

**Statement of
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before the

**Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Reform
U.S. Senate**

Chairman Lankford, Ranking Member Heitkamp, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today about NASA's efforts to recruit and retain millennials as part of the Federal workforce.

In my role as Assistant Administrator for NASA's Office of Human Capital Management, I'm regularly approached with questions about why NASA is ranked as the Best Place to Work in the Federal Government (Large Agency). Today, I'd like to share with you what makes NASA such a great place to work, as well as what we have learned along the way about employee engagement, leadership development and incentivizing innovation – all topics of importance to our younger workers who are often described as the millennial generation.

Research shows that millennials generally expect to work for multiple organizations throughout their career; they care about having a positive work experience; they value learning and development; and they want to work for an organization that makes a positive impact on society. These are foundational elements of our approach to employee engagement at NASA. The potential to work on NASA's exciting mission attracts a wide variety of prospective employees, including those from the millennial generation. We strive to create an environment at NASA in which all employees feel valued and have opportunities to contribute to the NASA mission. This requires understanding and respecting the different styles, values, and expectations of everyone in our workforce.

NASA is the world leader in space exploration and cutting-edge science missions, and our work contributes directly to the economic vitality of our great Nation. My job is to care for and support the Agency's most valuable asset – currently a community of about 17,500 civil servants, including students, and 40,000 contractors located at nine NASA Centers and one Federally Funded Research Center who make up the NASA workforce. This includes brilliant rocket scientists, innovative engineers, dedicated support and administrative personnel and every employee and contractor that makes up a community that is often referred to as "the NASA family." I work for an Agency that inspires, challenges and empowers our employees daily to carry out missions that benefit humankind here on Earth.

Last year, for example, the entire world watched as New Horizons sent back the first close-up images of Pluto, and we continued to make new discoveries about Mars that will help inform human missions there. Most recently, we successfully launched OSIRIS-REx to an asteroid, and NASA's Juno spacecraft arrived

at Jupiter. Earlier this year, the world watched as American Astronaut Scott Kelly returned home from the International Space Station after 12 months of working off the Earth for the Earth. His year in space will pay scientific and medical dividends for years to come, helping pave the way for future astronauts to travel to Mars and beyond. We are still operating the International Space Station and working with commercial partners in developing our next fleet of vehicles to launch astronauts from U.S. soil to this amazing on-orbit laboratory. Concurrently, we are developing the next generation systems to extend human presence farther into the solar system, first to the area near the moon and then on to Mars. We are in the critical phases of completing the James Webb Space Telescope, our next Mars rover, the Solar Probe Plus mission, and several key Earth science missions. In aeronautics, we are embarking on new efforts in hybrid electric propulsion, low sonic boom demonstrations and traffic management systems for unmanned aerial systems. Our space technology work continues to attack the key challenges we face in taking humans farther away from our home planet and enabling the new technologies to gain better science. None of this would be possible without the combined effort of NASA's multi-generational workforce.

NASA is always looking for ways to attract the best and brightest workers, irrelevant of their generation or career stage. Millennials are a part of our workforce, and therefore, this hearing today is important in trying to understand what attracts and retains those workers. While NASA is indeed on the best places to work in the Federal Government, we know that we cannot rest on our laurels. Therefore, the remainder of my testimony will provide an overview of NASA's employee engagement and development programs, including our efforts to attract and retain millennial workers.

A Look at the Numbers

NASA currently has more than 4,100 employees under the age of 40¹, comprising 23 percent of our workforce, and that number will continue to grow in the coming years as more millennials enter the workforce. NASA's attrition rate for employees under 40 years old is 2.8 percent, which is lower than NASA's overall attrition rate of 4.7 percent.

In the 2015 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), 80 percent of millennials said that they felt engaged at NASA. In fact, the 2015 FEVS results show that millennials at NASA have a higher positive response rate than non-millennials in global satisfaction, as well as in the Engagement, Innovation, and Inclusion indices and the questions used to calculate the Best Places to Work score. We believe our high engagement scores among millennials is reflective of intentional focus on creating a positive work environment in which employees feel included, valued, and connected to a purpose bigger than themselves.

