

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074

MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Robin Kelly
Subcommittee on Information Technology
Hearing on “18F and U.S. Digital Service Oversight”
June 10, 2016

Thank you, Chairman Meadows and Chairman Hurd, for holding this important hearing. And thank you to our witnesses for taking the time to be here this morning.

As we all know, the federal government relies on information technology in countless ways. Most importantly, Americans rely on IT to access services and connect with the government—from signing up for health care, to applying for student loans, to securing veterans’ benefits. And when the government’s IT services aren’t working, the government isn’t working.

We learned this lesson from our experience with Healthcare.gov and other recent IT challenges. Although the Affordable Care Act is much more than a website, we saw what happens when we try to implement good policy without the underlying IT infrastructure to support it.

That’s why the Administration created the U.S. Digital Service and 18F.

The stated goals of USDS and 18F are to improve and modernize government IT operations, and help the government become better at procuring, developing, and sharing IT going forward. These are worthy goals. And the USDS and 18F have made great strides towards reaching them.

For example, USDS has helped the Department of Homeland Security launch an online immigration review process. This is a project DHS has been working on for nearly a decade, at a cost of \$1 billion.

18F is in the process of developing a new IT acquisition process that will make it easier for federal agencies to contract with vendors that provide agile software development services. I look forward to hearing more about these and other success stories today.

One of the greatest achievements of the Digital Service and 18F has been their ability to attract and recruit incredible talent from the tech industry into the federal government. At almost every hearing we hold, I ask agency heads to list some of their greatest challenges. And without fail, we hear about the challenges of recruiting and retaining a talented IT workforce.

I've been impressed by 18F and USDS's ability to open the door to public service in one of our fastest growing industries. These employees are using the knowledge, skills, and experience they've gained in the private sector to help improve federal IT.

In addition to recruiting the best and the brightest in tech talent, we need to continue leveraging the resources and expertise that of our partners in the private sector. They are eager to help bring federal IT into the 21st Century.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses how the mission of these offices differs from what the private sector offers through government contracts. What value added do these programs bring? How are your roles changing and what limitations do you face?

But in order for the Digital Service and 18F to fully realize their potential, they need to be transparent about the good work they are doing. They should also continue to engage stakeholders—and Congress—so we can all understand the important role they play in modernizing federal IT, and help shape that role going forward.

Thank you again to our witnesses for being here, and to my colleagues for holding this important hearing.

Contact: Jennifer Werner, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181