

# **STATEMENT OF SENATOR DANIEL K. AKAKA**

## ***DOMESTIC PARTNER BENEFITS: FAIR POLICY AND GOOD BUSINESS FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT***

### **Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for holding this important hearing on domestic partnership benefits for Federal employees. As you know, I am proud to be a cosponsor of your bill, S. 1102, the Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act of 2009.

As Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, I have worked hard over the years to make the Federal Government the employer of choice in this country. We need to streamline the Federal hiring process and improve recruiting, in order to attract the most talented individuals to the Federal Government, regardless of their sex, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, or sexual orientation. During my time in the United States Senate, I, along with my colleagues, have focused on providing Federal agencies with the tools and resources necessary to compete for talent and retain a highly-skilled workforce. That is why I believe this legislation is crucial.

The Federal Government has a unique opportunity to recruit and retain a new generation of Federal civil servants. The Obama administration has sparked interest in government service among students and recent college graduates across the country. With the economy not yet fully recovered, many of this nation's young people are looking to the government for long-term employment. However, it is clear that this next generation of Federal employees values an employer that treats all employees equally. Young people want to work for an employer that offers domestic partner benefits.

Currently, 19 states offer some form of domestic partner benefits. Moreover, nearly 60 percent of Fortune 500 companies – including Dow Chemical, American Airlines, and Lockheed Martin – offer domestic partner benefits to their employees. We must ensure that the Federal Government has the tools it needs to compete with the private sector and attract the best and the brightest to serve our country. Simply stated, providing domestic partner benefits to Federal employees makes sound business sense.

I am pleased that President Obama recently demonstrated his commitment to Federal employees by signing a Presidential Memorandum on June 17, 2009, which directed the heads of Executive Departments and Federal agencies to provide certain benefits to the same-sex partners of Federal employees. As President Obama stated, this action was “long overdue” and paves the way for progress in our nation's pursuit of equality. However, the President also acknowledged that this action was “only one step.”

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I am also pleased that the Office of Special Counsel recently updated its website to reflect that discrimination based on sexual orientation is a prohibited personnel practice and is subject to investigation by OSC. During the past Administration, Federal employees were provided inaccurate and inconsistent guidance on this very important issue. I am hopeful that a new Special Counsel will soon be in place to make sure that this protection is rigorously enforced.

Federal agencies already make significant investments in their workforce. Through employee and supervisor training, professional development, and student loan repayment programs, the Federal Government is committing significant financial resources and time to the current workforce. If Federal employees leave for more competitive benefit packages elsewhere, this investment will be lost.

Our dedicated Federal employees cannot be asked to sacrifice the needs of their families and loved ones in order to serve to their country. As a nation and an employer, we must hold ourselves to the highest standards of equality. Providing Federal employees with domestic partner benefits will bring us a significant step closer to the principle of equality under the law.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman.

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