the problem exists. He revoked President Obama's Climate Action Plan and is now creating a new White House panel to counter the idea that burning fossil fuels is harming the planet.

Inadequate Strategy for Cybersecurity: Today's report also warns that the Trump Administration lacks a comprehensive strategy to address cybersecurity threats across the federal government. Inexplicably, the President eliminated the cybersecurity coordinator position at the White House last year, leaving our federal government without any White House leader devoted to protecting cybersecurity. GAO's report calls on federal agencies to take "urgent actions" to address this threat, which could affect our nation's most closely held secrets, our energy grid, our banks, our communications systems, and nearly every aspect of Americans' lives.

Deficient Security Clearance Process: Today's report also warns that the Trump Administration "has not established measures to ensure the quality of background investigations and adjudications" for security clearances and faces a current backlog of 565,000 security clearance applications. Instead of fixing these problems, the President has undermined the security clearance process. According to recent reports, he ignored the concerns of his own White House advisors and career national security officials to give his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, a security clearance.

Challenges with the Census: Today's report also highlights the risks facing the upcoming Census, which is of special interest to our Committee. The report highlights rising costs, hundreds of unresolved security weaknesses, and scaled-back testing under the Trump Administration that "increases the risk that innovations and IT systems will not function as intended during the 2020 Census."

Opioid Crisis: Today's report also highlights the epidemic of drug addiction in this country, which is one of this Committee's highest priorities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 70,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2017—about 191 people every day. Yet, the President ~~has~~ had no national drug control strategy or White House drug czar for the past two years. GAO has identified this as an "Emerging Issue Requiring Close Attention." We are holding a hearing on this topic tomorrow with the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (~~ONDCP~~) and experts from GAO.

Today's report provides a roadmap for improving our federal government. But GAO's recommendations can be turned into effective reforms only with cooperation and leadership from the President and the Executive Branch agencies.

Unfortunately, President Trump and the White House have refused to cooperate with GAO. Last year, GAO sent an extraordinary letter to the White House Counsel, expressing concern that White House officials "will not respond to inquiries or otherwise engage with GAO staff during the course of our reviews." The letter noted: "This approach represents a clear departure from past practice."

Nevertheless, the obstruction has continued. Last month, GAO issued a report finding that the President spent \$13.6 million of taxpayer money on trips to Mar-a-Lago. The White House refused to provide any information to assist with GAO's review.

GAO is part of the legislative branch, and the White House's refusal to cooperate with GAO's requests is an insult to Congress. We will be following-up directly with the White House on this.

I look forward to hearing today from Mr. Dodaro on each of these issues and many others. I also look forward to continuing to work closely with GAO to hold our federal government accountable to the American people.