Chairman Daniel K. Akaka

Today, the Committee examines VA's IT program with an eye toward the future. Many important VA benefits depend on information technology, from the delivery of quality health care, to the processing of education and disability claims, and to any effort to ensure a seamless transition from DOD to VA.

While it is true that VA has been a leader in adopting electronic health records, VA's overall history with IT projects is far from perfect. VA has stumbled over the years on its path toward the goal of an electronic VA. More recently, we had a financial and logistics system fail known as CoreFLS. To make matters worse the contractor responsible was paid a bonus. Software systems processing GI Bill claims suffered many false starts. Last summer, VA halted 45 projects that were dramatically over budget and overdue, including an outpatient scheduling system that was three years overdue.

I do not wish to dwell in the past. We must, however, learn from these mistakes and take action to avert them in the future. The Administration has made it a priority to improve the delivery of veterans' benefits through technology. With the appropriate technologies, VA will more efficiently serve veterans by reducing the time it takes to process benefits.

Moving forward, VA must clearly articulate a vision for its IT program. VA's day to day management must reflect this vision. The lines of communication that compel IT development must remain open between VA leadership and users. Every VA medical facility across the nation must operate with a fully electronic medical record. The Life Time Electronic Record also needs to become a reality. GI Bill processing software needs to be good enough to allow veterans, their schools, and VA to access and file claims in hours, instead of weeks. We must be in line to eventually replace the
paper-centric disability claims process with an electronic business solution.

I look forward to the testimony from our panel and to continuing to work with the many interested parties as we seek to ensure VA is on the right track.