

## OPENING STATEMENT

I want to start by thanking Chairman Craig, Chairman Collins, Senator Akaka, and Senator Lieberman for bringing together this critical hearing on such short notice. As we all know, one of the central questions in this troubling incident relates to whether or not the VA could have responded more quickly to the news that the personal information of 26.5 million veterans had been compromised. In light of those concerns, I believe it is imperative for Congress to act as quickly as possible to address this situation, and I hope today's hearing will set an example.

I also want to thank today's panelists for agreeing to come before our committees today to discuss this important matter. I realize that many of you had to change your plans to be able to be here. But our veterans weren't planning on having their information put at risk, either, and it's important we do everything within our power to protect them during what must be a worrisome time. So, thank you.

I am extremely troubled by what we learned earlier this week from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. First and foremost, I share the concern of our nation's veterans about the potential for misuse of their names, birthdates, and Social Security numbers, and the consequences – both personal and financial – that could result.

What is most troubling to me is the nature of the information that has been compromised. This is not like losing your keys or your credit card, where you can change your locks or your account information. These are the fundamental keys to a person's identity, and they could be used to open a bank account, take out a loan, obtain lines of credit, buy property – and the list goes on. The lives of millions of our nation's veterans could be turned upside down as a result of this security lapse.

Second, this incident raises serious questions about the gaping holes in security that exist at VA, and about why more hasn't been done about them in recent years. We have known that VA's security safeguards are insufficient for years, and yet very little has been done to prevent the kind of theft we saw earlier this month. We need to know why, and we need to know what the VA plans to do now to ensure this kind of nightmare never happens again.

Finally, as I have mentioned, we need to know more about how this event and VA's response to this event unfolded, and why the department did not act more quickly to notify law enforcement, Congress, and most importantly, our veterans.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to address this issue. I have written to VA urging the department to do everything it can to protect our veterans and make sure it doesn't happen again. I am also a cosponsor of legislation introduced by Senator Kerry that would require VA to provide one year of free credit monitoring to affected individuals, and one free credit report each year for two years thereafter.

Our nation owes a debt to our veterans that can never be fully repaid. It is deeply concerning to me that the very agency responsible for providing these veterans with the care and services they have earned failed to protect their most basic personal information. For that reason, I am hopeful that we can get to the bottom of some of these issues today.

Thank you.