

**Statement of Senator Daniel K. Akaka  
Nomination Hearing for Mr. John Berry  
Nominee for Director at the Office of Personnel Management  
March 26, 2009**

Today, the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs meets to consider the nomination of Mr. John Berry to be Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

Mr. Berry is a native of Washington, D.C. and a graduate of the University of Maryland and Syracuse University Maxwell School of Public Administration. Mr. Berry is a life-long public servant. He currently is the Director of the National Zoo, where he successfully shepherded a 20-year facilities master plan for the zoo, which the National Capital Planning Commission approved in November 2008. He has worked in a variety of posts in the Smithsonian Institution, the Department of the Interior, and the Department of the Treasury, in addition to serving the people of Maryland while working in the Montgomery County Government and the Maryland State Senate. Of course, Mr. Berry also served as Congressman Steny Hoyer's Legislative Director for ten years.

The federal government and its workforce are under a tremendous amount of pressure. We are fighting two wars overseas and trying to guide the recovery of our struggling economy. People are looking to the federal government for strong, effective leadership from the most senior officials to the front-line employees. Having the right talent in the right jobs is more important now than ever. If confirmed as Director of OPM, you will be vital to confronting this challenge and helping agencies meet their workforce needs and their missions.

Since 2001, Strategic Human Capital Management has been included in the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) annual High Risk Series report. Furthermore, GAO considers strategic human capital management as a critical element in 18 of the 30 high risk areas. Successful human capital management requires real focus and bold leadership.

As you know, Senator Voinovich and I have worked very hard on this Subcommittee to address the human capital challenges in the federal government. We have provided agencies many flexibilities, which too often are going unused. We must do more to make the federal government the employer of choice. As more of the federal workforce becomes eligible for retirement, we must look to the next generation of federal workers. A wave of new employees with similar aspirations, but different career expectations, is ready to take on the call to service.

One way to do this is for OPM to support competitive benefits for employees at all points in their careers. OPM must help agencies implement recruitment, hiring, and on-boarding processes that attract a highly-talented workforce. Another is to improve the federal hiring process. The current process is too confusing, too complicated, and too long. I believe the hiring process must be streamlined, timely, and informative to applicants while maintaining the merit system principles including Veterans' Preference. Agencies must be held accountable for modernizing their hiring processes so that qualified employees from a diverse range of backgrounds can be brought on board in a timely manner.

Managers must be held accountable for improving morale and productivity so that we are able to retain employees as well. I believe training can go a long way to support this goal. Earlier this week, I introduced the Federal Supervisor Training Act to provide initial and ongoing management training to all supervisors in the federal government. Agencies would be required to train supervisors on management and leadership skills, mentoring, prohibited personnel practices, and ways to foster an environment of fairness, respect, and equal opportunity based on the merit of employees' work.

As you know, last year also I introduced a bill that would have reestablished Labor-Management Partnerships. I understand that the Administration is considering reestablishing partnerships. I believe that this will go a long way toward rebuilding a collaborative relationship with employee unions and managers.

The need for stronger labor-management partnership has been evident in efforts at personnel and performance management reforms over the last few years. Congress granted broad personnel authorities to the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security, but these Departments' efforts have been plagued by concerns about fairness, transparency, and accountability. Greater cooperation with federal employees could have improved the reform proposals and, importantly, employees' perceptions of them. With a new Administration, we have an opportunity for a strategic pause. I am pleased that OPM and DoD are planning a review of the National Security Personnel System, and I look forward to those results and recommendations. I hope that you will work closely with federal employee unions and other stakeholder groups as you consider personnel reforms.

In his address before Congress on February 24, 2009, President Obama called for a renewed spirit of national service for this and future generations. The federal workplace should be a model workplace, and every federal worker should feel proud to work for the federal government. Civil servants should feel a sense of honor, duty, and importance to the Nation, and carry that feeling with them into work every day. In turn, I believe employees will work better, be more productive, and inspire the confidence of the American people in the work of their government. In this new role you will not only be the steward of employees' rights, paychecks, and performance, you will also be responsible for inspiring the renewed spirit of service in the federal government and the next generation of federal employees. I look forward to working with you and hope that we can work together to address the challenges of the modern workforce.