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# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

#### Hearing on "Exploring GAO's High Risk List and Opportunities for Reform"

February 14, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I believe this will be one of the most important hearings this Committee will hold this Congress. Mr. Dodaro, thank you for testifying today and for the work GAO put into creating the new High Risk report.

Every one of GAO's High Risk reports has been important. However, this year's report is especially significant because the Comptroller General and the nonpartisan experts at GAO have made a landmark decision to add the issue of climate change to their biannual High Risk report, which details the most pressing challenges facing our nation and the federal government.

In its report, GAO identifies a serious risk facing our nation, one that we cannot continue to ignore. GAO finds that climate change poses particularly significant financial risks to our nation's economy, including agriculture, infrastructure, ecosystems, and human health. GAO warns that our government "is not well positioned to address this fiscal exposure," and GAO recommends a "government-wide strategic approach with strong leadership and the authority to manage climate change risks."

GAO finds that the government has already spent tens of billions of dollars on damage from severe weather events related to climate change. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, over the past two years, the United States experienced 25 weather disasters that cost over a billion dollars each.

GAO's historic decision to add climate change to the list of high risk challenges facing our nation is a wake-up call for Congress to finally start addressing this critical issue. Unfortunately, in the last Congress, House Republicans voted 37 times to block action to address the threat of climate change. For example:

- They slashed climate change research funding by more than \$100 million.
- They voted to prevent the State Department from using funds to send a Special Envoy for Climate Change to international climate negotiations.

- They voted to zero out the US contribution to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world's leading authority on climate change science.
- They voted to prohibit the Department of Homeland Security from using any funds to participate in the Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force.
- And they voted to prohibit the Department of Agriculture from using any funds to implement its climate change adaptation program.

What GAO is telling us today is that Congress cannot afford to block or delay action any longer. We must act now to implement GAO's recommendations and mitigate the risks from climate change.

For these reasons, I sent a letter to the Chairman today requesting that our Committee hold a series of hearings to address each of the four specific areas that GAO highlights in its report relating to climate change.

Mr. Chairman, when we were here two years ago considering GAO's last High Risk report in 2011, you said it was our Committee's obligation to conduct "vigorous oversight" over the issues raised by GAO and to insist on "plans for change by each of the agencies listed here today."

I agreed then, and I agree now. With our Committee's extremely wide jurisdiction across multiple federal agencies and departments, we have a unique opportunity to conduct hearings that will lead to vigorous oversight, responsible funding decisions, and legislation to address the growing threats to public health and our economy.

I stand ready to work with you and all Members of the Committee in a bipartisan manner to make that happen.

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