

PRESS STATEMENT

STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR DANIEL K. AKAKA

Chairman, Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services

"The Federal Workforce: Legislative Proposals for Change"

March 18, 2002

This morning we begin two days of hearings on the federal workforce and several legislative proposals offered by Senator George Voinovich and Senator Fred Thompson. We have with us a distinguished group of witnesses -- both today and tomorrow -- who will share their insights on how to best meet the challenges of recruiting and retaining the people that agencies need to carry out their missions.

I thank you all for being with us today, and I wish to extend a special aloha to Mr. John Priolo, director of the Hawaii Chapter of the Federal Managers Association, who will testify on behalf of his Association's president, Mr. Michael Styles.

I am delighted to be joined by my colleague and good friend, the Senator from Ohio, who has championed the importance of a strong federal workforce. I appreciate his support today just as I was pleased to support him during the many hearings he held on these issues.

I won't recount statistics, or talk about my concern over the loss of critical institutional knowledge; and I leave the discussion of the bills to our panelists.

I will, however, talk about the men and women who make up our government's workforce. I am pleased that in the wake of the terrorist attacks last fall, anti-government rhetoric has abated and a higher percentage of young Americans say they would consider federal service as a job option.

We saw that for every essential service these attacks disrupted, the government responded quickly and effectively. Our nation's recovery is being aided through the talents and professionalism of our federal workforce, who are selflessly supporting the efforts of armed forces abroad.

After September 11th, more than 2,100 federal employees were deployed in disaster response teams, and to this day, thousands of federal employees are responding to the war on terrorism as a part of their normal duties. The federal workforce is this nation's backbone, and I think it's time to drop the pejorative use of the word bureaucrat.

Our hearing continues the dialogue on what needs to be done to make government service more attractive to young people and to inspire and compensate those who have chosen government as their job of choice. Just last week, this Subcommittee heard from agency and expert witnesses that the lack of employees with language, science, and technical skills threatens our national security. That hearing focused on S. 1800, a bill I introduced with Senators Durbin and Thompson, and cosponsored by Senators Cochran, Collins, and Voinovich.

As we examine the Voinovich and Thompson legislative proposals, I want to make sure that the bills will not cause harm to either employees or their agencies. Federal agencies have been operating under flattened budgets for years, and the Administration's fiscal year 2003 budget proposal – after removing funding for homeland security and defense purposes – would see discretionary spending decline by one percent. This leaves no room to fund recruitment, retention, and training programs. Moreover, the lack of parity between the pay of civilian workers and military service members sends the wrong message to prospective and current federal employees.

I support good management, and I want to make sure that we have the right people and the right skills to operate the government in an effective, efficient, and economic manner. But I do not see how we can expect young people to consider government employment if we are unable to provide them with comparable pay and benefits and opportunities for training.

How do we advertise the government as an employer of choice if agencies lack funding for incentives – including money to implement fully the student loan repayment program?

How do we balance recruitment and retention goals with this Administration's goals for competitive sourcing? These are among the questions I hope we will answer today.

There must be a commitment from the highest levels of government and a willingness to allocate the resources necessary to achieve a strong and vibrant workforce. Again, I wish to thank our witnesses for being with us today. You deserve our gratitude for your commitment to our federal civil service system.

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