Reaching Millennials

NASA uses multiple methods to reach prospective millennial employees. This includes more traditional methods such as the NASA website, USAJobs postings, and partnering with colleges and universities, as well as newer methods such as social media. Traditional outreach channels, such as USAJobs, employee referrals, or working with a NASA affiliate are still our largest source of new hires. We also have built relationships with a number of colleges and universities across the country and are beginning to harness more digital methods to reach the next generation, such as social media and virtual recruitment events. Currently, NASA has active social media accounts on over a dozen platforms including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Flickr, and more. Our Facebook page alone has more than 17 million

¹ NASA included statistics for employees age 40 because those age brackets match those used in the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey.

followers and we are growing the social platforms that are more closely linked with millennial followers, such as Instagram and Snapchat.

Through these various platforms, prospective employees can follow NASA's various missions, learn about NASA's accomplishments, and engage with the Agency before ever stepping foot on a NASA facility. In fact, we encourage our employees to share their NASA stories through a variety of means, including social media, inviting the public to learn about NASA's mission related accomplishments and NASA as an employer. One of our most powerful recruitment tools is the enthusiasm of our employees. We recently began running employer-brand focused campaigns over social media that highlight real employees doing real work to help the public at large – including millennials – better understand what makes a job at NASA truly unique.

We have also learned that different hiring authorities produce candidate pools with different characteristics. For example the Federal Pathways hiring authority targets individuals who are still in college or who have graduated within the past two years. The Pathways program is an important part of our talent pipeline for hiring the future leaders of the Agency. NASA is also now a recognized Employer of National Service and is beginning to use the Returned Peace Corps and Americorps/VISTA Volunteers hiring authority. Both of these authorities tend to generate a higher percentage of millennial hires.

The NASA Employee Experience

Once NASA hires an individual, our goal is to provide that employee with a positive work experience from onboarding up until that employee chooses to leave the Agency -- whether after a couple of years or a full career. First and foremost, this demonstrates that we value and care about the human experience our employees have with the organization. Second, for those employees who do choose to leave the Agency, it leaves a lasting positive impression and may influence their decision to return at some point in the future with the new skills and knowledge they have gained from experience elsewhere such as in the civil space industry.

We engage all new hires in a robust onboarding program that provides for a smooth transition into the NASA Family, from administrative in-processing, to learning about the Agency and its mission, meeting with Center leadership, and providing meaningful work. Always seeking to continually improve, we are looking at how we can add to the onboarding experience so that new hires can connect across geographic boundaries and learn from each other as a cohort.

We recently conducted a survey of new hires at NASA, and we learned that, like previous generations, millennials seek work-life balance and are attracted to organizations that will not only let them gain experience in their chosen field, but also offer flexible work schedules, telework, and competitive sick and annual leave. NASA is at the forefront of introducing new ways to work and has successfully introduced a "Work From Anywhere" program that hinges on the notion that work is what you do, not where you go. With the appropriate policies in place to ensure productivity while away from their NASA facility, NASA empowers its employees to telework whenever possible, letting the work drive where the job gets accomplished and moving away from the mindset that you must be "in the office" to get work done. NASA has also introduced a suite of Virtual Collaboration Tools to give our employees a more seamless experience working in a distributed work environment and to provide access to development resources, wherever they are.

To help engage and build the skills of our early career hires, we provide meaningful work assignments where they can put their knowledge into practice. For example, employees working on the Commercial Supersonics Technology project at the Glenn Research Center in Ohio gain experience in system and sub-system analysis and modeling and propulsion system development and testing. Those working on the

Orion project at Kennedy Space Center in Florida gain experience in contamination control, development of new window scanning methods to look for defects, and safety engineering expertise. Employees at the Marshall Space Flight Center in Alabama work on launch vehicles to gain experience in structural design and analysis, propulsion analysis, structural testing, systems engineering, software development, and pyrotechnics for rocket boosters.

