Statement of Oversight Subcommittee Chairman Barry Loudermilk
Can Americans Trust the Privacy and Security of their Information on HealthCare.gov?

Chairman Loudermilk: Thank you, Chairwoman Comstock, and welcome to all of our witnesses here today. I am looking forward to hearing from each of you as we gather information on this very important issue.

Just last week, I joined many of my Republican colleagues to vote for a full repeal of Obamacare. This sweeping health care law has punished countless Americans by doubling some health insurance costs for the same or less coverage, or, in many cases, by no longer being able to use the plans they were promised to keep.

That same health care law created HealthCare.gov, a federally-operated health insurance exchange website to assist Americans in signing up for healthcare coverage. As reported by the Associated Press on January 20th, 2015, dozens of companies, including Google, Facebook, and Twitter had embedded connections to HealthCare.gov. Essentially, when a consumer was applying for coverage on the website, it is possible that some or all of those data companies were able to tell, at the very least, when the person was on the site, their age, their income, their ZIP code, and whether they smoked or even if they were pregnant.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services claims that this kind of data mining is necessary for data analytics in order to improve user experience. If that is the case, however, I wonder why the number of embedded connections to the website has significantly dropped since the first news story on this matter. Did the Administration actually know and approve all of the companies that were connected to HealthCare.gov?

One of our witnesses here today comes from the Center for Democracy and Technology, which compiles similar analytics in-house instead of through a slew of different companies. This technique decreases privacy and security vulnerabilities by giving website access to a minimum number of individuals who are able to improve user experience without compromising user information.

Having multiple outside connections to HealthCare.gov means more vendors have access to the website, which only means one thing: increased vulnerabilities. About one year ago, hackers were able to use just one vendor, an HVAC Company based in Pennsylvania, to obtain the credit and debit card information of millions of Target customers nation-wide.

Cybercriminals appear to be increasingly interested in the personal information collected by U.S. insurers, so much so that a recent Reuters article warned that 2015 could be "the Year of the Healthcare Hack." So far, it looks as though they are right. Just last week, it was disclosed that a database containing personal information for about 80 million customers of health insurer Anthem, Inc. was

hacked. It is feared that this breach exposed names, birthdays, addresses, and Social Security numbers – all information that the HealthCare.gov website requests of its customers.

As someone with a background in the IT sector, I find what appears to be extensive tracking of Americans' personal information extremely disconcerting and unnecessary. Americans were first misled when their President told then that, "if you like your health insurance plan, you can keep it," and now it seems like they are being misled into thinking that their personal information on HealthCare.gov is as secure as it can be.

Considering that HealthCare.gov is one of the largest collections of personal information ever assembled, it is extremely important that the Administration implements best practices to protect Americans' privacy. This Administration ultimately has a responsibility to ensure that personal data collected is secure, and Congressional oversight will continue until the Administration has proved that it is doing all it can to protect the American people.

I look forward to today's hearing where I hope to gain some insight from our expert witnesses on the possible reasoning for why scores of data mining companies would be embedded on HealthCare.gov as well as the potential consequences of them having access to the website. The American people deserve to know the truth and are owed some level of transparency from this Administration as to how their information on HealthCare.gov is being collected, used, and secured.

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