

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DANIEL K. AKAKA

Improving Federal Employment of People with Disabilities

Hearing

Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Aloha and thank you all for being here today as the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia meets to examine what the Federal government is doing to improve Federal hiring and accommodations for people with disabilities.

As the Nation's largest employer, the Federal government has an opportunity and a responsibility to be the model employer in the country. We have taken many steps toward that goal, but we have so much further to go. Despite great efforts by our witnesses here today and the agencies they represent, the number and percentage of people with disabilities employed in the Federal workforce has declined over the past two decades. Even at their peak, these numbers were not acceptable, but now people with targeted disabilities make up less than one percent of our Federal workforce.

Last year, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This landmark civil rights legislation continues to serve the millions of individuals with disabilities in our country. These individuals are now better able to participate in society because the ADA helped remove barriers in employment, transportation, public services, telecommunications, and public accommodations. Despite ADA requirements of equal employment opportunities and reasonable accommodations, people with disabilities continue to face significant barriers to employment. The Federal government must work to reverse this trend by setting an example of successfully hiring and accommodating people with disabilities.

Former Senator Voinovich and I requested that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) study the best practices that agencies could use to increase the employment of people with disabilities. Last summer, GAO held a forum with experts and advocates from across the disability community. An expert from GAO will present the findings from that forum today.

I have been pleased with this Administration's renewed commitment to this issue. The Executive Order President Obama issued last summer lays the groundwork for agencies to improve their efforts. I am eager to hear from our witnesses today about the progress they have made, as well as what more needs to be done.

Each day, disabled veterans return from service overseas – and they must be a central part of this effort. Whether recently injured in Iraq or Afghanistan or disabled in prior service, these veterans have

demonstrated enormous commitment to this Nation, and we have a responsibility to provide them opportunities to continue their service as civilian employees.

The Federal government has started to take some positive steps toward improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities, but we still have long way to go. I am pleased that we are able to bring attention to this important issue— and I look forward to hearing from each of our witnesses and to continuing to work with them on these issues.

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