Not only does NASA provide hands-on work for employees, we encourage innovation. As outlined earlier in my testimony, NASA's missions constantly push the boundaries of what humans believe is possible. In doing so, we challenge our employees to push the boundaries within their current job assignments to find better ways to do their work, suggest improved or streamlined processes, and identify better business practices. We also encourage employees to look for possible areas of transformational innovation and discuss those possibilities with their supervisors.

As we continue to build a workforce that is deeply connected to our mission, NASA is constantly exploring new incentive models to recognize and reward our employees for their achievements. This process starts simply by asking our employees to tell us what kinds of rewards they find most meaningful. While monetary awards are always nice to receive, we have found that recognizing an employee's creativity and allowing that creativity to be incorporated into one of our exciting missions is an amazing incentive for employees, especially for millennials.

We have introduced new programs such as annual Innovation Awards and we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with our unions through the Labor Management Forum on defined styles of innovation. For example, we developed two innovation awards, the Lean Forward; Fail Smart Award and the Champion of Innovation Award. These awards recognize, encourage, and celebrate the spirit of innovative behavior that 1) propels individuals to lean forward, in spite of risk, and consequently learn from the experience, and 2) is demonstrated by supervisors/managers who build a culture of appropriate risk taking and who support and encourage creative and innovative behaviors from their employees. One very unique feature of the award selection process is that the NASA workforce ultimately selects the winner in each category. Additionally, NASA has introduced its first-ever Agency-wide Innovation Day which will take place on November 1, 2016. This event is being organized and led by our early career leadership development program cohort and will have a virtual component to connect Centers, publicize innovation tools, and promote and celebrate the Agency's commitment to innovation.

Employee/Supervisory Development

The health of our workforce is a top priority for NASA leadership. Our leadership pays attention to FEVS data and other indicators to monitor the state of the Agency and to develop strategies for continually improving employee engagement, connection and effectiveness. NASA continues to invest in a number of leadership development programs and activities across the Agency -- from early career to executive -- that are designed to better equip current and future Agency leaders to carry out our mission. Through these and other programs, we offer participants mentoring, shadowing, and coaching opportunities as well as the opportunity to develop lasting relationships with their peers across the Agency. These programs are regularly used by senior leaders in the Agency as idea generators and think tanks. In addition, these sorts of programs are particularly important to millennials who are eager to advance their careers, often in an expeditious manner.

Our on-demand, just-in-time supervisory training and more formal, yearlong leadership development programs focus not only on practical human resource topics such as performance management, but also on creating an environment in which employees feel included, valued and recognized for their contributions to the mission. For example, we recently launched an online supervisory curriculum that

contains thousands of resources for supervisors ranging from books to 2-3 minute videos. All of the resources are cataloged and arranged by topic to help users navigate directly to items on a specific topic.

NASA also places intentional focus on training our supervisors. Supervisors are the touch point with every employee, and they play a unique role in creating a positive work environment that supports employee connection, satisfaction, and engagement, ultimately yielding increased productivity, delivery on the mission, and general employee happiness. NASA has recently placed an intentional focus on first-line supervisory development. For example, the LASER (Leveraging Agency Supervisory Excellence and Resilience) program aims to develop a community of current supervisors who have a full understanding of the Agency's vision and mission areas. This program looks at supervision as something that can be learned and done well, like other technical or professional disciplines. Built and designed by model NASA supervisors, the program is geared toward helping individual supervisors address their unique growth and development needs within the complex discipline of supervision through face-to-face week-long development sessions, mentoring sessions with senior leaders, coaching, hands-on experiences, and peer teaching.

Conclusion

In conclusion, NASA recognizes the tremendous value and impact that our millennial workforce provides, and we will continue to look at ways to better engage and develop them. Every day our employees – no matter their age or generation -- work together to overcome the huge challenges of exploring space and improving life on Earth. This is a workforce that is dedicated to ushering in the future of our Nation, including developing new technologies with the goal of one day landing on Mars. When you are surrounded by these amazing people who somehow manage to make the impossible possible, it is hard not to be inspired and to not want to be part of the team.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today to share the story of NASA's workforce. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.