

**Statement of Senator Daniel K. Akaka**  
**From Candidates to Change Maker: Recruiting the Next Generation of**  
**Federal Employees**  
**Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal**  
**Workforce, and the District of Columbia**  
**May 8, 2008**

This hearing will come to order.

Thank you for joining us today to discuss the federal hiring process, and how agencies can improve the way they recruit and evaluate the next generation of federal employees.

Today, we are in a crisis. The hiring system is broken. Every day talented people interested in federal service are turned away at the door. Too many federal agencies have:

- built entry barriers for younger workers;
- invested too little in human resources professionals;
- done too little to recruit the right candidates; and
- invented an evaluation process that discourages qualified candidates.

As a result, high quality candidates are abandoning the federal government. The federal government has become the employer of the most persistent.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) estimates that 30 percent of the federal workforce – approximately 600,000 employees – will retire in the next five years. Agencies have an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity is to hire the next generation of highly talented and dedicated employees. The challenge is how to fix the recruitment and hiring process that is outdated and broken.

OPM is responsible for rating agencies on their human capital activities, which includes hiring practices. Agencies receive a red, yellow, or green rating depending on their improvement and success. Yet, agencies receive green ratings for human capital, despite the fact that the hiring process is failing.

For example, federal agencies still require applicants to answer knowledge, skills, and ability questions. Applicants are given 500-5000 characters per answer to respond to many, often redundant, questions. According to the Merit Systems Protection Board report entitled *Attracting the Next Generation: A Look at Federal Entry-Level New Hires*, the two greatest obstacles new hires face were the length and complexity of the process. In the private sector, employers only require a resume and cover letter. Applying to the federal government should be as easy.

The problem is not Congress. Since 2002, Congress has given agencies the flexibilities they need:

- agencies no longer must rely on the rule of three;
- they can use category ratings; and
- they can get direct hire authority from OPM.

However, in many cases federal agencies are not using these authorities.

The competitive process is not the problem. The notion that merit system principles and veterans' preference are barriers to hiring is wrong. These are good management practices.

Agencies need to adapt, just as the private sector has, to the culture of the next generation of federal workers. For example, agencies should use new media marketing tools to attract young people into federal service. Candidate-friendly applications that welcome cover letters and resumes should be implemented. Candidates should receive timely and informative feedback. And, more pipelines into colleges and technical schools need to be developed to recruit candidates with diverse backgrounds.

The federal government is the largest employer in the United States. Federal service is a noble profession. This week – Public Service Recognition Week – we celebrate those men and women who make a commitment to serve their government in the military or civilian corps. In honoring these employees, we have an opportunity to recruit the next generation by highlighting inspiring federal careers. Good people attract more good people. However, the positive impact of this week will not help agencies recruit if they continue to use outdated hiring practices.

I look forward to hearing about the efforts being made by OPM to address this issue and recommendations from other witnesses to improve recruitment and hiring at federal agencies.