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"National Security Reform: Implementing a National Security Service Workforce"

WASHINGTON, DC - Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, held a hearing to examine current and proposed national security rotation programs, implementation challenges of creating such programs, and recommendations to improve on existing efforts.

Chairman Akaka's opening statement appears below.

Recruiting, retaining, and developing the next generation of national security employees is critically important both to our current operations and in light of the impending federal retirement wave. Half of Department of Defense civilians will be eligible to retire within the next few years. About 90 percent of senior executives government-wide will be eligible to retire within 10 years. We must ensure that the federal government is able to attract the best and brightest national security workers. As these workers rise to more senior levels in government, we must also prepare them to work across agency lines in confronting the complex challenges that will confront them. Such a rotation program should have a strong focus on training and mentoring participants, so they get the most from their experiences.

There are several elements that I believe are critical to developing world-class national security employees, which I hope the witnesses will address today.

The first key element is rotational programs to improve government coordination and integration. A number of events this decade have demonstrated the need for greater coordination and integration. These include the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and reconstruction operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The military already has a joint duty program which has fostered unified effort across military organizations. Likewise, developing a rotation program for civilians in national security positions can improve coordination and support a more unified effort across government.

I am a strong supporter of rotational programs. In 2006, my amendment to start a rotation program within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) became part of the *Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act*. This program is supporting integration and coordination efforts within DHS, but we can benefit from an even broader, interagency focus on the national security workforce.

Two interagency rotation programs have been created in recent years. The Intelligence Community's (IC) Joint Duty Assignment Program was set in motion by the *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004*. Today, joint duty rotational assignments and a leadership development program generally are required for IC employees to be eligible for promotion above the GS-15 level. The other rotation program is part of the National Security Professional Development Program created by an Executive Order in 2007. This program envisions the participation of a broad array of national security workers at a number of federal agencies.

Another key element needed to better develop the national security workforce is a stronger student loan repayment program. Student loan repayments help the federal government to attract the best and brightest to government service and to encourage advanced education in relevant fields. The current federal student loan repayment program has been underused, in part because agencies must balance funding loan repayments for its employees against other priorities. Current operations often are prioritized over investing in the long-term development of employees. However, recent trends show that agencies are beginning to understand the importance of this valuable recruitment and retention tool. We must make sure agencies prioritize investing in this workforce and that they have funds to do so.

Similarly, national security fellowships to support graduate students could help the federal government attract and develop national security leaders. Fellowships could be targeted to help fill critical national security skills gaps, for example by focusing on graduate students pursuing studies in foreign languages, science, mathematics, engineering, and international fields. Fellowships could also be used to help current federal employees obtain the skills needed to meet our national security requirements.

Finally, agencies should be required to improve their strategic workforce planning to ensure that they have the workforce needed to meet national security objectives.

In 2003, I introduced a bill that would have addressed all of these key elements to building a stronger national security workforce, the *Homeland Security Federal Workforce Act*. Many of the proposals I have outlined were contained in that bill. I hope that today's hearing will provide additional information that will be useful in the introduction of a similar bill that builds upon the changes that have taken place since then.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today as we explore how we can build a stronger, more integrated national security civilian workforce.

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