

Statement of Senator Ron Johnson

“Investing in an Effective Federal Workforce”

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

September 19, 2012

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this oversight hearing on Investing in an Effective Workforce.

Today is a memorable day for Senator Akaka, and for me, because it is the last time I will have the privilege of serving with him on this Subcommittee before he retires. In the Aloha spirit that you have brought to your work in the Senate and to this subcommittee, I would like to start this hearing by presenting you this lei as a sign of my appreciation and respect for your service to America.

When I started in the U.S. Senate less than two years ago, Senator Akaka gave me a warm and friendly welcome to the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. His cheerful smile, encouraging attitude, and genuine desire to make a difference has been a hallmark of his many years of service. The affection we all have for Senator Akaka is heartfelt and well deserved.

During my time here, I have always enjoyed joining Senator Akaka at the Senate's Wednesday morning prayer breakfasts. Many of you may not know this, but Chairman Akaka started the tradition of singing a hymn at the beginning of every prayer breakfast. Everyone in attendance always looks forward to Senator Akaka's explanation of the hymn's history, and hearing his fine voice lead us in singing. Your presence at the weekly prayer breakfast will be sorely missed.

Senator Akaka has demonstrated his commitment to public service throughout his life. His entry into public service began during World War II, where he served in active duty in the U.S. Army. From there, Senator Akaka continued his service in the State of Hawaii Department of Education before first being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1976. Today, 36 years later, it is clear to see the countless contributions that Senator Akaka has made during his many years of service.

As one of the longest serving senators currently in the Senate, Senator Akaka has forged many friendships, including with a number of U.S. Presidents. He has served with every President since Jimmy Carter and maintained friendships with many of them. Senator Akaka has strong ties across the aisle, from his common bond with President H.W. Bush as World War II veterans to playing many rounds of golf with President Clinton.

As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, it has been his goal to attract, retain, and motivate a skilled federal workforce. I applaud the work Senator Akaka has done to ensure that federal employees are protected from retaliation when they disclose government waste, fraud, and abuse.

Senator Akaka has also worked hard to ensure that the Federal government process retirement claims in a timely and efficient manner. He has advocated for the modernization of the information technology infrastructure to achieve this goal. These are common sense advancements that are good for the federal workforce, and good for the American taxpayer.

It is Senator Akaka's "Aloha Spirit" that has earned him the recognition of many organizations. Time will not allow me to name every award that he has received, but I would like to mention just a few.

In 1999 he received the Adam Smith Medal from the National Council on Economic Education for his work in improving our youth's education on economic principles.

In 2008, he received the Inspirational Leadership Award from the Military Order of the Purple Heart for his dedication to our Nation's veterans.

And in 2011 he received the Public Servant Award from the Government Accountability Project for his work in protecting the rights of whistleblowers.

Senator Akaka, all too often, the public spotlight is on the differences between members of Congress, but your record in Congress points to a different reality. Your tireless efforts to streamline federal processes and make agencies more accountable have always found broad bipartisan support. The Aloha spirit has worked.

Senator Akaka, I know you will be missed by all of your colleagues in Congress, every staff member, and everyone who has had the pleasure of working with you here in Washington and throughout America during your dedicated years of service. In particular, I will miss you. During our short time of service together, you have been most kind and gracious to me, and I will always consider you my friend.

I know you are looking forward to spending more time with your family, including your 15 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren. I cannot think of a more fitting, satisfying, and well deserved retirement. I would like to extend my appreciation and congratulations to you and your family, and I wish you all the best in the years ahead. Aloha.

I would also like to welcome our witnesses, and thank them for being here today. I look forward to hearing your testimony and how we can continue to implement and improve upon many of the reforms that Chairman Akaka has worked so tirelessly on. Thank you.