

# STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DANIEL K. AKAKA

## *Inspiring Students to Federal Service*

### **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 examines how the Federal government could better partner with colleges and universities to prepare and recruit students for Federal service.

The Federal government is the largest employer in the United States, and Federal service is a noble profession. Within the next five years, the Federal government is expected to face one of the largest retirement waves in the nation's history, making the development of a new generation of workers even more vital.

In today's economy, many students are graduating only to find that they are locked out of a market that is not producing enough jobs. At the same time, the Federal government has jobs that are mission critical and difficult to fill. There simply are not enough graduates to fill critical jobs in many scientific, technical, national security, and medical fields. We must develop innovative strategies to bridge this gap. We should not look at this solely as a challenge – this creates a unique opportunity for universities to place graduates in good jobs, if we can make students aware the opportunities exist and prepare them to fill those jobs.

We need to continue to build stronger relationships between agencies and universities to help foster academic programs that prepare students for Federal service, especially for difficult to fill positions. I believe that, working together, we can maximize our recruitment efforts to address critical hiring needs while also creating direct pipelines for students into the agencies.

As part of this effort, we must continue to work to improve the broken Federal hiring process. This Subcommittee has focused on reforming the Federal hiring process. Since 2008, we have held three hearings on the issue and worked closely with the Administration on its reform efforts. Additionally, I introduced the Federal Hiring Process Improvement Act last Congress with Senator Voinovich. I intend to continue that effort this year.

The Administration has been making some good progress, but we still hear stories of talented individuals who seek employment with the Federal government, only to grow frustrated with the archaic hiring process and find work elsewhere. In the past, I believe there has been too much focus on creating exceptions to the competitive hiring process for recent graduates, rather than making sure the competitive process works for them.

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I strongly believe the competitive hiring process can serve as an effective avenue for bringing recent college graduates into the workforce. The competitive hiring process serves as our most effective tool to ensure that the Federal workforce is composed of the most qualified and able individuals, who are appointed only after competing in a fair and open process that is free from political interference.

As the President stressed when he issued his Executive Order last December on recruiting and hiring students and recent graduates, the Federal government benefits from a diverse workforce that includes the enthusiasm and perspectives of students and recent graduates. Once we recruit students and recent graduates, we must harness their enthusiasm and talents through focused training and development. One program I am particularly proud of is the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard apprenticeship program, which attracts thousands of applicants for 125 to 150 positions each year. The apprentices learn a trade and earn an associate's degree from the Honolulu Community College through this four year paid, work-study program.

I am so glad to have each of our witnesses here today representing both the public and private sectors. Each one of you brings a different and valuable perspective to this discussion. I look forward to hearing from each of you today and also continuing to work with you to ensure our next generation of Federal workers will be ready to lead.

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