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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement
Ranking Member Robin Kelly
Hearing on “Oversight of IT and Cybersecurity at the Department of Veterans Affairs”
December 7, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Information technology is critical to improving the service and performance of the federal government. This is especially true at the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is one of the largest integrated healthcare systems in the United States, serving millions of veterans and their families.

The VA’s goal for modernizing its healthcare IT is full interoperability, which would allow seamless sharing of health information between the VA and the Department of Defense, as well as private healthcare providers.

The VA is now on its fourth attempt since 2001 to modernize its healthcare IT system.

The record has not been good. The VA abandoned two earlier attempts after spending billions of dollars. This summer the VA announced that it would scrap its third attempt in favor of acquiring the same healthcare IT system as the DOD.

I do not know what we should make of that, since the VA previously abandoned this same approach four years ago.

Chairman Hurd and I requested that GAO examine the VA’s modernization efforts because of these red flags.

We discovered that right now the VA is relying on 138 contractors to help it modernize. Some of them are the very same contractors VA had hired and fired, after their previous attempts had failed.

In fact, 34 of the 38 repeat contractors make up about \$793 million of the \$1.1 billion of the contractual obligations related to modernization between fiscal years 2011 through 2016.

This raises serious concerns. This change in strategy delays actually modernizing and makes it harder on veterans who rely on the agency for healthcare. We need to understand whether these changes are justified.

I want to hear today what the agency is doing to hold this army of contractors accountable. I also want to hear about the progress made towards interoperability and improving the ability to track patient outcomes.

Getting these efforts right and improving VA operations and information security are essential to regaining the trust and confidence of the American public that the VA is taking care of our Nation's veterans.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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